

European Alliance Group

Wise spending a necessity for the new EU budget, says Dr Uno Silberg

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



Dr Silberg meeting President Barroso, Commissioner Hahn and the CoR Conference of Presidents

Having reached agreement on the MFF, the EU has finally secured the practical agreement for 2014 budget. This is a welcome step but it is the beginning of the process, the EU has failed to deliver results on what is needed most across our Regions, cities and local communes. That is why wise and targeted spending on carefully chosen initiatives which can make a difference in people's everyday lives is essential for the legitimacy of the EU as an idea. Our group has consistently called for action on tackling youth unemployment. The levels of youth unemployment in the EU is a disgrace and while the youth guarantee is a very welcome step we now need to see it being put into action.

The search for employment has been a magnet for people to move from the rural

communities to the larger cities across Europe. Such trends, unfortunately, have devastating effects on many rural areas in Europe which remain empty and degraded. There needs to be a change in thinking to ensure our Rural communities have a sustainable future, providing IT access (especially broadband), creating small scale jobs. Our group reiterated this in our meeting in Panevėžys, Lithuania and we hope that some of declaration points will be taken on board.

Demonstrating practical ways forward our group organised a seminar during Open days on workshop "Creative tourism development: creating jobs across Europe's regions". In cooperation with the European Commission and representatives of local initiatives, this

seminar gave some very interesting example on where small scale projects can create real and tangible results in our regions.

Lastly we are in the process of finalising our annual Primary Schools Art Competition where children from all across Europe depict through art their vision of 'My Region, My Traditions'. What can we say is that the results are wonderful, the winners from the 17 schools will have their art displayed in the CoR and a publication will be forthcoming where a true reflection of 'My Region, My Traditions' will be shown through our Children's eyes.

**We wish all our readers
a wonderful Christmas and a peaceful
and prosperous New Year.**



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The 5th edition of EA group's Primary schools competition

For the fifth consecutive year, the European Alliance group has launched its highly acclaimed Primary Schools Art Competition aimed at primary school students between the age of 6 and 12. The topic for this year is 'My Region, My Traditions', allowing students to depict their local music, dance, folklore, food, culture, sports, etc.

This year's concourse saw the participation of 17 primary schools from 9 Member States across the European Union.



*Kubikova Katka
Základná škola s materskou školou
9 years*

Winning entries will be exhibited in the Committee of the Regions at the end of November after which the artworks will be transformed into postcards for the students and schools to send to their friends.

More information available on:
www.ea.cor.europa.eu



Thomas's opinion on state aid for fisheries to be discussed at the CoR plenary



Mr Rhodri Glyn Thomas

The November Plenary session of the Committee of the Regions will see the adoption of Rhodri Glyn Thomas' own-initiative opinion on forthcoming state-aid revisions in the domain of fisheries and aquaculture.

This highly contested issue is of great interest to many local and regional authorities in Europe as targeted support at the territorial level is critically important for the long-term prosperity and viability, particularly of small communities with a high concentration of employment in the fisheries.

The draft opinion is firmly opposed to any use of state-aid scheme as a support for fleet upgrades or any activities which could ultimately lead to unsustainable fishing practices. Instead, it states that all revisions must have as a priority sustainability of fishing in Europe and structural changes and diversi-

fication within the sector, including a bigger focus on the onshore economy. It is particularly important that support is targeted at developing local markets and local supply chains, to ensure that the 'added value' of landed fish benefits fishing and coastal communities. At the same time, many small and artisanal fishing fleets that fish sustainably must be given the opportunity to benefit from these shortened 'supply' chains.

As a conclusion, Mr Thomas calls the European Commission to provide a detailed analysis of the impact of the current thresholds and potential impact of their increase or reduction whilst keeping in mind the broader suite of public interventions within the sector.

Mr Rhodri Glyn Thomas is a Member of the National Assembly for Wales for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr.

European Alliance group takes active part in the Open Days

On October 8, the EA group organised a workshop "Creative tourism development: creating jobs across Europe's regions". Gathering speakers ranging from European policy makers to representatives of local grassroots initiatives, the workshop offered participants a coherent view across the sector, with focus on local initiatives which successfully blend creative and tourism industries.

Mr Eric Philippart, from the "Tourism and cultural instruments" Unit at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Enterprise and Industry particularly emphasised the European Commission's commitment to stimulate the diversification of tourism activities by supporting small and medium-size

enterprises and providing them with better access to finance.

Other participants included Mr John Theodore, Director of the International Tourism Centre at the Manchester Metropolitan University, Mrs Carol Gleeson, Project Manager for the Burren & Cliffs of Moher Geopark in Ireland and Prof. Peter Dorčák, the leader of the Slovak Marketing Association.

All participants agreed that, notwithstanding the crisis, tourism based on innovation, local knowledge, local traditions and the development of local small and medium sized businesses has huge potential to create growth and jobs in every corner of Europe. In this regard, Europe's cultural diversity is



Open days 2013 - Creative Tourism Development'

a huge asset which should be taken more into consideration at the local level. While each community has to identify its own assets and come up with good and creative ideas, it is very encouraging that the support from the policy and decision making centres is not in question.



National Assembly for Wales building

EA bureau members to visit National Assembly for Wales

Upon the invitation of Mr Rhodri Glyn Thomas, members of the European Alliance group bureau will pay a visit to the National Assembly on Wales on 9 December this year. During their stay in Cardiff, EA members will get closely acquainted with the work of the Welsh Assembly and its role, particularly in the context of EU policies. In addition,

members will have the opportunity to find out more about the preparations of the Plaid Cymru, one of the leading political groupings in Wales, for the forthcoming European elections.

Mr Rhodri Glyn Thomas is a long-standing member of the National Assembly for Wales for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr and former Welsh Minister for Heritage.

Marc Hendrickx re-examining the functioning of the Benelux Parliament

Recently many criticisms of the Benelux Parliament have been voiced by the Dutch delegation in this body, particularly concerning the Parliament's current way of working and a general lack of political guidance in cooperation among Benelux countries. The criticisms at a certain point even resulted in a threat of withdrawal of the Dutch delegation from the Parliament unless changes in the method and mission statement of the institution were introduced. In order to tackle these problems, a working group was created in which the prominent



Mr Marc Hendrickx

member of the EA group from Flanders, Mr Marc Hendrickx, plays an active role.

The main conclusions of the working group are that there is indeed need for better political control and optimisation

of the role of the Benelux Parliament and that this body is ideally placed to be a valuable platform for specific topical debates of common concern, such as the recent Fyra train controversies. Not least, there is a strong need for substantial support and improvement in information and communication activities, in order to present better the Parliament's activities to the public.

The first evaluation of the announced reforms will follow at the end of 2014 and the Benelux countries, as frontrunners of European integration, have an obligation to keep and additionally strengthen their role as a critical laboratory.

Marc Hendrickx is the European Alliance group member and a Member of the Flemish Parliament from the N-VA party.

Montenegro JCC to discuss Montenegro progress report on 4 December



Mr Szwabski

The European commission has recently published its Montenegro Progress report in the context of the wider Enlargement strategy for 2013-2014.

Political and economic challenges lie ahead of Montenegro. In particular, according to the European Commission, more efforts are needed in the fight against corruption and organised crime, to ensure the independence of the judiciary as well to enhance productivity and attract foreign investments.

The next meeting of the JCC which will take place in Brussels on 4 December under the co chairmanship of the EA member Mr Szwabski will take stock of the progress made during the last year while looking at ways to promote further the integration of Montenegro in the EU as well as to address shortcomings. The JCC members will

keep ensuring the local authorities in Montenegro are largely involved in the accession process and will focus on key thematic priorities of common interest for local and regional authorities.

Besides the discussion on the enlargement report and on the state of play of decentralisation in Montenegro, the members will vote upon a joint report on **"Increasing absorption capacity for EU pre-accession funds and improving administrative capacity at the local level in Montenegro"**. Similar papers have been extremely useful for some CoR members in the past before their countries joined the EU and now they are eager to pass on the benefit of their knowledge and experience to the Montenegrin colleagues.

EA delegation to attend the 6th Subsidiarity Assises in Berlin

On 18 December in the Bundesrat a delegation of EA members will participate in the 6th edition of the Subsidiarity Assises.

This biannual event aims at taking stock of the cooperation between the different actors involved in the subsidiarity monitoring scrutiny process.

The EA coordinator in the CoR subsidiarity Steering group and member of the Flemish Parliament, Mr Marc Hendrickx, who will act as a moderator in a working session on the

involvement of regional assemblies, considers this event an important occasion to assess the state of play of the subsidiarity monitoring since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty.

Besides granting the CoR the right to bring an action before the European Court of Justice (ECJ) against an EU legislative act on grounds of subsidiarity breach, the Lisbon Treaty introduced the definition of local and regional dimension of subsidiarity as well as an Early Warning System.

EA Vice-President Zająkła attends the Turkey working group in Ankara



Mr Jerzy Zająkła

The EA Vice president and Mayor of Łubianka, Mr Jerzy Zająkła will take part in the Turkey Working group meeting on 21 November in Ankara to discuss the recently published European Commission progress report on Turkey.

The meeting focused discussion on the evolution of the decentralisation process in Turkey, focussing in particular on the law on metropolitan municipalities, and on the industrial relations.

While not downplaying the worrying events which occurred in June, we still believe Turkey is a strategic partner for

the EU and that both sides should make efforts to enhance their cooperation and facilitate a greater integration of Turkey in the EU, provided that compliance with fundamental rights is guaranteed. In this respect, the contribution of the subnational level to the EU enlargement process must not be downplayed. Empowering municipalities with greater tools and resources is the best way to enhance local democracy and meet the citizens' needs whilst offering them the most efficient solutions.

Primary Schools art competition – "My region, my traditions"



Vasile-Marius CIOCAN
Școala Gimnazială
„Ion MAREȘ” Vulcana-Băi
10 years

Jarabinec Adam
Základná škola s materskou školou
11 years



Roberta-Daria BITOC
Școala Gimnazială
„Ion MAREȘ” Vulcana-Băi
11 years