

## European Alliance Group

### The European Union needs to protect the democratic principles and rights at the heart of our Union, says Karl Vanlouwe, President of the European Alliance Group



Mr Karl Vanlouwe, President of the EA Group

Since its inception the European Union has ensured that its founding values have been safeguarded but we have seen in the recent past an erosion of the democratic principles which are the basis of our common European project. This clearly refers to the heavy-handed tactics being used against Catalan people and their democratically elected

politicians. It is not acceptable to see the return in Europe of political prisoners and the EU must take a stance to ensure that democracy and free speech remains at the core of the Europe in which we believe. I believe that the President of the European Council is correct when he says the “force of argument is better than the argument of force” and I reiterate my call for dialogue, international or European mediation and indeed an absolute rejection of any use of violence.

As the CoR will shortly hold its Subsidiarity conference in Vienna, it is an opportunity to reflect on the competences of the regions across the European Union and indeed how those regions engage with the European Union and its institutions. There is a clear role for the European Committee of the Regions in this regard and I believe that we need to debate, discuss and not shy away from providing answers to the regions, cities and local authorities we represent.

## CONTENT

*Enda Stenson's opinion on Smart Villages to be adopted by the CoR Plenary*

*ARLEM Bureau discuss good governance in the Mediterranean and EU - Egypt relations*

*Major success for CoR and EA group as locally and regionally determined contributions get featured in the COP 23 final declaration*

*EA President to take part in high level Subsidiarity Conference in Vienna*

*Silberg: EU can learn about tolerance from young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina*

*Truskolaski calls for continued support to SMEs beyond 2020*

*Strengthening the role of Nations and Regions in Economic*

*Kieran McCarthy attends Cities Forum on the future of the Urban Agenda*

*Wróbel: "Effective EU involvement with EaP countries requires the highest degree of participation of local communities and citizens"*

### 9th CoR/EA Group Primary School Art Competition “My Region, My Dreams” launched



Logo of the 9th CoR/EA group  
Primary Schools Art Competition

Children from 15 primary schools from 8 different member states - Estonia, Ireland,

Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia as well as Flanders, and Scotland - are at the moment taking part in the CoR/EA Group's popular annual Primary School's Art Competition.

The theme for this year is 'My Region, My Dreams' and the aim is to engage children in a creative exercise to express their dreams for and about their regions in a European context. We love seeing how children from different places in Europe interpret the subject and we believe we can learn from their vision.

The winning entries will be displayed in an expo in the Committee of the Regions at

the end of November and the beginning of December. They will also be transformed into booklets and postcards.



## Enda Stenson's opinion on Smart Villages to be adopted by the CoR Plenary



*Cllr Enda Stenson*

During the November 2017 Plenary Session members of the European Committee of the Regions are set to adopt an opinion on the revitalisation of rural areas through Smart Villages drafted by EA member and

member of the Leitrim County Council Cllr Enda Stenson.

In the opinion, Cllr Stenson proposes expanding the notion of Smart Villages to that of Smart Rural Areas and incorporating the initiative into the European Rural Agenda, so as to also encourage and develop synergies between neighbouring small villages within Smart Rural Areas. He also called on the stakeholders to start the preparatory work as soon as possible to put a sustainable and effective programme for Smart Villages in place for the next funding period..

"With this opinion we welcome the European Commission's initiative on EU Action for Smart Villages which recognises the need for targeted actions to support the revival of rural areas as sustainable places in which to live and work. Enhancing rural prosperity and the viability of rural areas are among the most urgent tasks, since a

more balanced territorial development is the basis for achieving greater socio-economic and environmental sustainability," said Mr Stenson.

He also added: "However I should say that we regret the lack of ambition outlined in the paper, which represents a compilation of pre-existing initiatives. In this text we call for greater ambition and the development of a targeted and forward-looking policy on Smart Villages with a view to the post 2020 period, which builds on the need to consolidate the full range of place-based EU smart instruments." "As the rapporteur, I would like to draw attention to the importance of close coordination at all levels of governance, with due respect for the principle of subsidiarity in order to define "bottom up" and "place based" solutions. The rural proofing should be integrated into the policy and training to be provided to target groups such as farmers", Mr Stenson concluded.

## ARLEM Bureau discuss good governance in the Mediterranean and EU - Egypt relations

On 24 October the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) Bureau met in Brussels to discuss future activities and hold a debate on the topic of good governance and its importance for territorial stability.

Ms Nanette Maupertuis, EA member in the ARLEM bureau and member of the executive Council of Corsica highlighted the important role of local elected representatives in developing a political culture in the Mediterranean society.

"There is a critical need for pedagogic work among the youth to ensure their active participation in politics and establish a wider culture of responsibility in the society.

There is a correlation between corruption and economic growth. Whenever public authorities are unable to collect due taxes, the more vulnerable groups and the majority of the society are the ones who pay a higher price".

In the presence of a representative of the European External Action Service, members also discussed the relations between the EU and Egypt where ARLEM will hold its plenary session early next year.

After the Bureau meeting, all ARLEM members had the opportunity to discuss the 2017 report on the role of subnational authorities in women' empowerment and on combating violence and radicalisation.



*Ms Nanette Maupertuis*

## EA group looks forward to European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018

The European Alliance group warmly welcomes the nomination of 2018 as the European Year of Cultural Heritage (EYCH). EA group has always placed preservation and promotion of Europe's diverse cultural heritage high among its priorities and we are

looking forward to taking active part in the EYCS 2018 programme.

In June 2015, the EA group adopted the so-called Aalst Declaration in which we called on the European Commission to place fostering

and promotion of Europe's cultural and linguistic heritage at the core of EU's policies and programmes and adopt a more proactive approach to promoting European cultural heritage and its diversity among young people and children.

## Major success for CoR and EA group as locally and regionally determined contributions get featured in the COP 23 final declaration



Cllr Andrew Cooper

EA members Cllr Andrew Cooper and Cllr Enda Stenson were part of the CoR delegation, led by President Karl Heinz Lambertz, which took part in the 23rd Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC (COP23).

On 12 November CoR members participated in the Climate Summit of local and regional leaders where all parties, regions and cities across the

world, as well as international organisations such as ICLEI and Climate Alliance, to name a few, agreed a final declaration which stipulates the establishment of Locally- and Regionally-determined contributions (LDCs) to help national governments achieve existing Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Cllr Andrew Cooper, EA coordinator in the ENVE commission and member of Kirkcaldy County Council, who took the initiative of setting up the concept of LDCs as a way to achieve the agreed target under the Paris agreement, called on UNFCCC to continue work on its development.

“Establishing targets agreed at a local level could give us the boost we need to actually achieve the carbon reductions that need to happen to prevent runaway climate change. LDCs also give us the opportunity to make action on Climate Change more relevant to citizens as they see action at the local level

by their Local or Regional Authority”, said Cllr Cooper.

A global system of LDCs is a huge opportunity for local and regional authorities all across the globe. For Mayors in the USA, for example, it provides a Framework to get involved in the delivery of the UNFCCC targets. For smaller municipalities which are not engaged with bodies such as the Global Covenant of Mayors it gives an opportunity to contribute to the Paris goals.

On 13 November members took part in a conference on Transatlantic Dialogue on Climate Change with the US conference of Mayors and the Canadian municipalities. Members committed to champion the Covenant of Mayors initiative within and beyond the EU as a prime model of multi-level governance for climate objectives.

## EA President to take part in high level Subsidiarity Conference in Vienna

On 4 December Karl Vanlouwe, EA president and member of the Flemish Parliament will take part in the 8th Subsidiarity Conference jointly organized by the CoR and the Austrian Federal Council.

Participants will discuss how to convert subsidiarity into action and enhance subsidiarity, proportionality and better regulation in the daily operation of the European Union.

Mr Vanlouwe will bring the perspective of the Flemish Parliament in subsidiarity monitoring and lay out his views and proposals to ensure a greater involvement of national and regional parliaments.

EA group Bureau members Tony Buchanan and Uno Silberg will also be part of the EA delegation attending the conference.



EA group President, Mr Karl Vanlouwe

## Silberg: EU can learn about tolerance from young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina



Mr Uno Silberg

On 24 and 25 October, members of the European Committee of the Regions' (CoR) Working Group on the Western Balkans visited the city of East Sarajevo in Bosnia and Herzegovina's Republika Srpska entity.

CoR members and representatives of local authorities from Bosnia and Herzegovina discussed the best practices and challenges in the use of IPA 2 pre-accession funds in Bosnia and Herzegovina and especially in cross-border cooperation with neighbouring countries.

The members also had a conversation with the students of the University of East Sarajevo where

young people from the region shared their concerns and ideas about Europe, Balkans and the EU. EA group was represented at the meeting by Mr Uno Silberg, Member of Kose Municipality Council (Estonia) who encouraged students to seek opportunities and learn from their peers from other parts of Europe. Talking with student representatives, Mr Silberg also said that young people from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Balkans have a lot to teach to people in Europe about multiculturalism, tolerance and life with people of different backgrounds.



## Truskolaski calls for continued support to SMEs beyond 2020



Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski

At the last meeting of the CoR's Commission for Economic Policy (ECON), members adopted two opinions: "Deepening of the EMU by 2025" and "Future of COSME programme beyond 2020".

Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski, EA coordinator for the ECON Commission and CoR rapporteur on the start-up and scale-up initiative, said that it is very important that LRAs ensure a stable support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurs beyond 2020 through instruments of support for SME competitiveness, such as the current COSME programme. "That is why we requested that particular care should be taken to ensure that this programme's successor addresses the funding needs of the entire spectrum of SMEs in different regions, including traditional SMEs, self-entrepreneurs, micro-enterprises and high-growth start-ups and scale-ups" Mr Truskolaski added.

Mr Truskolaski's opinion also underlines that additional measures to strengthen and network actors working to promote entrepreneurship in traditional economic sectors, including the craft sector and the cultural and creative industries, rural and peripheral regions, and peri-urban areas would be highly desirable. Moreover, it encourages the European Commission to analyse the possibility of supporting local and regional authorities in setting up teams composed of experienced representatives of business, who would help develop entrepreneurship and start-up and scale-up businesses in the area administered by the local or regional authority.

## 'Strengthening the role of Nations and Regions in Economic development' discussed at European Alliance Group seminar



European Alliance group seminar at this year's EWRC

Under the chairmanship of EA group President Karl Vanlouwe, this year's European Week of Regions and Cities (EWRC) seminar focussed on 'Strengthening the role of Nations and Regions in Economic development'.

To a packed room the seminar brought together policy makers and practitioners from Flanders, the Vanguard initiative, Gdynia City Council and the Northern & Western region of Ireland.

It was clear from discussions that nations, regions, cities and local authorities are the levels

of governance closest to the citizens and business and therefore crucial for economic development. Different strategies were discussed as well as the role of the European Union to allow more flexibility for the relevant level of governance to enhance their regional and local economies.

The seminar also examined the strengthening of the economic development, bridging of the investment gap, as well as other current challenges and opportunities.

## Kieran McCarthy attends Cities Forum on the future of the Urban Agenda

On 27-28 November, Kieran McCarthy, Cork city Councilor and CoR rapporteur on the implementation assessment of the Urban Agenda was in Rotterdam to speak at the 3rd Cities Forum. Commissioner for Regional Policy Corina Crețu, CoR president Karl Heinz Lambertz as well as many other high level speakers from EU, national and local governments discussed current challenges and shared their visions on

the way forward towards better sustainable urban policy making and investments included the urban dimension of Cohesion Policy.

In his intervention, Mr McCarthy commented on the freshly published report of the European Commission on the implementation of the Urban Agenda and on the progress of the partnerships, including the one on sustainable use of land where the city of Cork is taking an active part.



Cllr Kieran McCarthy

## Wróbel: "Effective EU involvement with EaP countries requires the highest degree of participation of local communities and citizens"



Mr Dariusz Wróbel

Earlier this year, European Committee of the Regions adopted recommendations to the heads of state and government gathering in Brussels for the fifth Eastern Partnership summit on 24 November 2017.

On the eve of the summit, Mr Dariusz Wróbel, Mayor of Opole Lubelskie said that he hopes that the EU's involvement with the Eastern Partnership countries will imply the highest degree of participation of local communities and citizens. "It

is very important to engage with all sectors of society. And it is important that the future cooperation is based on the same values. More democracy can give more opportunities" – he highlighted. "Local elections are essential in terms of engaging citizens and should be accompanied by a process of reflection on how to work more effectively for the public. I wish to encourage a multi-stakeholder approach to local and regional development in the EaP countries based on close cooperation between LRAs, civil society organisations and citizens," Mr Wróbel added.