

European Alliance Group

Subsidiarity and proportionality must be enshrined in EU policies says Karl Vanlouwe, President of the European Alliance Group



Mr Karl Vanlouwe, President of the EA group

During the season of 'State of the Union' addresses one has to reflect as to why subsidiarity and proportionality are enshrined in the treaty but often not followed in formulating or implementing EU policies. This is one of the messages that I would like the European Commission to take on board when it publishes proposals announced in a recent address by the Commission President. The European Committee of the Regions has a pivotal role in ensuring that policies are adapted to reflect the needs of our regions, cities and local communities.

A few weeks ago the European Alliance bureau met with members of the Houses of the Oireachtas (Parliament) in Ireland to discuss Brexit and its implications. When we delve into the detail we see that it will affect people's lives and these impacts need to be analysed in more detail. This is why I have called on the CoR to also look at the impact of BREXIT on Flanders, Northern France, and the Netherlands to see what their concerns are and how we can then transmit these points to the European Commission negotiator Mr Barnier.

Our group also welcome the 'Cohesion Alliance' as an example of joint action being more effective in ensuring the continued existence of Cohesion policy. We will remind everyone of the work of our members in making the case for Island and Mountain regions within this policy.

Lastly, I would like to highlight that my Presidency will continue on the excellent work of Stanislaw Szwabski and bring forward policies developed by our group. We will also enhance our communications effort to reach out to our constituents.

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Cllr Hughie McGrath, Tipperary County Council hosted a delegation from the European Alliance Group in the European Committee of the Regions to discuss EU policies to regenerate town centres. The objective was to examine how EU funding and policies needs to be adjusted to reflect also the needs of towns and their centres.

Cllr McGrath said that he has raised on many occasions the need to look at rural towns and he felt it was important that people see the situation on the ground and in particular in Nenagh. He further added that towns lose out on funding due to the fact they are too small to be eligible for urban funding but too big to receive rural funding and this needs to change.

The President of the European Alliance Group and Member of the Flemish Parliament Mr Karl Vanlouwe welcomed the invitation to Nenagh and highlighted that the situation of town centres was similar across the European Union and clearly EU policies needed to adapt and reflect the reality of towns.

Participants in the meeting included Members of the Dáil (Irish Parliament), Jackie Cahill TD (Fianna Fáil) and Alan Kelly TD (Labour). The delegation met local politicians, the Tipperary County Council manager, the director of the Southern Regional Assembly and local chambers of commerce.



European Alliance group members in Tipperary

*"I will actively support the right of self-determination with a political dialogue on fiscal and cultural autonomy for Europe's Nations and Regions."
says EA group President Karl Vanlouwe*

EA group's new President Karl Vanlouwe outlines the group's priorities for the coming period



EA group President Karl Vanlouwe with Amadeu Altafaj, Representative of the Government of Catalonia to the EU & CoR member

On 12 July, EA group members elected Mr Karl Vanlouwe as the group's new president for the next 2.5 years. Mr Vanlouwe is a member of the Flemish Parliament and a vice president of the Belgian Senate.

In his first speech, the new president thanked the members for their trust and presented his priorities for the forthcoming period.

Given the uncertainty which surrounds the Brexit process and its eventual impact across the continent, the group will actively take part in analysing and mitigating the consequences UK's departure from the EU will have on regions in Europe which are likely to be among the most affected by it and also equally so on the regions within the UK which voted against leaving the EU.

Furthermore, the group will continue to actively support the right to self-determination and a plain and open debate

on political, fiscal and cultural autonomy of Europe's regions and nations. In parallel, Mr Vanlouwe stressed that the members will campaign for the preservation of diversity within Europe and fight for tailor-made EU policies which take into account the interests of all of Europe's regions and peoples, especially those whose development is hampered by geographical circumstances, demographic developments or the lack of transport and digital connectivity. Here, as Mr Vanlouwe stressed, a particular focus will be placed on the diversity of Europe's cultural heritage, also in the context of the European Year of Cultural Heritage which will be marked in 2018.

Finally, Mr Vanlouwe also announced that the group will intensify communication with citizens, especially through social media to better explain 'what we do here in Brussels' and how we defend their interests.

CoR to vote on local climate change targets and greater data comparability in implementation of EU environmental legislation

At the October Plenary Session, the CoR will vote on the "Environmental Implementation Review" opinion, drafted by the EA member Cllr Andrew Cooper.

Cllr Cooper, EA coordinator in the ENVE commission is pleased that the European Commission has explicitly referred to cooperation with the Committee of the Region in order to address the implementation gaps

in EU environmental policy across Member States, as shown by the 28 country based reports published in February.

At the same time, Mr Cooper recalls in the opinion that further improvements are necessary in many member states to ensure effective involvement of local and regional authorities in reviewing an improving implementation, and calls on the Commission to increase comparability across Member States while avoiding additional reporting obligations.

With the EIR limiting its initial scope to areas of waste management, nature and biodiversity, air quality and water management, the EA Group coordinator demands that climate change, chemicals and industrial emissions become important elements of the next cycle of the EIR.

In particular the Kirklees Councillor emphasizes the pivotal role of local government in tackling climate change and encourages the formulation of regional and local climate change targets in addition to the nationally determined contributions.

The opinion requests that 'the European Commission works with relevant national authorities, the European Committee of the Regions, the EU Covenant of Mayors, the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy and ICLEI to develop the concept and methodologies for introducing Local and Regionally Determined Contributions, thereby contributing towards climate change targets agreed under the COP21 Paris Climate Agreement.'

"This opinion", said Councillor Cooper, "could form the basis for a template for reporting local and regional action across the globe, giving the opportunity for partnerships with organizations like the US Conference of Mayors who are opposing President Trump's decision to pull out of the obligations of the COP21 Paris Climate Agreement".



Cllr Andrew Cooper, CoR rapporteur on the "Environmental Implementation Review"

Marie-Antoinette Maupertuis meets Commissioner Crețu to discuss EU policies for islands

On 26 September, Executive member of the Corsican regional authority Ms Marie-Antoinette Maupertuis met with European Commissioner for Regional Policy Corina Crețu, Member of the European Parliament

and Vice Chairman of the EP Searica Intergroup Tonino Picula and the Economic and Social Committee member S. Mallia to discuss the challenges of islands and cohesion policy.



Marie-Antoinette Maupertuis with Commissioner Corina Crețu and MEP Tonino Picula

During the meeting the members of the CoR, European Parliament and EESC highlighted the cohesion policy's fundamental role in addressing the needs of all regions, in particular those suffering from geographic and demographic constraints, and called on the European Commission to place special attention to island territories.

Ms Maupertuis, who is also CoR rapporteur on entrepreneurship on islands, stated that we need to develop a new methodology that would allow islanders to fully benefit from the single market and that the support through cohesion policy is now needed more than ever to cope with the higher costs faced by island businesses and citizens.

BREXIT the focus of European Alliance bureau meeting in the Irish Houses of Parliament

The implication of BREXIT on Ireland and the European Union was the focus of the European Alliance bureau visit to the Houses of the Oireachtas (Parliament) in Dublin on this occasion. The delegation met with Mr Darragh O'Brien, TD, Fianna Fáil spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Trade who outlined the worrying aspects of BREXIT for the Irish Economy and its Citizens and also a call for a "special economic zone" for Northern Ireland.

The delegation also held a meeting with Senator Neale Richmond, Fine Gael Senate spokesperson on Europe and also Chair of the

Special Select Committee on the withdrawal of the UK from the EU. He outlined the impact of BREXIT on a range of areas of relevance to local and regional governments.

European Alliance President Karl Vanlouwe said that it was fundamentally important to ensure that everyone was aware of the implications of BREXIT and that this is subject to ongoing discussions in the Flemish Parliament. He in particular drew attention to the ports of Flanders as one of many examples where it would have an impact. He welcomed the discussions with the Irish Members of the Dáil and Seanad.



Mr Karl Vanlouwe, EA group president with Mr Darragh O'Brien TD, Fianna Fáil party spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Trade

Enda Stenson to draft an own-initiative opinion on Smart Villages

Europe is changing and we are witnessing a technological and societal revolution. Rural



Cllr Enda Stenson, CoR rapporteur on Smart Villages

areas are not immune to all these challenges. The term Smart Villages refers to rural areas and communities which build on their existing strengths and assets to develop new opportunities in this changing environment.

The concept is very wide and covers a range of policy areas, such as smart farming, urban-rural synergies, sustainability, transport, digital connectivity and others. This is because rural areas have great but insufficiently employed assets which can unlock their full economic potential and turn them into development and innovation hubs.

Leitrim County Councillor Enda Stenson is currently preparing a report in which he will look into the current practices in various regions across Europe and propose a set of

measures to revitalize rural areas in a number of challenging areas, such as economic development, demographic change, digital divide with cities, transport links and others.

The initiative is very timely as the European Commission in April launched a reflection exercise called 'EU Action for Smart Villages' which looks into the existing instruments and policies which could be better used to tackle challenges rural areas are facing. The opinion of the Committee of the Regions will provide a grassroots feedback to this initiative and give an additional boost to the Commission's initiative.

The opinion on Smart Villages is set to be discussed at the CoR plenary in November this year.

EA members 7th CORLEAP Annual meeting

On 12 September 2017 Mr Dariusz Wróbel and Mr Povilas Žagunis participated in 7th CORLEAP annual meeting in Brussels. The Conference of the Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP), which involves regional and local representatives of the EU and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, is committed to pursuing the objectives of the EaP in accordance with the reviewed European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy. It promotes and implements, at local level, the universal values upon which the EU is founded – the rule of law, respect for human rights and democracy – as well as enhanced

territorial cooperation between the EU and partner countries. CORLEAP aims to support local democracy and good governance both in the EaP countries and in the EU. It provides an institutional framework for cooperation and exchanging good practices on territorial development and decentralisation between members of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and representatives of the local and regional authorities of the partner countries.

During this meeting the members approved the declaration to the Heads of State and Government gathering in Brussels on 24 November 2017 for the 5th Eastern Partnership Summit.



Mr Dariusz Wróbel,
CORLEAP Bureau Member



Cllr Kieran McCarthy, CoR rapporteur
on the opinion 'Building a
European Data Economy'

Data can be used to improve almost any aspect of our daily lives, from road safety and food security to healthcare or weather forecasting. In terms of economy, in 2015 the EU data economy was estimated at €272 billion and employed 6 million people. By 2020 this could increase to €643 billion-

Kieran McCarthy's opinion on EU's data economy strategy to be adopted at the CoR plenary

worth and 7.4 million jobs. However, there are numerous legal and administrative barriers which prevent such development, in the first place strict and often disproportionate data localization restrictions in many member states which prevent the free flow of data across borders within the EU.

In January 2017, the European Commission presented a strategy to 'unleash EU's data economy' and overcome such barriers, which could generate up to €8 billion in GDP a year. European Committee of the Regions' rapporteur on the European Commission's strategy is Mr Kieran McCarthy from the Cork City Council whose opinion is set to be adopted by the CoR plenary session on 11 October.

In the opinion, Mr McCarthy welcomed the initiative but underlined the necessity to establish clear safeguards in order not to violate the existing data protection rules and ensure confidentiality and safety of our electronic communications. He also stressed that cities and regions should have a key role in implementing the strategy and asked for special regulatory assistance for the implementation of digital development projects in disadvantaged regions, such as rural, mountainous, islands and sparsely-populated areas, which have neither the basic infrastructure nor the expertise needed to establish a digital data-driven economy.

The opinion was previously adopted at the SEDEC commission meeting on 8 June 2017.

European Alliance Group organises seminar 'Strengthening the role of Nations and Regions in Economic development'

As part of the European Week of Regions and Cities, the largest gathering of representatives of regions across Europe, the EA group will organise a seminar on 'Strengthening the role of Nations and Regions in Economic development' on Tuesday 10 October 2017 from 09:00-10:45.

The EA Group seminar will bring together policy makers and practitioners from various

nations, regions and local authorities across the European Union, who will identify best practices as well as policies and incentives needed to strengthen their role in economic development.

It is clear that Nations, regions and local authorities are the level of governance closest to the citizens and business. The seminar will examine strengthening the economic

development, bridging the investment gap, as well as current challenges and opportunities. More information is available on www.ea.cor.europa.eu

