Three European regions awarded for their innovative and sustainable entrepreneurial strategies to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic

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The European industry, including small and medium enterprises (SMEs), is facing mounting challenges, amplified by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing war in Ukraine. This makes it all the more important to use European policy to strengthen the competitiveness of European SMEs and increase the resilience of the European industry. Through the European Entrepreneurial Region (EER) award, the CoR's promotes smart place-based actions for SMEs and industry, which contribute to a sustainable future for EU regions and cities.

Opening the award ceremony, CoR President Vasco Alves Cordeiro, member of the Azores Regional Parliament, said: "The EER award is a recognition of cities' and regions' efforts to advance innovative and sustainable development strategies, creating the conditions for a thriving and modern SME sector and promoting the green and digital transitions. I congratulate Mayor Barcelona, Penela and Western Pomerania on winning this year's award. Their example and leadership will inspire many other territories across the EU."

The winners of the 2023 EER Award, in alphabetical order:

Awarded for its visionary and ambitious Barcelona Green Deal (BGD) Entrepreneurship Strategy, which improved also the alignment with the new EU SME and Industrial Strategy and aims at developing a more sustainable, inclusive and resilient economic system. The city's action plan includes the goal of having an efficient digital and technological region while stressing the importance of social fairness. It is vital for implementing the BGD 2030, which sets out a new urban economic agenda to invest in the resilience of local economies and

diversification of entrepreneurial activities.

Pau Solanilla, Commissioner for City Promotion in the Barcelona City Council, said: "We are totally committed with the pillars that should lead the European economies to assure a sustainable future for our populations. They must be green-based, digital and inclusive. No strategy is valid if a single person is left behind. Our candidacy focused on that, and also on our Entrepreneurship strategy with goals such as developing new hubs of economic activities, strengthening business competitiveness around the world and standing out for fostering new talent."

Awarded for its ambitious and inspiring vision and objective to become a "living laboratory", a concept with a smart and rural specialisation based on a plan that aims at implementing innovation, competitiveness and entrepreneurship. The action plan will support local economic actors, SMEs and will build upon Penela's territorial advantages and endogenous resources while responding to the specific challenges of its rural, sparsely populated region.

Eduardo Jorge Mendes Nogueira dos Santos, Mayor of Penela, said: "Receiving this distinction by the European Committee of the Regions is the recognition of the commitment of Penela Municipality in the area of innovation and entrepreneurship as an essential path for the development of low population density territories. We recognise the importance in defining a sustainable local strategy, focused on innovation, competitiveness and entrepreneurship, achieved through the Master Plan for Innovation, Competitiveness and Entrepreneurship (PD-ICE). This allowed to create competitive advantages from the territory's differentiating factors and establish strategic partnerships."

Awarded for its ambitious and credible political vision based on the Economic and Regional Innovation Strategy 2030, which focuses on a modern and diversified economy making use of the geographical location and natural resources along with the development of innovative ideas. Raising social awareness and shaping entrepreneurial attitudes will support the region's development as well as improve European and interregional cooperation.

Olgierd Geblewicz, President of West Pomerania Region, said: "West Pomerania is a region with a modern and diversified economy, striving for a high level of innovation, focused around smart specialisations,

especially in the areas of the green and blue economy. Taking into account its potential and situation, we intend to build a modern, competitive and sustainable economy, creating opportunities for both residents and business entities. This award will contribute to the creation of regional partnerships, as well as to the further implementation of an entrepreneurial and pro-innovative approach among residents and local businesses."

The video on the three winning EER 2023 regions is available here.

The European Entrepreneurial Region (EER) award is a project that each year identifies and rewards EU territories, which show an outstanding and innovative entrepreneurial policy strategy, irrespective of their size, wealth and competences. The territories with the most credible, forward-looking and promising action plan are granted the label “European Entrepreneurial Region" for the following year. Applicants must demonstrate a real political commitment to support SMEs and strengthen entrepreneurship through a strategy officially endorsed by the regional assembly, the government of the region or other authorised political bodies.

The EER label has been set up in partnership with the European Commission and is supported by many EU stakeholders such as SME United, Eurochambres, Social Economy Europe and EURADA.

The EER jury – composed of representatives of the CoR, the European Commission, the European Parliament, social partners and territorial associations – will monitor the implementation of the prize-winning regional strategies throughout 2023, with the aim of providing the winners with an objective outside view on their policies and on the progress made during the EER year.

The list of European Entrepreneurial Regions since 2011 is available here. To date, thirty-nine EU regions and cities have been awarded the EER label.

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