

# COMMUNIQUÉ DE PRESSE

July the 8th 2021

## THEMATIC PUBLIC REPORT

### THE RECONSTRUCTION OF SAINT MARTIN AND SAINT BARTHELEMY AFTER THE HURRICANE IRMA

In 2017, three hurricanes of exceptional violence hit the islands of *Saint Martin* and *Saint Barthélémy*, 250 kilometres north-west of Guadeloupe. The most devastating of them, Irma, caused considerable damage to both territories. The two northern islands suffered the same cataclysm, but each have known different methods and modalities of reconstruction, taking into account their institutional and developmental characteristics. Although the reconstruction is now almost completed in *Saint-Barthélémy*, *Saint-Martin* still faces important challenges, without even mentioning the specificity of the island, divided between France and the Netherlands.

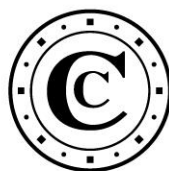
By March 2018, the State's financial assistance had been estimated at more than EUR500 million, with two thirds for the reconstruction phase. If the Court recommends that the Overseas Territories Ministry carries out from now on a precise and regular follow-up of the public funds mobilised for the reconstruction of Saint Martin, an exact measure of the State's financial support should be presented only at the end of the full implementation of its multiannual investment plan.

#### **Different choices in both islands, as regards to methods of reconstruction and the degree of State intervention**

The hurricane Irma hit two French overseas communities in September 2017, whose special status acquired in 2007 granted them great autonomy, particularly in terms of taxation. In terms of economic development, the situation in *Saint-Barthélémy* is much more favourable than that of Saint Martin.

As a result of these different contexts, plus heavier damage to *Saint Martin*, the State's support to both communities, as well as the methods chosen for the governance of their reconstruction, have been different.

The community of *Saint-Barthélémy* supervised and took charge of its reconstruction, with the State acting only on an ad hoc basis to ensure financial continuity.



On the other hand, the community of *Saint-Martin* received significant support from the State and its operators, both in terms of funding and the strengthening of its human management and engineering capabilities. Given the fragility of its administrative and technical organisation and the complexity of the operations to be carried out, it appears *a posteriori* that a direct administration by the State of reconstruction could have been justified.

### **A near-complete reconstruction for *Saint-Barthélemy***

The reconstruction of the destroyed buildings in *Saint-Barthélemy* is now well-advanced. It is accompanied by a major effort to adapt buildings and equipment in order to learn from the experience of Irma.

### **An unfinished reconstruction that faces major challenges in *Saint Martin***

In Saint-Martin, the restoration of the destroyed buildings is still very partial: less than half of the buildings stock and equipment was rebuilt, with the exception of schools and high schools that are today almost all upgraded. The weakness of the community management led it to be able to obtain only EUR25 million out of the EUR46 million allocated by the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) because of, *inter alia*, a flawed public ordering process.

The completion of the reconstruction requires that several challenges be met, which depend primarily on the community and to a lesser extent on the state and its operators. First of all, it is essential to strengthen local contracting authorities management and public ordering capacities. Besides, it is necessary to implement the natural hazards prevention plan by ensuring compliance, as done in *Saint-Barthélemy*, with the construction rules to reduce the risk of occurrence of the consequences of this kind of disaster. There is also a need to better mobilise the community's tax resources. Eventually, the maintenance of the State technical support will continue to be decisive in terms of management and expertise.

The French Court and the territorial chambers of the accounts of *Saint-Barthélemy* and *Saint-Martin* make 8 recommendations.

**[Read the report](#)**

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