

European Alliance Group

Let's be positive about the EU and create a true Partnership with Local and Regional Government in building a Europe of the Future says Stanisław Szwabski, President of the EA group



Mr Stanisław Szwabski with Mr Michel Barnier

As we reflect on 60 years since the Treaty of Rome, look at what we have achieved; peace and stability across the EU; a Europe where our young people are free to travel and study; a single market which helps our SME's and investment in our regions and cities; economic, social, cohesion and environmental policy which benefits us all, to name but a few. We should not continue to be negative but reflect on the positives which we could have in the EU with a new momentum and how we can take these positive elements to really engage with our citizens. Solidarity in this respect is one of our key principles as we face common challenges.

During 2017 a number of key decisions will be taken which will direct the future of the

European Union. One of these is the decision on Brexit and its implications on the European Union and also the impact it will have on the four Nations of the UK, in the light of the fact that Scotland and Northern Ireland have voted to remain in the EU.

For the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, I am calling on the EU leaders to have the same vision which their predecessors had in agreeing the Treaty of Rome all those years ago. This vision needs to also include the local and regional authorities. We are the closest level of governance to the citizens and we can help in building the bridges to the regions, cities and rural communities across Europe. This also applies to Member States, where we clearly should be reinforcing Local and Regional

government and not be trying to reduce its power or restrict democracy.

As a group we pride ourselves in our open engagement with young people and this is why we will run again this year our secondary schools competition. We are going to bring the winners to Brussels in July to have an open dialogue with our members and I also welcome the CoR's Conference of Presidents initiative to hold an event with young people in Maastricht to celebrate 25 years since the treaty was signed which created the CoR. This year will be very busy and we need to ensure that we build a real partnership with local and regional government in progressing our vision of a vibrant European Union.

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Revitalisation of Port Cities requires Targeted Investments and Support says Stanislaw Szwabski

On 8-9 February the COR Plenary session will adopt the opinion of Gdynia City Councillor Stanislaw Szwabski on regeneration of port cities and port areas.

Challenges faced by port cities and port areas as a result of globalization have provided with opportunities for port cities and towns to diversify their activities in port areas and use land available to promote emerging advanced technologies, develop new and attractive waterfront and reuse port infrastructure and cultural heritage. The opinion of Mr Szwabski highlights the high potential of Port cities and

port areas for local economic development and job creation while at the same time underlining the need for a stable investment climate and continuous EU funding for innovative projects.

Moreover the rapporteur points out that it is important for public authorities to define the right policy mix to attract investors and that positive synergies are sought between port and city authorities to minimize conflicts of interest whilst ensuring mutual benefits.



Huge success of the 2016 CoR/EA group Primary School Competition with entries from around the EU

It is a tradition now, that the COR/ EA organise a Primary School Art Competition every year. In December 2016 the final of the My Region, My Language and Culture art competition took place. The aim of the concourse was to encourage children aged between 6 and 12 years to express how they experience and perceive the role of their region in their lives. The participants were inspired to draw and write about the different languages and dialects which play a part in their own regional cultures. The art work was very impressive, bursting with colours and unique ideas. Each entry included a

short description in which a participant explained the story behind the art work.

The competition saw the participation of 20 primary schools from 10 Member States across the European Union. Each country had 3 winners. Winning entries were exhibited in the Committee of the Regions between 5 and 16 December 2016, after which the artworks were transformed into post-cards for the students and schools to send to their friends and families.

Once more, the competition is a fantastic way to promote the 'united in diversity'



theme of the European Union. Children from across the EU expressed how they see their region, they language and their culture, often highlighting the cultural and national diversity in their immediate surroundings.

ARLEM to debate EU Neighbourhood Policy and Migration Challenges in Malta

On 22-23 February the Euro-Mediterranean Assembly of local and regional authorities (ARLEM) will hold its 8th annual Plenary Session in Malta in the context of Malta's Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Members will discuss the revised European Neighbourhood Policy from the sub-national authorities point of view and will adopt thematic reports on Cross border cooperation as well as on Energy and climate change in the Mediterranean region.

Furthermore, ARLEM members will determine the priorities for the Assembly's

activities in 2017, appoint rapporteurs for the 2017 thematic reports.

The ARLEM plenary session will be preceded on 22 February by the CoR Bureau meeting and a conference on migration, co-organised by the European Committee of the Regions and Maltese authorities on the topic "Addressing the root of migration and the reception of migrants and the role of the local and regional authorities in the common European asylum system".

The EA group delegation will be represented by Ms. Nanette Maupertuis from Corsica and Mr Emil Drăghici from Romania.



EA Group to hold external meeting in Corsica on EU policies for islands, mountain and rural areas

On April 3rd the European Alliance group will hold its external meeting in Ajaccio, Corsica, upon invitation of Ms Nanette Maupertuis, member of the Executive Council of the Territorial community of Corsica.

The topic of the seminar will be “EU policies for islands, mountain and rural areas”.

While such territories display unique natural cultural capital, they have to cope with structural handicaps and disadvantages, notably due to their geographic location, that severely impact on their economic and social development.

Ms Maupertuis is also currently drafting an opin-

ion in the CoR COTER commission on addressing obstacles to entrepreneurship in islands and achieving territorial cohesion that will be discussed at the next COTER meeting on 2-3 March.

In mountainous islands like Corsica, smallness (lack of economy of scale, domestic demand), remoteness (leading to higher cost for energy, transport and services) as well as vulnerability are identified as main critical factors and appropriate policies at EU level need to be designed to ensure balanced development across the EU regions and that citizens in islands are provided with the same opportunities as those living in the main land.



Ms Nanette Maupertuis

Cllr Tony Buchanan calls for clear action towards the Rural Areas of Europe

The 1st Vice Chair of the NAT Commission Cllr Tony Buchanan participated in a high-level round table with the Commissioner for Agriculture Phil Hogan during Berlin Green Week. In the debate Cllr Buchanan welcomed the Cork2 declaration and also called for action in ‘rural proofing’ our rural areas where we “systematically reviews macro and sectorial policies through a rural lens”.

It is vitally important that the Cork 2 declaration is now put into action to ensure that Rural areas are places where people can continue to live and work and ensure vitality and vibrancy in those communities. The Committee of the Regions and the NAT commission are fully engaged in ensuring that Local and Regional Government play its part in making this happen.



Commissioner for Agriculture Phil Hogan and 1st VP of NAT Tony Buchanan participating in a panel discussion during green week

Catalan President outlines case for independence referendum in 2017



Catalan delegation in the European Parliament led by President Puigdemont

The Catalan President, Carles Puigdemont, the Vice President and Minister of Economy, Oriol Junqueras, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Raül Romeva, visited the European

Parliament in Brussels on the 24th of January to defend the Government plans to hold an independence referendum in 2017. The meeting was hosted by Catalan MEP's in the

EFA and ALDE political groups including Jordi Solé a former member of the European Alliance group.

President Puigdemont, stressed that Catalonia has always been pro-European and intends to stay in the European Union if it becomes independent. and he highlighted “Catalonia is very committed to Europe, our goal is to enhance this shared project. That is, we want to fully exercise our sovereignty and share it with our European partners, in the areas that make us collectively stronger.” “At the EU level” President Puigdemont added, “this means an internal enlargement process without discontinuities, in particular with regard to the Economic and Monetary Union and the functioning of the Internal Market”. More information is available on <http://www.catalangovernment.eu>

The European Union needs to reform to ensure that it works on behalf of its citizens, says Karim Van Overmeire, 1st Vice President of the EA group, Member of the Flemish parliament and Alderman of the city of Aalst



Mr Karim Van Overmeire

In the autumn of 2016 the Minister-president of Flanders Geert Bourgeois outlined his vision of the European Union. Minister-president Bourgeois advocated for a Union which is built up from below. A Union that is tuned in to the aspirations and demands of its citizens. A Union that provides added value for its citizens. Such a Union doesn't necessarily require changes to the existing EU treaties, according to

Minister-president, but it needs to be able to develop and evolve within its borders. The Union must also serve as an antidote to the populism, which seems to pop up everywhere now.

On the basis of this vision the Flemish government have formulated a 10 point vision for the future of the European Union, as follows:

- 1 To further propagate our shared fundamental values, standards and freedoms
- 2 To shore up Schengen Area with effective external border checks
- 3 To provide targeted support to socioeconomic reforms in the Member and Federated States
- 4 To take initiatives that encourage investments, in full respect of the Stability and Growth Pact
- 5 To develop a social policy, and in particular tackling social dumping and 'fiscal shopping'
- 6 To deepen the EMU with the

completion of the Banking Union as its first priority

- 7 To deepen the internal market with an energy, transport and Digital Union
- 8 To achieve a breakthrough in the key strategic trade agreements with state of the art investment protection
- 9 To implement an ambitious and efficacious sustainability policy and continued development of the European Research Area with research programmes aimed at the knowledge and low carbon economy of tomorrow, in accordance with the COP21 Paris Climate Agreement
- 10 To conduct a potent foreign, security and defence policy, in particular in Europe's neighbouring regions.

It is my belief that we need this vision of Europe as is needed to be able to progress coherently and show leadership to the people that we serve to represent. More information is available at: <http://www.vlaanderen.be/int/en/vision-eu>

Andrew Cooper to draft opinion on the implementation of environmental legislation

With 20% of the infringements procedures relating to EU environment law, the European Commission is establishing "Environmental Implementation Review Cycle", a regular review mechanism that runs in a 2-year cycle, inspired by the European Semester governance cycle.

This governance cycle would look to implementation gaps in implementing

environmental legislation across all EU member states. The ENVE commission has appointed the EA member Cllr Andrew Cooper to draft the CoR opinion and highlight the crucial importance of involving local authorities to discuss possible solutions and ensure a better application of environmental law.



Cllr Andrew Cooper



President of the Estonian delegation Dr Uno Silberg and CoR President Markku Markkula as well as other Estonian delegation members meeting to prepare for the Estonian Presidency during the second half of 2017