

## European Alliance Group

### Building Europe for future generations

■ By Dr Uno Silberg, President of the European Alliance group



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The coming months will be marked by significant changes in Europe, changes that will deeply affect our lives and those of the people we represent. Between 22 and 25 of May, Europeans will have their

say on the future of our Union and members who represent their interest in the European Parliament. And this time, it is more important than ever before. This time it is not about nuances, this time it is about the essence. It is not about the next five years, it is about the decades to come. This time, the circle you mark will sketch the future of Europe.

One important lesson we can draw from the current situation in Ukraine is that we always have to act responsibly and think about long-term consequences of our actions. It is easy, especially in times like these when things are far from how we would like them to be, to be seduced by disappointment, anger and inflammable promises of easy solutions. But there are no easy solutions and even those who preach them know that very well. Dismantling is easier than building. But what are we left with after it takes place?

That is why, in this edition of the EA group's newsletter before the elections, I

strongly appeal to all us Europeans, new and old, northern and southern, eastern and western, old and young: choose wisely and responsibly. Europe is in the process of building which always takes time and never goes as smoothly as we think it should. But in the world of change we have to stick together and build something with those who are like us, who think like us and who share our values. At the same time, we must not stop talking with those who are different and looking into ways to benefit from that diversity.

It is important that we are all aware that this May we are deciding on what we will leave to our children. Therefore, please, do vote. Think twice and choose Europe.

Therefore I would call on all of you to cast your vote, it is very important to understand that it is a conscious choice what will happen in Europe, for the short-and long-term.

### Revisiting the Danube strategy as highlighted by the EA group at the beginning of the current CoR mandate

At the very beginning of this CoR mandate, European Alliance member Emil Drăghici, Mayor of the commune of Vulcana-Băi, Romania, invited the EA group to discuss The Danube Delta and its role in fostering a common European heritage on the 18 June 2010. The group adopted its Tulcea declaration *The Danube Delta-a common European Heritage*.

As part of our follow-up with the European Parliament, invited by Ms Silvia-Adriana Țicău, MEP, Vice-chair of the European Parliament's TRAN Committee, Dr Uno Silberg participated in an exchange of

views on the implementation and future developments of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, held on 18 March in the European Parliament. Dr Silberg present-

ed the views of the EA group as outlined in 2010 as well as the current CoR positions on the Danube Strategy and macro-regional strategies.



"Promoting and Preserving Europe's diverse Cultural and Heritage is vital in ensuring a better understanding of our regions and cities diversity."

Cllr Linda Gillham

## Povilas Žagunis appointed rapporteur on the provision of milk and fruits in schools

At the meeting of the NAT commission held on 6 February this year, EA member and Mayor of Panevėžys district municipality (Lithuania), Mr Povilas Žagunis was appointed rapporteur on the *Proposal for a Regulation as regards the aid scheme for the supply of fruit and vegetables, bananas and milk in the educational establishments*.

The Commission's proposal merges the existing rules on the provision of milk and fruit to school children into one single regulation with the aim to sim-

plify procedures and make them more efficient. The document has raised a number of controversies among Member States so we expect a very interesting and fruitful debate.

The first exchange of views on the opinion is foreseen for the next NAT commission meeting on 8 April. The adoption should subsequently be discussed and adopted in the NAT commission in June and in the plenary session in October this year.



Mr Povilas Žagunis

## EA group's external meeting this year to celebrate Europe's diverse cultural heritage and its potential to create growth and jobs

At the invitation of Ms Linda Gillham, Member of Runnymede Borough Council, the European Alliance group in the Committee of the Regions will hold its annual extraordinary meeting this year in Runnymede (England, UK).

The location of the meeting is symbolic as it is on a nearby water-meadow that in June 1215 King John sealed the Magna Carta, the first written constitutional document in the English history and a precedent which established the

principle of human and civil rights in the Anglo-Saxon legal tradition.

The meeting, which will thus take place at the beginning of preparations to commemorate the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this event, and the subsequent seminar, will be focused on the preservation and promotion of Europe's diverse cultural heritage. Representatives of the European Commission, cultural industries and non-governmental organisations will discuss with EA members how to

protect endangered European heritage, how to improve the promotion of the diversity of Europe's heritage and how to exploit its full potential as a strong driver for growth and jobs.

Apart from the visit to the place where the Magna Carta was sealed, the participants will also have a study visit to the nearby Windsor Castle.

The meeting, study visit and the seminar will take place on 1 and 2 June 2014.



Runnymede Meadow

## EA group launched the 2014 edition of its Secondary Schools Competition

For the 9<sup>th</sup> consecutive year, the European Alliance group launched its highly acclaimed competition for secondary school students. Like every year, the competition will gather students from all around Europe who will write an essay on a given EU-related topic and solve a quiz of 28 questions. The two most successful students from each participating school will visit Brussels

and the Committee of the Regions on the occasion of the CoR's plenary session on 25 and 26 June. They will have the opportunity to meet members of the Committee of the Regions, present their schools and communities to them and discuss current EU issues. Winners of the competition will be known in the beginning of May.



Participants in Secondary Schools' Competition 2013'

## ARLEM to focus on migration and waste management in 2014

On 24<sup>th</sup> February the Euro Mediterranean Assembly of local and regional authorities (ARLEM) held its annual meeting in Tangier, Morocco. At the meeting, members of the CoR and its counterparts coming from the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean took stock of the state of decentralisation in the region where three years after the Arab Spring some constitutional reforms and changes are underway. Moreover, a new project on improving capacity building in local and regional authorities to improve the management of public policies, especially those related to urban development, has been presented. The intention is to have it labelled by the UfM's Secretariat at end 2014 so that it can be implemented early 2015.

The meeting provided the opportunity to adopt the annual report on the ter-

ritorial dimension of the Union for the Mediterranean as well as the reports discussed beforehand in the thematic commissions, notably on the cohesion strategy for the Mediterranean region and on sustainable urban mobility.

Members decided that in 2014 the focus will be on crucial issues such as the management of migration flows and waste management in the Mediterranean region. The just appointed rapporteur Mr. Costa, Mayor of Lisbon, and Mr. Boudra, President of the regional council of Taza-Al Hoceima-Taounate, Morocco, will have to present a draft report at the next meeting before the ECOTER and SUDEV commissions respectively.

The EA members Mr Stanislaw Szwabski and Mr Brian Meaney agreed that such issues need to be looked at in



*Mr Stanislaw Szwabski*

more detail as migration and waste management are major challenges which require a coordinated approach and actions, and the EU needs to be in the frontline in assisting the Mediterranean partners by transferring know-how and experiences.

## Athens Summit: Hendrickx stresses the role of subsidiarity in creating Entrepreneurial regions



*Mr Marc Hendrickx*

Marc Hendrickx, Member of the Flemish Parliament participated in the CoR Athens Summit "European Recovery, Local Solutions" where he spoke in the

workshop focussed on "Getting the delivery right: involving Europe's regions and cities". In his contribution he stressed the importance of regional parliaments in scrutinising the EU legislation with a view to the respect of the principle of subsidiarity. He said that Regional parliaments are best placed to assess and reflect citizens' needs and the Lisbon Treaty clearly acknowledges their importance in the Early Warning Mechanism. Despite this, in practice, their experience and competences are not given enough importance, in the first place by National parliaments but often also by the European Commission which often sets too short deadlines for consultation.

Entrepreneurs need to be the leaders

of an innovative future. Governments need to support the entrepreneurial consortiums. This needs to be at the appropriate level and this in his own Member State is Flanders and the Flemish Government. There is a clear need to apply the subsidiarity principle to Entrepreneurship policy.

Governance mechanisms are necessary in regions to set priorities and stimulate clusters and the creation of networks of SMEs. Programmes have to be supported and monitored, and whenever needed adapted. Governments must have a method to help entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial institutions to cluster on the basis of relative specialisation advantages.

# CoR Plenary to support Linda Gillham's call for plastic bags reduction



Mrs Linda Gillham

The CoR plenary will vote on 2-3 April on the opinion of Cllr Linda Gillham

on reducing the consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags.

The proposal of the Commission requires Member States to take measures to reduce the consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags with a thickness below 50 microns. The opinion of the EA member and Runnymede Borough councillor, unanimously adopted by the ENVE commission, supports a binding EU level reduction target (obligatory reduction to 35 bags per capita per year/per Member State), instead of voluntary national reduction targets, as well as a European ban of free lightweight bags by 2020.

The rapporteur regrets that the Commission proposals are not ambitious enough: she advocates a larger defini-

tion of "carrier bags" in the Directive to include also paper bags and those partially made of plastic (e.g. of combined materials) and she calls for an obligation for Member States to use economic instruments (levies, taxes) while underlining their potential to generate revenues for LRAs which could be used to offset implementation costs.

Finally, the rapporteur strongly objects with the exemption of biodegradable and compostable plastic carrier bags, because of their questionable green credentials and often misleading labelling. At the same time she reiterates the call for a total ban on Oxo degradable plastic until further research establishes that these products bring an added value.

## ENVE delegation to visit high-tech centre for renewables in Swansea

Upon the invitation of Runnymede Cllr Mrs Linda Gillham on 29 April a delegation of the ENVE commission, including the EA member Mrs Urve Erikson, will visit Swansea and its University to look more closely at links between the promotion of renewable energy, environmental protection, innovative technologies and post-industrial regeneration. The ENVE members will have the opportunity to meet stakeholders involved in a range of environmental and engineering projects being undertaken in the Swansea Bay area in which the Swansea University is playing a key role working with local government, businesses, community groups and NGOs. A

tour of the aquatic research facilities in the University will be organised.

Work at the centre encompasses the themes of food and fuel security, low carbon technologies, climate change research and blue biotechnology. It includes the algal production facilities showcased during the EnAlgae reception which was held at the CoR in December 2013. The programme also foresees a visit to a wetland centre on the outskirts of Swansea a nationally important ecological site.

Following the decline in heavy industry through the 20th Century, the Swansea region with the help of European support has reinvented itself as a centre for high technology research and innova-



Mrs Urve Erikson

tion, not least in the renewable energy, biotechnology and environmental tourism sectors.

## Upcoming Events:

April								
01/04	CoR Bureau meeting	Brussels	2-3/04	Plenary Session of the CoR	Brussels	10/04	Meeting of the EDUC Commission	Brussels
01/04	EA Group Bureau meeting	Brussels	07/04	Meeting of the CIVEX Commission	Brussels	24/04	Meeting of the ENVE Commission	Brussels
02/04	EA Group meeting	Brussels	08/04	Meeting of the NAT Commission	Brussels	24/04	ENVE Study visit, Swansea	Wales