

## European Alliance Group

### 2014, the year citizens decide.....

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



Dr Uno Silberg, President of the European Alliance group

In the coming weeks we will finally enter into election mode, a year when the European Parliament will be elected and indeed we will have a new President of Commission and Council as well as new Commissioners. It is

also an opportunity for the Committee of the Regions to put ourselves at the heart of the debate, a debate which may also focus on the important role of local and regional authorities in the EU decision making process, as we also have a pivotal role in promoting the conditions for growth and jobs locally and which needs to be considered in new European initiatives. Where we can clearly begin this campaign is in the Athens summit in March.

The EA group will launch its Secondary Schools competition in the coming weeks where we encourage students to undertake an essay and multiple choice competition the winners of which will be invited to the June CoR plenary. We are very proud of our competition as it engages openly with students and this is a positive initiative which needs to happen in our contacts with citizens.

Now that we also begin the year with a new financial perspective for the EU and new programmes, for example,

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Structural Funds, CAP etc, it is clear that we need swift implementation of the programmes. This is a necessity for many regions to continue to take action that may increase employment in their regions.

### The EU must take clear action on Ukraine; says Dr Uno Silberg

EA group President visited Kiev as part of a CoR delegation fact finding mission on the 22-23 January and was horrified by the level of violence against protestors in Maidan Square. Dr Silberg condemns in the strongest manner any violence and calls for dialogue to find a solution to the exceptionally difficult situation in Ukraine. The delegation met with Civil Society in Maidan as well as The CoR President and delegation are also due to meet with **Evgeniya Tymoshenko**, daughter of the former

Ukrainian Prime Minister, currently still imprisoned.

The planned meetings with Ukrainian Government representatives was cancelled as a mark of clear protest against the actions of the Government. He further called for clear and swift actions of the EU to ensure that there is a solution found quickly. He expressed his sympathy to the families who have lost their lives in the protests. Dr Silberg said that Local and Regional authorities have a role to cooperate

with their counterparts in Ukraine and called for a strengthened cooperation via CORLEAP.



Maidan Square, Kiev

*"If the EU is to tackle the democratic deficit and fight the widespread disillusion amongst its citizens, it has to become more effective in areas where EU intervention brings an added value whilst refraining from imposing unnecessary rules in matters where national and regional parliaments can decide."* Marc Hendrickx

## CoR Plenary to adopt Cllr Meaney's position on new EU inland waterway transport sector policy

The CoR Plenary will adopt on 31 January the opinion of the EA member and Clare county Councillor Brian Meaney on the NAIADES II package which already received overwhelming support in the COTER commission in December.

The package is composed from a Communication envisaging actions to improve the environmental impact of the inland waterway transport sector, to innovate vessels and to improve the working conditions of workers. Together with a proposal for a directive laying down technical requirements for inland waterway vessels and a pro-

posal for a regulation on a Community-fleet capacity policy to promote inland waterway transport complete the package.

European cooperation and coordination in this field is still characterised by short-term and partial solutions or ad-hoc initiatives. Adequate financial and fiscal means must therefore be made available to promote investment in inland waterway transport in order to contribute to sustainable transport models while improving the quality of the infrastructure and fostering integration into the logistics chain thus



Mr Brian Meaney

shifting freight from road and rail to vessels as much as possible.



Mr Marc Hendrickx

On 18 December the Subsidiarity Assizes jointly organised in Berlin by the CoR and the Bundesrat provided the occasion for taking stock of the Subsidiarity monitoring procedure since the entry into force of the Lisbon treaty.

Until now national parliaments have triggered the yellow card procedure two times within the Early Warning Mechanism on the grounds of subsidiarity concerns thus forcing the com-

## Marc Hendrickx calls for action to give greater role to regional parliaments in subsidiarity monitoring of EU legislation

mission to withdraw or amend its legislative proposals respectively on the so called 'Monti II' Regulation on the right to strike and, more recently, on setting up a European Public Prosecutor Office (EPPO).

During the conference members reiterated the necessity of promoting a culture of subsidiarity and an efficient multilevel governance system whereby decisions are taken at the most appropriate level and a coordination mechanism between national and regional parliaments is established to make sure the views of subnational government are duly taken into account.

Moreover, many argued in favour of giving national and regional parliaments more time to react on a given proposal of the European Commission as the current eight weeks window seems too short.

Marc Hendrickx, EA member and coordinator in the CoR Subsidiarity Steer-

ing group says that more needs to be done to give regional parliaments a greater say in the Subsidiarity Monitoring Procedure. "Despite the Lisbon Treaty acknowledging the importance of regional parliaments in the Early Warning Mechanism, little use has been made by National Parliaments of their experience and competence. This is not acceptable as many regions dispose of legislative powers and are better placed than anyone else when it comes to suiting their citizens' needs"

Moreover, he adds, "there needs to be more clarity as to who is competent on a certain matter. If the EU is to tackle the democratic deficit and fight the widespread disillusion amongst its citizens, it has to improve the way it legislates. It has to become more effective in areas where EU intervention brings an added value whilst refraining from imposing unnecessary rules in matters where national and regional parliaments can decide".

## Linda Gillham to host the EA external meeting in Runnymede

At the invitation of Cllr Linda Gillham, the EA group will hold its external meeting in Runnymede in June 2014.

The EA Bureau member and Councillor of Runnymede has expressed an interest in welcoming the EA group in her constituency, a very meaningful historical place where the Magna Carta, the sacred text that influenced later constitutional texts, was signed in 1215.

Ahead of the celebrations that will mark the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its signature, the EA members will have an opportunity to see the meadow where, in 1215, King John sealed the Magna Carta.

The group will then discuss more thoroughly the topic of cultural heritage during its seminar. In particular the seminar will focus on the cooperation between culture, heritage and museums at EU level.



Mrs Linda Gillham

## ARLEM Plenary to be held in Tangier on the 24 February



Mr Stanisław Szwabski

The ARLEM Plenary session will be held in Tangier, Morocco, on 24<sup>th</sup> February, at the invitation of Mr Fouad El Omari, Mayor of Tangier and President of the Moroccan Mayors associations.

Besides the adoption of the annual report on the territorial dimension of the Union for the Mediterranean the ARLEM, members will discuss the latest developments in the region and take stock of the state of play of the decentralisation process.

An initiative to strengthen the institutional and administrative capacities of local and regional authorities in public policy management will also be presented.

Two important topics, addressing some of the most important challenges faced by the countries in the Mediterranean, will also be tackled during the meeting, notably the cohesion strategy in the Mediterranean and sustainable urban mobility.

Mr Stanisław Szwabski, EA member from Gdynia, Poland, believes the EU should not lose the opportunity of seeking more cooperation with neighbouring countries, both from Eastern Europe and Southern Europe. Despite the fact that in some countries fierce conflicts are still present and local democracy hindered, the EU should help Mediterranean countries in their efforts to promote a more efficient local administration and democratic participation, especially where the demand for freedom seems to have brought about more stability and slight improvements. We believe that local authorities and communities together with civil society are the backbone of a democratic society and actions shall be taken to strengthen their involvement in the decision making process in their respective countries.

## Jerzy Zająkała discussed the potential of rural areas in plans to exit the crisis

On December 13 2013, Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute and Sol & Civilisation organised a seminar on European policies for rural areas entitled "The EU and its rural areas: a cumbersome legacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?"

The seminar gathered representatives of the European Commission, including the Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development Dacian Cioloș, local authorities in Europe, national governments, and non-governmental and academic sectors.

The EA group vice-president and Mayor of Łubianka (Poland), Mr Jerzy Zająkała participated in the roundtable on the role and potential of rural areas in the plans to exit the crisis. He particularly pointed out to the problem of depopulation of rural areas and disparities with neighbouring cities. As a possible remedy, Mr Zająkała identified the increase of agricultural activity, which would benefit both environment and economy. However, he also added that this area faces insufficient support by instruments and ex-



Mr Jerzy Zająkała

pressed hopes that it will be resolved by a harmonised access to funds and a sustained link between consumers and producers.

# Projects from regions

■ *Witold Krochmal (EA/PL)*

## ODRA RIVER BASIN FLOOD PROTECTION PROJECT

It is always difficult to finance large infrastructure projects whose cost exceeds the budgetary capabilities of a given country and which necessarily have a short timeframe.

The Odra River Basin Flood Protection Project is one example of this type of project currently in progress in Poland. Presently the largest hydro-technological project underway in Europe, it aims to protect over 2.5 million people in the Odra river basin from the effects of flooding, an area which includes such towns as Racibórz, Kędzierzyn – Koźle, Krapkowice, Opole, Brzeg, Oława and Wrocław. As a result of climate change in this region, both Upper and Lower Silesia have experienced catastrophic flooding in recent years, the costs of which have been estimated to amount to in excess of EUR 4 billion, and which involved the loss of some 50 lives.

This project is financed by the World Bank, the Council of Europe Development Bank, the EU's Structural Funds and the Polish national budget. This financial support has been possible because all the institutions involved in financing the project have adopted the World Bank's rules when implementing the project.

The main elements of the project include:

- Construction of the Racibórz flood protection reservoir - with a volume of 185 million cubic metres, the reservoir will be 12 km long and some two kilometres wide.
- Improvement of flood protection dykes and flood embankments along the River Oder; this work involves expanding the area between flood protection dykes, strengthening and raising the height of flood embankments and reconstructing the historic waterside in Wrocław.
- Modernisation of the Wrocław Floodway System; this involves deepening and widening the river channel, including the removal of approximately four million cubic metres of sand and silt, the reconstruction of three weirs, three pumping stations (sluices), flood bypass channels as well as raising and reconstructing three road bridges and one rail bridge.
- Modernisation of Poland's flood risk early warning system. The modernised system will make it possible to detect flood risks earlier and to assess their size more accurately.



Mr Witold Krochmal

The total cost of the programme is EUR 505 million. The programme is due to be completed by the end of 2017 (construction of Racibórz flood protection reservoir); all other work should be finalised at the turn of 2014/2015.

Project management will be carried out under the supervision of the Polish government and the institutions financing the project. The institutions tasked with implementing the project are the Water Management Boards of Upper and Lower Silesia and the IMiGW (Institute of Meteorology and Water Management) in Warsaw, which is responsible for flood risk monitoring.

Once the work has been completed, the modernised flood protection project will be able to cope with events such as the 3400 cubic metres per second flood surge which in 1997 devastated a large part of Upper and Lower Silesia and other regions in the Czech Republic and Germany.

