

European Alliance Group

Catalonia's right to choose its own government must be respected, says Karl Vanlouwe, President of the European Alliance group



EA group President Karl Vanlouwe with Catalan MEP Jordi Solé

On the 21st December the people of Catalonia voted in an election which they did not call, however the results were clear with a majority of seats won by the autonomous movements. Now the

Catalan parliament should be allowed to choose its own government without preconditions. To this extent I think it is unacceptable that people are in jail or in exile for their political views. This clearly goes against the fundamental objectives of the European Union. No EU Member State should be allowed to erode civil rights and democratic principles which are the basis of our common European project.

On a separate issue we welcome the agreement reached in December on BREXIT. It will be a very sad day when the UK leaves and we wish we were not in this situation. This will have a huge impact not only on Ireland but also on Nations such as Flanders and therefore we welcome the research undertaken by the CoR on the impact of BREXIT on regions. The latest Scottish Government document clearly outlines the benefits of the single market. This will be a key issue for our group for the next year.

BREXIT worries continue to be highlighted by European Alliance members



Ms Mairi Gougeon

While there was an agreement of phase 1 of the BREXIT negotiations reached in the December Council, the next steps will prove difficult for the negotiations and many of the worries of European Alliance members highlighted during the Europe-

an Committee of the Regions' 126th Plenary session debate on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union are still of concern for their regions and citizens. Guest speakers at the CoR debate included Brian Hayes MEP who emphasized the priority of an agreement on Irish border issues.

Cllr Enda Stenson, member of Leitrim County Council reminded everyone of the devastating effect a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland had in the past and added that we cannot return to those days. He urged that a solution be found that would suit those living on the whole island of Ireland.

The European Alliance group President Karl Vanlouwe highlighted BREXIT's impact on Flanders, in particular on the very

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Lastly, we welcome the subsidiarity task force which has been set up by the President of the European Commission. This is hugely important and we will actively participate in putting forward the views of our members.

high level of trade it has with the UK. Cllr Andrew Cooper said the British people were conned by the Brexiteers and much of their campaign, including claims of the alleged financial benefits of Brexit for the NHS, which have now been shown as false.

Mairi Gougeon, Member of the Scottish Parliament focused on the need to protect citizens' rights post BREXIT while Cllr Kieran McCarthy from the Cork City Council outlined the need for continued cooperation projects in particular around the Atlantic Area.

Finally, East Renfrewshire Councillor Tony Buchanan outlined a worrying perspective of Brexit's impact on local services in Scotland and also reinforced the need for continued cooperation.

"Jailing and forcing people into exile over their political views clearly goes against the fundamental objectives of the European Union. No EU Member State should be allowed to erode civil rights and democratic principles which are the basis of our common European project."
Karl Vanlouwe, President of the EA group and member of the Flemish Parliament

Scotland must remain in at least the Single Market and Customs Union

On 23 January, the European Alliance group organised a lunchtime briefing on the consequences of BREXIT for Scotland, with a focus on the areas of employment

and investment. The briefing was given by Ms Fiona Hyslop MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs in the Scottish Government.

On 15 January, Scotland's Prime Minister Nicola Sturgeon presented the Scottish Government's report analysing consequences of different Brexit scenarios which forecasts that Scotland's economy may lose up to £16bn (€18bn) a year as a result of the UK leaving the EU. Ms Hyslop presented the report and offered first-hand information on how Scottish Government sees the Brexit process and what measures it is considering in order to mitigate its negative implications for the country's economy.

It is clear from the Scottish government's perspective that a Brexit which results in the UK being outside the European Single Market and Customs Union will have the most damaging consequences for Scotland. The Government believes that Scotland's future is best served by continued EU membership, in line with the wishes of the Scottish people as expressed in the referendum in 2016. If Brexit proves to be inevitable, Scotland's interests are best protected by the UK remaining inside the European Single Market and Customs Union.



Ms Fiona Hyslop with the EA group President Mr Karl Vanlouwe

Pè a Corsica sweeps territorial elections in Corsica

Territorial elections in Corsica held on 3 and 10 December 2017 saw a conclusive victory by the *Pè a Corsica* list headed by EA member Gilles Simeoni which won 41 out of 63 seats in the Corsican Assembly.

The elections were organized as part of an administrative reorganization of the island, which will from now consist of one single collectivity created through a merger of the current departments of Haute-Corse and Corse-du-Sud.

Both members of the European Committee of the Regions representing Corsica are members of the EA group: Mr Simeoni, President of the Executive Council of Corsica, and Ms Marie-Antoinette Maupertuis, member of the Executive Council.



Mr Micheal Ó Conchuir, Secretary-General of the EA group (left) with Mr Gilles Simeoni, President of the Executive Council of Corsica and Ms Nanette Maupertuis member of the Executive Council

The EA group warmly congratulates Mr Simeoni and Ms Maupertuis on their

success and re-election and looks forward to the continuation of our work together.

ARLEM to discuss priorities for local governments in the Mediterranean in Egypt

Managing migration, combating radicalisation and promoting women empowerment will be at the centre of the discussions at the next plenary session of ARLEM, the Euro-Mediterranean Assembly of local and regional representatives which will take place in Giza, Egypt on 20-21 February.

From security to unemployment and climate change, the Mediterranean region is facing enormous challenges which require enhanced commitments and joint responses as they equally affect people in Europe, Africa and the Middle East.

During the meeting, ARLEM members will decide on the 2019 action plan and focus on areas of mutual interest and relevance for local and regional authorities. Members

will also hold a topical debate on the management of migration flows and adopt two reports on combating violence and radicalisation and women's empowerment.

At the last meeting in Cairo in November, Ministers from the Union for the Mediterranean adopted a declaration on "Strengthening the Role of Women in Society" with proposed actions and measures to raise women's participation in public and economic life and to fight all forms of violence against women.

The EA group will be represented by Marie Antoinette Maupertuis, member of the Executive Council of Corsica, who is also ARLEM Bureau member.



Ms Nanette Maupertuis

Mr Dariusz Strugała, Mayor of Jaraczewo on how not to waste food

On 20 November NAT Commission meeting in Brussels, Mayor of the town and municipality of Jaraczewo Dariusz Strugała presented the system of distributing food to deprived people in his municipality, which is organised in cooperation with the NGO Wielkopolski Bank Food based in Poznań.

"Large quantities of food are wasted each year. We produce and buy too much, and the problem of surplus food has been on

the agendas of a number of institutions and organisations for several years now. Worldwide, there is a very stark contrast between European countries and, for example countries in Africa. The problem of hunger in Africa should be addressed at international level. Meanwhile, a local authority's role is to ensure that food from the local market is channelled towards those in need – e.g. by catering in hospitals or schools and supporting the poorest families. To this end, an appropriate

mechanism to distribute this food needs to be developed and this is happening in Jaraczewo, the town that I represent." said Mr Strugała presenting the initiative.

"Within 12 years of the implementation of this project we have distributed more than 200 tonnes of food products with a total value of almost one million PLN. Food is distributed by volunteers from the fire brigade and other organisations to the staff of municipal social assistance centre. The food that ends up in our warehouse includes bread, milk, dairy products, food preparations, dry products, confectionery, juices, fish products, fruits and vegetables," said Mr Strugała. He also added that derived products are of high quality and mostly coming from donations of producers and distributors. With the help of the Wielkopolski Food Bank, the assistance reaches up to 300 organisations and institutions in the region and, through them, around 100,000 people per year. "During its existence, the bank distributed more than 11.5 thousand tonnes of food. As noted at the NAT meeting, each year around 1.3 billion tons of food are wasted globally, i.e. one third of the food produced; in Europe it amounts to almost 100 million tonnes of wasted food. Food waste is also a waste of water and energy - e.g. 1 discarded kilogram of beef leads to a loss of 6 litres of water" –Mr Strugała concluded.



Mr Dariusz Strugała with Mr Czesław Siekierski MEP, Chair of the European Parliament's AGRI committee

Cllr Enda Stenson calls for Rural Agenda during Joint NAT-AGRI Meeting

Leitrim County Councillor Enda Stenson, EA Coordinator for the NAT Commission participated at the Joint NAT-AGRI Meeting which took place in Brussels on Thursday, 11 January 2018. During a comprehensive debate on the simplification of the Common Agriculture Policy, Mr Stenson stressed the need to simplify common rules but vigorously rejected any attempt to renationalise the bloc's biggest common policy. He also called for measures to ensure that farming can continue to be a secure, sustainable industry that can attract and retain young people. Cllr Stenson argued that less red-tape is needed in farming and that the application of the CAP should be simpler to allow the farmers to do what they do best and that is farming. Cllr Stenson finally raised the issue of the lack of infrastructure, in particular broadband, in rural areas. He said that "provid-

ing high speed broadband and services in rural areas will help create jobs and keep people working and living in the rural communities."

"I hope that the European Commission's initiative on EU Action for Smart Villages is a first step towards targeted actions to support the revival of rural areas as sustainable places in which to live and work. However, this is not sufficient and I regret the lack of ambition from the European Commission, which merely presented a compilation of pre-existing initiatives. In line with the previous positions adopted by the CoR, I propose expanding the notion of Smart Villages to that of Smart Rural Areas and incorporating the initiative into the European Rural Agenda. It is now clear that the first Cork declaration has not fully met its objectives due to a lack of



Cllr Enda Stenson

tangible commitments. The adoption of a Rural Agenda is essential to ensuring that the second Cork declaration does not exist solely on paper", Mr Stenson added.

Creativity the big winner for the 9th CoR/EA group Primary School Art Competition "My Region, My Dreams"

Children from across the European Union have shared their artistic talent with us in the 9th CoR/EA group Primary School Art Competition "My Region, My Dreams". The winning paintings have been displayed in the European Committee of the Regions since December 2017 and the exhibition

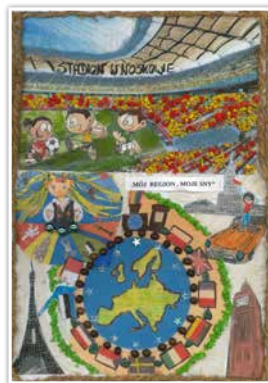
attracted a lot of attention with spectators amazed by the young talented Europeans' artistic take on their dreams about the European Union and their regional identity.

All paintings will be published as post-cards and included in a booklet.

Commenting on the exhibition, the European Alliance President Karl Vanlouwe highlighted the richness of talent in Europe's children and added that this is one of the motivating factors in organising these competitions.



EA member Stanisław Szwabski looking at an entry from the City of Gdynia



Piotr Sędziak, 11 years, from Norków, Poland



Clariana Hana, 11 years, from Mechelen, Flanders



Daniel O'Brien, 11 years, from Nenagh, Ireland



Meta Dagytė, 8 years, from Naujamiestis, Lithuania