



European Alliance

EA Political Priorities for 2010 – 2015

Recommendations for the CoR Mandate

EUROPEAN UNION



Committee of the Regions

EA Political priorities for 2010 – 2015
Recommendations for the new Mandate

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 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.

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.

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

1. Long term EU challenges

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

Europe 2020 Strategy

This mandate will be decisive to make the new Europe 2020 strategy a real success which delivers growth and jobs. The EU, hardly hit by an unprecedented economic crisis, will have to develop a comprehensive strategy aimed at ensuring sustainable development, not only from a sheer economic point of view, but also socially and environmentally. This strategy states that it should contribute to attaining the Lisbon Treaty objective of territorial cohesion. However, it fails to provide any concrete proposal for achieving this. In the EA Group's point of view this failure needs to be addressed. EU must show real commitment to raise innovation and research which are keys attaining competitiveness advantages. The EA Group will draw on its experience of social partnership, which enriches policy-making, increases productivity and enhances the prospects of managing change successfully.

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 EU has given itself for the next ten years. The EA Group will actively contribute to the debate preparing the final decision on this strategy.

Restore Public finances (and supporting businesses)

The EA Group will support a better coordination and, if necessary, new mechanisms in the EU economic governance in order to ensure sound and stable public finances, preserve our economy and sustain growth. We will be vigilant so that any economic downturn should not impact negatively on local and regional authorities' financial autonomy and their role as services providers.

Investing on People (employment and education)

The EA Group will give highest priority to education, lifelong learning and training as key instruments to increase participation in the labour market and adapt the workforce to the globalisation side effects. The current declining demographic trend put our social security and pension systems at stake; yet it poses serious challenges for young people to access to the labour market. The EA Group advocates the importance of the European Social Fund, the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund as well as the European Regional Development 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 growth

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, innovation so as to lay the groundwork for genuinely Community-wide research and innovation policies. The Group fully believes that a clear, realistic and, to a certain extent, binding, framework must be set, in order to overcome any weaknesses of the open method of coordination.

The EA Group welcomes the European Commission intention to invest 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 growth of the digital economy and the information society, particularly to the socio-economic fabric of our rural and more remote areas. The EA Group would like to see broad band access to become a universal service in order to ensure equal access and opportunities to people, regardless they live in urban, rural or peripheral regions. We will continue to make valuable contribution towards the development of

local and regional e-Government while underlining that local and regional actions would be the most effective method of achieving results.

To this end we will encourage local and regional authorities to make ambitious long-term investments in education, lifelong learning, research and innovation and in development of quality infrastructures, public transport and in energy efficient technologies.

Cultural and linguistic diversity

The EA Group believes that Europe's strength lies in its cultural heritage as well as in its diversity.

We will work to assure 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 and financial framework

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. European solidarity should remain the key element of the EU integration. In an enlarged European Union, an efficient reform of the system of regional and structural funding must be undertaken in order to safeguard the less favoured regions taking due consideration for the principle of sustainable development. The European cohesion policy must evolve with regions' needs, and focus on narrowing the gaps between rich and poorer regions. It is important developing a cohesive Union which recognises common responsibilities and demonstrate solidarity. The EA Group will look for a strong and ambitious commitment to Cohesion Policy within the EU budget review process, avoiding any kind of renationalisation. This policy should concentrate on the central objective of strengthening employment possibilities while reducing social disparities.

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. The EA Group will call for ensuring the European added value of a real territorial cohesion policy to reduce regional disparities.

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 such issues as urban and rural renewal, social deprivation, specific housing initiatives, economic restructuring and public transport, and the revitalisation of rural areas. The EA Group recognises the importance of all Europeans regions and the importance of ensuring an urban-rural balance in future programmes. The 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 small rural and agricultural 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 will develop its view towards the new CAP post 2013 with a view towards ensuring that high quality, traceable agriculture products are plentiful, while ensuring that the natural and environmental resources across our regions are protected.

Environment and climate change

The EA Group will look at the development of the European Commission initiative which will help EU to prosper in a low-carbon, resource constrained world tackling climate change, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss and improving sustainable mobility. 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.

Biodiversity

Biodiversity is a key environmental priority for the EU. The European Commission has recently identified issues at stake while proposing different options for the development of a post-2010 EU vision and target. The EA Group will follow up the development of this strategy.

The group believes that is vital that we 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.

Energy

Energy is one of the major sources of wealth in every society. Today's research policy provides the knowledge for tomorrow's energy policy. A number of key decisions and choices will have to be made at a European level over the next few weeks and months about renewable energy and energy efficiency. The EA Group calls on a real energy policy to include more measures targeting energy supply and will support encouragement of economic incentives for energy efficiency measures. The EA Group especially want to see measures that will help Europe realise its potential in renewable energy and energy efficiency. It will continue challenged the European Commission over soaring fuel prices and the development of alternative energy resources. The EA Group will do more to promote clean energy sources.

3. **A strong voice in the world**

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

Europe as a global partner

The EA Group reiterates the Union must have a single voice in the word in the field of external relations, building on the new role the Lisbon Treaty has enshrined for it. EU will have to demonstrate its capacity of negotiating on behalf of all member states when it comes to signing international agreements, preparing future enlargements and ensuring good neighbourhood relations. Whilst Croatia's accession to the EU is approaching, the EU should keep treating all applicant country in the same way while asking them to comply with the criteria. With accession talks soon coming to an end for Croatia, the EA Group looks forward to working ever closer with the colleagues of the Western Balkans countries, Turkey and Iceland. The Group will urges to plan and develop cross-border operations that involve the active participation of border regions.

Security

The EA Group condemns every form of aggression and will focus on working together to combat crime and terrorism, protect citizens and minimise risk.

The EA considers it important that local and regional authorities are involved in combating organised crime, terrorism and urban and rural areas safety.

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 governance. 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.

Role of Local and Regional Authorities

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 European Commission, in close cooperation with local and regional authorities and civil society, to promote and support information campaigns at a local and regional level, in both the Member States, candidate and potential candidate countries. We need to ensure that our citizens have a sense of belonging to the EU, knowledge of the different policies that affect their daily lives.

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

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