



European Alliance Group

In a Global context we need Regional & local actions, says EA group President Dr Uno Silberg



Conference of Presidents meeting the President of the European Council, November 2014

We began 2014 with a visit to Maidan square in Kiev where we witnessed the beginning of a huge movement of change in Ukraine - unfortunately the Eastern part of the Country has and continues to see instability, violence and intimidation which are unacceptable and Europe needs to be strong in its response to Russia. Many of us who have recently achieved our independence are watching this with worried eyes and with a hope that the people of Ukraine can rebuild in an atmosphere of peace for all its citizens. The CoR should give its support and assistance for the local and regional

authorities in Ukraine and indeed across the Eastern Partnership Countries.

All over Europe different Nations and Regions have seen a lack of growth and jobs, showing that we have still not delivered for the people. The European Union must involve local and regional government in delivering the agenda for growth and jobs. I hope that the new Commission and Parliament will take this on board when designing the new Investment Package.

As we approach the end of this CoR mandate what is becoming clear is that

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the European Union needs to change in the way it works with Nations and Regions. We have seen mass public participation in Scotland's independence referendum and this was also reflected very clearly in Catalonia. Europe needs to harness this and better reflect the needs of Nations and Regions by engaging them further in the decision-making process.

The forthcoming European Summit should be the beginning of this change, in this globalised world we need to engage with the Nations and Regions in Europe to achieve real and tangible results.

EA group launches Primary School Art Competition 2014 "My Region, My Future"



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 Future', allowing students to depict via art the future of cities, towns, schools, environment, parks, Europe, etc.

This year's competition will see the participation of 16 primary schools from

9 Member States across the European Union.

Winning entries will be exhibited in the Committee of the Regions at the beginning of December 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

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





A Holy Alliance against Nations?***

By Karim Van Overmeire, Marc Hendrickx,
Members of the Flemish Parliament

Two hundred years ago, the crowned heads of Europe came together at the Congress of Vienna. Following the fall of Napoleon the revolutionary genie was finally back in the bottle. The great powers promised to join forces to stamp out any attempt to upset the new order they had sketched out. To that end they established what became known as the "Holy Alliance".

This conservative pact could not however prevent the map of Europe from changing drastically. Empires and federations locked horns and everywhere new nations were born. One hundred years ago, half of today's 28 EU Member States were not yet independent. But that does not stop the current European elite from denouncing anything that threatens the political status quo.



Mr Karim Van Overmeire

As long as the rumbling was restricted to the former Eastern Bloc, the European leaders didn't lose any sleep over it. Now that the status quo is under threat in their own Union, however, the alarm bells are ringing. Suddenly, after two hundred years, the Holy Alliance is stirring once more.

The Scottish referendum in September already showed the ugly face of that conservative pact.

The Scottish spectre may have been banished for a while, but the Holy Alliance now has an even harder nut to crack: Catalonia and the other Nations in Europe...



Mr Marc Hendrickx

"Internal enlargement" does not have to mean the end of Europe. Both the American and the Swiss confederations survived many such internal reorganisations. Couldn't a European Union that regulates the length of cucumbers and the curvature of bananas also consider the practicalities of a possible "internal enlargement"?

***extracts from an article published on the 8th November 2014. Full article on www.ea.cor.europa.eu*

Mr Szwabski calls for an 'open door for accession' in next 5 years



Mr Stanisław Szwabski

During the JCC Montenegro which took place in Kotor on 27 October 2014 Mr Stanisław Szwabski, President of Gdynia Assembly, co-chair of the JCC Montenegro welcomed the progress

made by Montenegro during last year. Macroeconomic stability has been broadly maintained and Montenegro continues to sufficiently meet the political criteria for EU membership.

At the same time he is worried that shortcomings with regard to the independence and accountability of the judicial system remain a matter of serious concern and hamper the fight against corruption. The government should continue publicly promoting and supporting media freedom, avoiding any statements that may be understood as intimidation.

"In this context it is difficult for me to agree with the position of the President elect of the EC that our citizens need a pause from enlargement so we can

consolidate what has been achieved among the 28 and a freezing of the further enlargement for over the next 5 years. I am convinced that this policy in the long term will have negative results for the EU." – said Mr Szwabski

He highlighted: "I think from the perspective of the LRAs and the citizens we should keep the doors open for candidates countries. If ever one of them is ready to access before the term of 5 years we shouldn't block the opportunity to become a member of our EU family. Saying that, I hope the CoR will have the European Parliament's support in this area/on this issue. I strongly encourage the European Parliament and the Council to see this issue from this perspective."

CoR Plenary to adopt Mr Olszewski's opinion on Recognition of skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning.



Mr Marek Olszewski

During the December Plenary Session the CoR will adopt the opinion drawn up by Marek Olszewski (PL/EA), Mayor of Lubicz, on Recognition of

skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning. The European Commission is expected by next year to revise

policy priorities in the framework of the renewed Europe 2020 strategy and on the European Area of skills and competences acquired not only through formal but also non-formal informal learning, while ensuring permeability between different levels of education.

"In my opinion there is a strong need to create pan-European strategy (in the form of guidelines and possible implementation scenarios) for establishment of common framework for recognition and validation of informal and non-formal education / learning in order to facilitate creation of relevant national procedures. Given these trans-national aspects, trans-national cooperation structures (both public and private) must also be involved in developing validation procedures. In this opinion I show the necessity to set up common quality standards for the recognition procedures. It would also have great impact on flexibility and mobility as a means of education."- said Mr Olszewski

Buchanan participates in discussions on Albania's progress towards EU accession



Cllr Tony Buchanan

On 11 November 2014, the European Alliance group member Cllr Tony Buchanan participated in the CoR Working Group on Western Balkans in Albania's second largest city Durres. The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss the latest developments in the country with regard to the

progress towards EU accession and the impact of the enlargement process at local level. Through the accession process, the EU promotes democracy and fundamental freedoms and consolidates the rule of law across the aspirant countries, reducing the impact of cross-border crime. Current

enlargement policy is reinforcing peace and stability in the Western Balkans and promoting recovery and reconciliation after the wars of the 1990s. Mr Buchanan said that he is keen to see Albania reach good results in building a stronger democratic political system and in tackling the cultivation and trafficking of drugs as stated in Enlargement Progress Report 2014 for Albania.

"I am happy that the European Council took a decision on June 2014 to grant Albania candidate status. It is recognition for the reform steps undertaken. Albania has made progress over the past year. It is also an encouragement to step up the pace of reforms. But Albania still needs to meet further key priorities, with particular focus on administration reform, the rule of law and fundamental rights. There must also be a strengthened focus on good economic governance. Our mission is to help our colleagues from Albanian LRAs to make face to all these efforts." - he added



Dr Uno Silberg and Mr Herman Van Rompuy

European Alliance Group calls for Investment package accessible to all local and Regional authorities

package not to focus only on large scale projects but also to examine and promote smaller projects which would make the funds more accessible for local and regional authorities.

Dr Silberg also said that often investments from the private sector are focussed on return on investment and there is a danger that most of the investment would go to centres of population and cities. There needs to be a clear focus on Rural areas and in

particular leveraging the financing of CAP Pillar II with loans from the European Investment Bank.

European Alliance Group members have been to the forefront of the CoR political views on investments via the opinion of Witold Krochmal's opinion on ' Long-term financing of the European economy' and Rhodri Glyn Thomas's opinion on: Synergies between private investment and public funding at local and regional levels

At a meeting with the President of the European Council Mr Herman Van Rompuy, European Alliance Group President Dr Uno Silberg called for next week's €300 billion EU investment



Cllr. Linda Gillham

Gillham expresses disappointment that the outright ban on Plastic bags has not been fully agreed

to reduce plastic bag usage, speaking on behalf of the Committee Cllr. Linda Gillham said, "There were hopes that governments would use the opportunity to rid Europe of the unnecessary over-use of plastic bags once and for all. But as the European Commission was close to pulling the plug on the entire proposal, we are relieved - as this agreement is better than no agreement. The proposal to cut the average number of lightweight plastic bags each year from 198 to 90 per person by 2019 is a compromise. It is a recognition that the environmental, social and economic consequences of the 100bn tons of plastic bags thrown away each year in Europe are illogical and unacceptable".

The Committee of the Regions argued that it would have been better to introduce both binding targets and oblige Member

States to use economic instruments, such as introducing charges and taxes, rather than giving them the choice between the two options. Cllr Gillham, from UK's Runnymede Council, who was responsible for leading the Committee's position on the issue, also criticised the decision to exclude oxo-biodegradable plastic in the new EU proposals after resistance from the UK government. "Oxo-biodegradable plastic is not fully biodegradable and should be banned. We must remember that it is communities and local authorities that are ultimately responsible for cleaning up the mess. 8% of all throw-away plastic bags end up in our seas: it is our environment and local authority resources that will pay the price for continuing to use plastic that is not 100% biodegradable".

Full press release on: www.cor.europa.eu

The Committee of the Regions and its Rapporteur Cllr. Linda Gillham expressed disappointment as EU Member States and MEPs came to an agreement which would ensure that by 2019 no more than 90 plastic bags per person per year will be used. The Committee - which represents Europe's local and regional authorities - had hoped for an outright ban of free plastic bags by 2020, compulsory EU targets for all Member States and the introduction of charges for all carrier bags to ensure an 80% reduction.

After the new European Commission considered pulling the entire package



Mr Marc Hendrickx meets Kurdish demonstrators

Hendrickx expresses solidarity with Kurdish demonstrators

Member of the Flemish Parliament and European Alliance Group member recently met with Kurdish demonstrators near the European parliament. He was accompanied by fellow Member of the Flemish Parliament Mr Karl Vanlouwe. They expressed their solidarity with the Kurdish struggle against terrorism and genocide in their homeland

