

## European Alliance Group

### The crucial next steps after 20 years of the CoR

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

As we reflect on the milestones and success of the Committee of the Regions (CoR) after 20 years of 'growth' we should be proud of what has been achieved in being the voice of local and regional governments in the EU decision making process. Now the CoR needs to face up to the new realities of Europe, which has gone through a difficult few years with unacceptably high unemployment, huge economic challenges and now external challenges in neighbourhood countries which need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Looking back at the 20 years and to when our predecessors created the European Alliance group for members who wished to ensure that members who wanted more identity for their Nations, Regions, Languages and Culture had a voice, for those members who believed in a balanced urban - rural agenda, for those



*Dr. Uno Silberg with Conference of Presidents and Deputy Mayor Jef Verschoore in Ieper - Ypres*

who had a clear view that in the long term sustainable social, environmental development can be achieved. These remain in our core values. Our group believe in consensus politics where the views of individual members can be respected and for this reason many independent members of local and regional authorities across the EU have and continue to join our group.

After 20 years we can be proud of the results we have achieved, but as always there is more to be done. With enlarged competences achieved by the CoR from the Lisbon Treaty our institution has been widely recognised as the guardian of the principle of subsidiarity.

Many of our former members, after serving the CoR, have moved forward in their political careers and they hold important positions in their countries or in the European Parliament.

However, there is no time for complacency. There is a crisis to fight which is as important as the economic and financial crisis. It is about our citizens, it is about economic and social cohesion. The role of the Committee of the Regions, and each one of us has become more serious in this new Europe therefore the CoR messages need to be heard across the EU and beyond. The European Alliance is committed in strengthening the role the CoR and its member's plans for developing policies of the European Union.



*Tyne Cot Cemetery in Passendale*

### Let us not forget them

On the 100th anniversary of the beginning of the First World War the Conference of Presidents of the CoR including European Alliance Group President Dr Uno Silberg visited Ieper - Ypres to pay tribute to victims of the war. This also happens to be the 70 year anniversary of the D-day landings. Dr Uno Silberg says it is important to reflect on those who

died to ensure freedom in Europe and that the European Union is clearly one of the greatest peace projects we have and this should not be forgotten. He said that: seeing thousands of graves in Tyne Cot is a shocking reminder of what occurred during both world wars and in the words of the soldier at the 'Last Post': "WE SHOULD NOT FORGET THEM".

"European Alliance group is proud to see winners of its annual CoR / EA group Secondary Schools competition in Brussels for the June Plenary session. The youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow and we see it vitally important to encourage an open dialogue with the 42 participants."

EA group bureau



**European Alliance**

## The promotion and preservation of Europe's diverse culture and heritage was the key focus of the Committee of the Regions' European Alliance group debate held in Runnymede

Upon the invitation of Cllr Mrs Linda Gillham the European Alliance group of the EU's Committee of the Regions held a seminar on Promoting and Preserving Europe's diverse Culture and heritage in Runnymede on Monday 2nd June 2014.

During the meeting the Members of the Group confirmed their belief that culture and cultural heritage is a human value, which supports national, regional and local identity, protecting cultural and linguistic diversity, with due respect for lesser used and regional languages. Promoting culture and cultural heritage is essential in order to strengthen democratic values in Europe and to contribute to social and economic cohesion.

A vibrant debate was held with European Commission and representatives from across Europe on the cultural heritage as a very broad concept which does not only include tangible artefacts but a wide range of shared values, beliefs, lifestyles and practices which strongly influence our perceptions and our daily lives. The Members stressed that it is of paramount importance to preserve and promote the different regional and local identities which make the European cultural heritage unique and which are endangered by migratory movements and economic globalisation. At the same time they were reminded of the huge socio-economic benefits that our cultural heritage brings to our towns and cities.

Mr Dennis Abbott, Spokesperson for the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth gave a detailed overview of how the European Commission prioritised Culture and Heritage across the EU and the funding possibilities.

Mr Stewart Maxwell, EA Coordinator on EDUC Commission and Convenor of the Scottish Parliament's Education and Culture Committee focussed on the Scottish governments prioritising the incredibly rich culture and heritage resources in his Country.

Mr. Rik Verwaest historian and second alderman in the city of Lier gave a fabulous insight on the promotion of the diverse European cultural heritage, especially the city marketing of Lier.

Europe's Rivers and Culture Heritage was the focus of the contribution of Prof.

Marek Dutkowski from Szczecin University, Poland.

The role of museums in preserving and promoting culture and heritage was the focus of Mrs Sigrid Karon, the Kohtla Mining Park Museum, Estonia.

Cllr Mrs Linda Gillham, who hosted the meeting, said: "I see European cultural heritage as a factor in the showcasing of European diversity with its key role in forging a vital sense of understanding and identity of the richness of Culture and Heritage across the European Union. At the same time I would like to acknowledge the benefits that our cultural heritage brings through activities such as arts, tourism, food specialities, and enjoyment of the historic environment. I am very happy to host the meeting on this issue and welcome in Runnymede my colleagues from different part of Europe".



Magna Carta memorial, Runnymede meadow, UK



At the invitation of Ms Linda Gillham, Winners of the 9th edition of the EA/CoR Secondary Schools are joining the CoR plenary session in July to experience one of the EU institutions in full action. The competition took place in eight member states, involving pupils with

## Winners of the 9th edition of the EA/CoR secondary schools competition to participate in CoR plenary week

ages between 14-18 years. The competition's first stage measured the pupils' knowledge on the European Union and the EU institutions, while the second was an essay competition.

Two pupils from each participating school, with the best results on both stages, participate in a two day study

trip to Brussels on the 25-26th June 2014 where they will meet the members of the EA group in the Committee of the Regions, visit several EU institutions and learn about the functioning of the European Union.





Mr Karim Van Overmeire

## Van Overmeire Visit Skopje To Discuss Territorial Cross Border Cooperation

Consultative Committee in the FYROM capital, Skopje. The meeting provided the opportunity to discuss the latest political developments in the country with regard to the progress towards the EU accession and the impact of the enlargement process at local level.

FYROM has made remarkable efforts in reforming the country but much remains to be done as challenges remain in the field of the rule of law including the independence of the judiciary, the fight against crime and corruption, the freedom of expression.

Moreover, it is crucial to strengthen administrative capacity of LRAs to al-

low them to effectively manage and absorb EU money. In this respect, the committee discussed a report on: "The possibilities and instruments available to local authorities to support the accession process".

The report underlines that the portion of funds for which LRAs can be direct beneficiaries is very small though they are the main target when it comes to absorbing them. It is therefore key to give LRAs the means to carry their own projects independently, especially the infrastructural ones which the country badly needs, said Mr Van Overmeire.

On the 3rd June European Alliance member Karim Van Overmeire participated in the EU CoR-FYROM Joint

## Krochmal nominated Rapporteur on the Communication on Long-Term Financing of the European Economy

At the meeting of the ECOS commission held on 16 May this year, EA Member and Councillor of Wołów City and Commune, Mr Krochmal was appointed rapporteur on the Communication on Long-Term Financing of the European Economy.

The public sector is a key contributor to gross capital formation in the form of tangible and intangible investment. Efforts are needed to ensure more transparent and efficient use of public funds, to maximise the return on public investment, its contribution to growth and its ability to leverage private investment. The European Commission's proposal aims to improve long-

term financing of the EU economy, by proposing different actions aiming to mobilize private sources of long-term financing or make better use of public finance. It is also about developing capital markets, improve SMEs' access to financing, attract private finance to infrastructure, and enhance the overall environment for sustainable finance.

This document introduces new elements and is described as "building upon" the consultation of the Green Paper on long-term financing on which the CoR produced an opinion last year (Rapporteur: Mr Silberg. Opinion adopted in October 2013). The first discussion and adoption of the opinion



Mr Witold Krochmal

is foreseen for the next ECOS commission meeting on 15 July 2014 and adoption during the plenary session in October 2014.



Mr Jerzy Zająkła

## Zająkła receives the honour of the Order of Polonia Restituta

European Alliance group member Mr Jerzy Zająkła received last week from the President of the RP the Order of Polonia Restituta (Polish: Order Odrodzenia Polski, English: Order of Rebirth of Poland). It is one of Poland's highest Orders. The 5 class Order can be conferred for outstanding achievements in the fields of education, science, sport, culture, art, economics, national defence, social work, civil service, or for furthering good relations between countries. It was established on 4 February 1921 and can be awarded to both civilians and soldiers, as well as to foreigners.



## European Alliance members continue to take a lead in the NAT commission

On 5-6 June 2014, during its meeting in Ponta Delgada, Azores, NAT Commission approved by unanimity the opinion of EA Member and Member of Panevėžys District Municipal Council, Mr Žagunis, on the aid scheme for the supply of fruit and vegetables, bananas and milk in educational establishments. Both school schemes were established in order to promote the consumption of fruit and vegetable and milk products. Aside from their economic importance, they are beneficial in the public health context and are suitable for the distribution to school children. Mr Žagunis is critical of the proposal under the new scheme to limit milk distribution to drinking milk, and considers that minimally-processed milk products without harmful additives – natural (unsweetened) milk products such as yoghurt or fresh cheeses – should also be eligible for aid. Accordingly, he suggests, in view of the diversity existing within Europe, considering the introduction

of additional criteria on which to base national allocations for the school milk and fruit scheme.

During the seminar on "Beyond the high season - promoting sustainable tourism throughout the year" which followed the NAT meeting EA group member Mrs Linda Gillham discussed the merits of a more customised tourism offer catering for more demanding, conscientious and higher-value customers. According to the UNWTO, sustainable tourism is defined conceptually as "development guidelines and management practices are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism segments. Sustainable tourism is attempting to make as low an impact on the environment and local culture as possible, while helping to generate future employment for local people. Mrs Gillham in her speech explored how tourism seasonality affects European



Mr Povilas Žagunis

destinations and what can be done to encourage more visits beyond the high season. Giving some examples from UK she mentioned that the UK has managed remarkably well to remain attractive to visitors round the clock and can boast a very balanced arrival pattern.

## Civil Society Is Key For Democratisation In Eastern Europe

■ Jan Bronś Mayor of Oleśnica, EA coordinator in the CIVEX commission and bureau member of CORLEAP

The CIVEX commission discussed on 16 June the recently published Europe-



Mr Jan Bronś

an Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) package, the annual reporting exercise on the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy which includes recommendations as well twelve country reports on the partner countries that have agreed an ENP Action Plan or an Association Agenda.

"Some Eastern and Southern European regions have been recently affected by serious crises, high political instability and difficult socio-economic conditions. While on one side the adoption of these documents package comes at a right time, on the other side it leaves no time for complacency." said Mr Bronś.

This is not a normal year Mr Bronś added, "What we have seen happening in Ukraine evokes past tragic events which should serve as a warning. It should convince all of us about the urgency of promoting democratisation in the Eastern countries and devolution of powers to local governments.

Nevertheless, as Poland experienced more than 25 years ago, not only it is fundamental to ensure greater financial support to LRAs but ultimately it is by introducing new pieces of legislations that Ukraine, and other Eastern countries, can "build up" the civil society, which is lays the foundation for a grassroots democracy."