



European Alliance

EA Political Priorities for 2015-2020

Recommendations for the CoR mandate

EUROPEAN UNION



Committee of the Regions

EA political priorities for 2015-2020
Recommendations for the new term of office

The EU with its 28 Member States spans an enormous length and breadth of physical geography and cultural diversity. Within its countries, regions and localities are ideas and possibilities which can work to secure the future development of other Member States and the wider matrix of the EU's institutions. The EA Group shares a common platform in key areas while respecting the identity of their nations or regions. We believe in consensus politics where the views of individual members can be respected. The EA group serves to empower members to fully participate in all work of the CoR, for the benefit of their nations, regions, local authorities, and all those our members represent. To achieve this, the EU must become more democratic, closer to its citizens, and more transparent. Clarity, accessibility and efficiency are what we want from the European Union. Clarity in allowing citizens to understand our methods of working and the objectives we strive to achieve. Accessibility in opening our doors to our peoples and efficiency is having an institutional structure, which is democratic but at the same time efficient.

The EA Group will continue to take full account of current changeable political and economic trends and contribute to develop coherent strategies accordingly. We believe that a key part of taking these trends into account is for our local and regional authorities to have their voices heard at the heart of Europe, and therefore believe that the Committee of the Regions and local and regional authorities should have a strong role as an integral part of developing EU policies. The EA Group defends the principle of subsidiarity to ensure decisions are taken at a closest level possible to citizens and maximise participation into political life. In this respect, the EA Group recognises that young people have a key and integral role to play in the debate on its future.

It is important that the Committee of the Regions brings its added value to the EU decision making process by providing support, contacts and know-how at the local level. The EA Group will encourage the EU institutions, in close cooperation with local and regional authorities and civil society, to promote better communicate with its citizens and support information campaigns at a local and regional level, in both the Member States, candidate and potential candidate countries. We need to reconnect the EU to its citizens so as to ensure they develop a sense of belonging to the EU and that their knowledge is deepened of the different policies that affect their daily lives.

It should not also be a one way process, whereby the EU works from the top down to influence policy on the ground. The COR should work towards bringing the bottom-up needs of regional and local authorities to the EU Commission. With that in mind, new mechanisms should be explored and implemented in the effective bringing of COR opinions through the EU Institutions to be brought to fruition and action.

Our group would intend to prioritise our key yearly objectives at the beginning of each year of the forthcoming mandate.

1. **Investing in the future of Europe**

Our group would like to highlight some of the following issues:

Beyond Europe 2020: towards development and jobs across all regions

This mandate will be decisive in making the Europe 2020 strategy and the investment plan a real success which delivers real development and jobs. In the EA Group's point of view, the strategy needs to be revisited to address its shortcomings.

The EU, hit by an unprecedented economic crisis, will have to renew its commitment to ensure sustainable development, not only from an economic point of view, but also socially and environmentally.

Moreover, this strategy should maintain the focus on attaining the objective of territorial cohesion which maintains an EU comprised of Nations and Regions, where, potential, ideas and possibilities within these regions are respected, negotiated and nurtured.

New energetic approaches will have to be shaped to spur enduring growth and promote real job creation in local areas. Some Member States have been more successful than others in creating employment. Employment models across Europe need to be evaluated and successful models adopted made available to EU Member States.

The EU must show real commitment to invest more in education, innovation and research which are keys to attaining competitiveness advantages. The EU should strive to mobilise private and public investments to revive economic growth and boost EU competitiveness in key high technologies sectors such as ICT, life science and cleaner energy sources, while ensuring a balanced development across all regions.

We bring a special interest in closely monitoring the implementation of the revised strategy at the level of Member States but also at regional and local level in order to contribute to achieving the new priority the EU has given itself for the forthcoming years.

Restore public finances and supporting investments

The EA Group will support a better economic cooperation and a review of the EU economic governance in order to ensure sound and stable public finances while ensuring flexibility for development-enhancing investments.

The economic downturn should not impact negatively on the citizens' lives and on local and regional authorities' financial autonomy and their role as services providers.

The EA Group believes that EU programmes and support should be additional to the funding currently provided to the regions and local authorities.

The EA Group will encourage local and regional authorities use available resources and innovative financial instruments to mobilise additional funding and make ambitious long-term investments in education, lifelong learning, research and innovation, quality infrastructures, sustainable public transport and in energy efficient technologies

The EA Group believes supporting entrepreneurship, SMEs and social enterprises at a local and regional level is key to facilitating a sustainable economic recovery.

Investing in people

The EA Group will give highest priority to education, lifelong learning and training as key instruments to increase participation in the labour market and tackling Europe's chronic youth unemployment levels. Universal access to education must be a key priority of the European Union. By investing in our schools, universities and colleges we will enhance and protect the intellectual and financial wealth through learning. Ageing population and low birth rates puts our social security and pension systems at stake and poses serious challenges for young people to have access to the labour market. The EA Group advocates the importance of the European Social Fund, the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund, the European Regional Development Fund as well as the European Strategic Investment Fund to help support local and regional authorities in countering unemployment, while providing people regardless their age, with the new skills required. The EA Group pays particular attention to the recognition of qualifications and any policy aimed at encouraging mobility and investments in entrepreneurial culture.

Research, innovation, green and digital development

The EA Group will continue working to ensure that all Europeans are included in the knowledge-based society. We will place the emphasis upon the provision of infrastructure and the role of research and innovation so as to lay the groundwork for a European Research Area. The Group fully believes that clear, realistic and, where possible, binding targets should be set, in order to address the innovation gap the EU is facing.

The EA Group stresses the importance of investing in green growth and technologies aimed at enhancing a low carbon economy and improving energy efficiency. We reckon that innovation and research should not only be industry driven but turn more towards the improvement of citizens' wealth as well as and the protection of environment and natural resources.

Moreover, the EA Group recognises the benefits and opportunities that will arise from the development of the digital economy and the information society, particularly to the socio-economic fabric of our rural, mountainous and more remote areas. The EA Group would like to see cities and regions transformed through more and better connectivity, ensuring universal access to broad band

and internet in order to provide equal access and opportunities to people, regardless of whether they live in urban, rural or peripheral regions.

We will continue to make valuable contributions towards the development of local and regional e-Government while underlining the necessity to reduce the digital and technological divide between urban and rural areas and between generations. Local and regional actions would be the most effective method of achieving results.

Cultural and linguistic diversity

The EA Group believes that Europe's strength lies in its cultural heritage as well as in its breadth of cultural diversity. The EU has its historical origins in some of the oldest sites of civilisation in the world. Globally it is also fortunate to have some of the most comprehensive heritages and beautiful landscapes and regions. The EA acknowledges that the celebration and commemoration of cultural heritage unites EU citizens, helps in international diplomacy, inspires identity and creativity, ignites the concept of active citizenship, and is one of the important foundations, which underpins future regional development strategies for urban and rural development.

The EA Group upholds the principle of self-determination of peoples, which means that the European Union must also enable "internal enlargement" in the form of new Member States, provided those states emerge from a peaceful and democratic process.

We will work to support national and regional identities assuring that the respect of cultural and linguistic diversity is one of the basic principles underlying the process of European integration which is not about levelling out differences or creating uniform identities but fostering greater cooperation and understanding among the peoples of Europe. The EA Group will continue to promote and safeguard Europe's lesser-used and regional languages.

2. Solidarity in achieving prosperity and environmental sustainability

Our group would like to highlight some of the following issues:

Territorial cohesion including cross-border cooperation

In a globalised world, underlying the new diversity as a source of strength to the economy and richness in culture will contribute to reinforce the cohesion of these communities through competition and solidarity.

Regional and structural funding must be undertaken in order to guarantee a balanced development across all the EU's regions. The European cohesion policy must evolve with regions' needs, and focus on narrowing the gaps between rich and poorer regions. It is important to develop a cohesive Union which recognises common responsibilities and demonstrate solidarity. Moreover, the EU cohesion

policy should concentrate on the central objective of strengthening employment possibilities while reducing social disparities.

The EA Group advocates a real change in culture in the implementation of the reformed cohesion policy and commits to monitoring the involvement of local and regional authorities and the full application of the partnership principle, now enshrined in the EU legislation (with the European Code of Conduct on Partnership).

We call for greater support for capacity building and training opportunities for civil servants of municipalities who are in charge of projects as well as for streamlined procedures.

Investing in infrastructure is important but the EA Group believes development will not happen without focusing on people.

We believe it is key to improve coordination of funding instruments and synergies between European national and local budgets.

Building on the positive experiences of the Baltic Sea, the Danube and the Adriatic-Ionian macroregions, the EA Group will give its support to the new Alpine strategy (EUSALP) as it will help improve policy consistency and lead to greater cooperation between different levels of governments in order to tackle common challenges such as harmonising environmental protection and economic development.

The EA Group will follow up on the implementation of the new EUSALP and ensure the strategy, whilst prioritising the interests of the core Alpine mountain regions, pays due consideration to the surrounding areas and cities so that relations between these regions can be mutually beneficial.

Towards a balanced urban-rural policy

The EA Group recognises the real and tangible benefits achieved for the citizens of Europe, due to the commitment of the Member States and the European Commission to a long term, strong and coherent Structural and Cohesion policy.

Whilst urban renewal is a vitally important area, it is important that we recognise the importance of all of Europe's regions and local communities and the role they have to play in building a strong economy. The EA Group will strongly recommend that future programmes financed by the Structural Funds cover issues such as urban and rural renewal, social deprivation, specific housing initiatives, economic restructuring and public transport, and the revitalisation of rural and mountainous areas.

The EA Group wishes to see clear action taken on the revitalisation of towns and cities in particular in the redevelopment of town and city centres which have been neglected by large scale shopping developments on the outskirts of towns.

The EA Group recognises the importance of all European regions and the importance of ensuring an urban-rural balance in future programmes. Rural communities are a crucial part of Europe, providing the fuel to ensure the cities work and the institutions must ensure a balanced approach in all activities. The EA Group upholds the importance of rural, agricultural and mountainous areas as crucial asset for local economic and social development and calls on the European institutions to take greater account of the needs of rural areas and to strike the right balance between urban and rural development policies. The EA Group believes in an agriculture policy which covers from "farm to fork"; ensuring that high quality, traceable agriculture products are plentiful, while the natural and environmental resources across our regions are protected.

Sustainable Tourism

The EA Group would point out that tourism is a global phenomenon which takes shape at local level but must find a niche given the highly diversified competition. Accordingly, the group considers that developing a consistent policy for sustainable tourism will deliver tangible benefits for local communities, both economically and environmentally. Tourism is a major factor in GDP and employment at all levels – local, regional, national and European. The EA Group recognises the key role played by tourism in promoting regional development and territorial cohesion, and urges the European Commission to continue to emphasise the cross-cutting nature of tourism and to provide Member States and local and regional authorities with appropriate and accessible financial tools promoting and supporting action in this sector. In particular, the EA Group asks the Commission to continue to promote measures supporting sustainable tourism.

Environment and climate change

The EA Group will look at the development of the European Commission initiatives which will help the EU move towards a low-carbon and resource efficient economy, tackling climate change challenges, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss and improving sustainable mobility.

The EA Group is committed to raising awareness and helping local and regional areas decrease their carbon footprint while taking due consideration of the different energy mix and the different local conditions across the EU.

We want to see ambitious global agreements encouraging all regions to play a part in cutting emissions and securing an environmentally sustainable future for Europe.

The group will work to ensure focus is placed on green investments to ensure sustainable mobility and the efficient use of natural resources in the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

Circular economy and waste

The EA Group, upholds the importance of moving towards a more resource efficient economy where wise use is made of natural resources, materials and waste which should be re-used and recycled as far as possible.

In this respect we strongly urge the European Commission to swiftly adopt new initiatives on promoting a circular economy, thus enabling the EU to prevent the loss of valuable materials, such as plastic, to boost recycling, reduce emissions and the environmental impacts while creating new jobs and economic development opportunities.

Bioeconomy

Biodiversity is a key environmental priority for the EU.

The group believes that is vital that we continue to pursue a sustainable forest policy and that efforts are devoted to substantially increasing the share of forest biomass used in the production of renewable energy.

The EA Group supports the roll out of Regional Biodiversity Strategies and action plans to help secure the future of energy sources and enhance their economic potential. We look to build consensus in moving Europe away from dependency on fossil fuels and developing a bio-based economy.

Energy

Energy is one of the major sources of wealth in every society. A number of key decisions and choices will have to be made at a European level to improve energy supply and promote renewable energy and energy efficiency. The EA Group calls for the completion of internal energy markets and the creation of a true Energy Union with interconnected energy networks as well as for new measures and economic incentives to enhance energy efficiency. The EA Group especially want to see measures that will help Europe tap the huge potential of renewable energy sources such as tidal, wave, geothermal, wind, solar, hydro and sustainable biomass. The EU must do more to promote cleaner energy sources and energy efficiency and help local areas to harness their natural resource potential while ensuring affordable energy to the citizens.

The EA Group will call on the European Commission to provide funding for signatory cities and regions to the Covenant of Mayors to be able to achieve the aims set out in the Covenant.

3. A strong voice in the world

Our group would like to highlight some of the following issues:

Europe as a global partner

The process of uniting Europe is first and foremost a project of peace. Enlarging the area of freedom and peace, especially to cover the EU neighbourhood in the broader sense, should be an overarching European policy objective.

The EA Group reiterates the Union must have a strong voice in the word in the field of external relations.

The EA group will encourage the EU institutions to make the enlargement policy more effective, continue negotiating with countries seeking membership and to ensure a strong neighbourhood policy. The European Union's neighbours should receive substantial support to develop democracy and prosperity in their respective countries.

We believe in enhancing cooperation with neighbourhood countries.

Migration

The EA Group advocates immigration and migration policies in accordance with fundamental rights whilst taking due account of the needs and challenges of the regions and local authorities.

At the same time, the group calls for greater solidarity and cooperation between the Member States in implementing coherent immigration legislation, patrolling external borders and combating illegal immigration and human trafficking. We seek to raise awareness in the EU regarding the specific difficulties facing border regions that are dealing with humanitarian crises.

Security and peace

The EA Group condemns every form of aggression and will join forces with other partners to promote peace, solidarity, stability and security inside the EU and along its borders while supporting neighbouring countries in promoting local democracy and local development.

The EA Group will continue to press the European Commission on its duty to provide support and assistance to Ukraine and encourages local cooperation between EU and Ukrainian local and regional governments.

The EA Group considers it important that local and regional authorities are involved in combating organised crime, terrorism and terrorist radicalisation to secure the safety of citizens in urban and rural areas.

On the basis of these previously established objectives and the forthcoming events listed above, the EA would also highlight the following:

4. **European governance and inter-institutional dimension**

The EA Group reaffirms its commitment to better European governance through its considerable improvement in the functioning, simplicity and transparency of the EU compared to the existing treaties. It welcomes the European Commission's view that the European Union will only achieve its objectives if its institutions and national, regional and local authorities, as well as citizens, together contribute to this end. It will work on the intensification of the processes of consultation and assessment of the impact of legislation, proposed by the Commission in connection with the objective of better regulation. It will also continue to strengthen its cooperation with the other European institutions, and in particular with the European Parliament and the Council to ensure an effective impact of the CoR's views and recommendations.

All those priorities will be realised in the respect for the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality and administrative simplification.

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