

European Alliance group

Leadership means taking initiative, not turning away, says Karl Vanlouwe President of the European Alliance group

Over the past few months we have seen the leadership of the European Union turning a 'blind-eye' to what is happening in Catalonia. They have not fully condemned the use of excessive violence during the referendum, nor acknowledged the outcome of the election in December. In addition, they have ignored the fact that there are people in jail and in exile without due justification. It is time for the EU to take a stand and defend the democratic principles and values which have been at its core.

Leadership is also needed in the discussion on BREXIT, as there are many regions across the EU where this will have a huge impact. One of those is indeed Flanders where the impact can be seen very clearly in the ports. I welcome therefore the



Mr Karl Vanlouwe, President of the EA group

COTER commission's initiative to send a delegation to the port of Zeebrugge to find out directly what the impact will be on the people and businesses around the city.

Lastly, the Committee of the Regions' work on the future of Europe debate is one which I would encourage every local government to get involved in, start the discussion and be part of the debate to define what you want from the European Union of the future.

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EA group members visit Flemish Parliament in Brussels



EA group members in the Flemish Parliament

On 30 January, members of the EA group attending the plenary session of the European Committee of the Regions paid a visit to the Flemish Parliament upon the invitation of EA group president Mr Karl Vanlouwe.

The members had the opportunity to find out more about the role and competences of the Flemish parliament, its place in the Belgian federal system, as well as the priorities of the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (N-VA), the biggest party in the parliament

and the single biggest party in Flanders and Belgium. After the presentation, Mr Vanlouwe and other EA group members from Flanders led the members on a tour of the Parliament's buildings.

EA group members were delighted by the opportunity to visit this important institution and most commented that the visit allowed them to see the political system in Flanders in a completely new light.

In addition to Mr Vanlouwe, EA group members and alternates from Flanders are Mr Andries Gryffroy, Mr Marc Hendrickx, Mr Wilfried Vandaele, Mr Jan Van Esbroeck and Mr Karim Van Overmeire, all members of the Flemish Parliament.

"The EU must show leadership on issues which have impact on its citizens and values, such as Brexit and the violations of human rights in Catalonia."
Karl Vanlouwe, EA group president



European Alliance

Launch of CoR/EA group Secondary School Competition 2018 with Cultural Heritage as the theme

The EA Group is pleased to announce that its popular Secondary Schools competition has recently been launched again for 2018. Students aged between 14 and 19 will compete in a quiz about the European Union and write an essay on a topic which will reflect 2018 as the European Year of Cultural Heritage. We are looking forward to seeing fresh young ideas on this most interesting of topics.

Two winners from each of the nominated schools will be invited to Brussels to see the EA Group and the European Committee of the Regions in action in the July Plenary.



Pupils will have the opportunity to present to and discuss with members and each other their experiences of cultural heritage in their regions and throughout Europe. They will also visit the European House of History

and see some of the iconic sights of Brussels such as the Atomium.

This year's edition will see participation by 9 schools from eight Member States.

EU Urban Agenda, Cork and the City of Tomorrow

On 27 March, upon the initiative of Councillor Kieran McCarthy the City of Cork hosted a workshop of the Urban Development Network which discussed ideas and possible solutions to common challenges in the implementation of sustainable urban development strategies.

The workshop was closed by an Urban Conversation framed within the European Committee of the Regions' initiative entitled "Reflecting on Europe" where citizens had an opportunity to have an exchange on what future they want for the EU and its cities. The event also aimed to showcase some of the wide range of methodologies being created in EU secondary cities within the innovation and urbanism paradigms.

With the EU Urban Agenda completing its first positive partnerships, it is clear from feedback that a more globalised urbanism is emerging across the EU, which has brought with it its own definitions, challenges and opportunities in equal measure.

The role of secondary cities is crucial to the development of the EU Agenda. Second and



third tier European cities are more agile in their response to Globalisation and their delivery in innovative practices across a myriad of elements such as enterprise, transport, energy and entrepreneurship.

Cork City Council is active in its service delivery to create an innovation ecosystem but recently the boundary of the city is expected to be expanded in the next

two years, which brings new challenges. Progressive debate has begun in the city on what Cork's "City of Tomorrow" should champion and develop. The event contributed to this ongoing debate from a European angle.

Cllr. McCarthy, is also currently drafting an opinion in the CoR on the implementation assessment of the Urban Agenda.

COTER to discuss challenges to outermost regions in Canary Islands

On 13 April, a COTER commission seminar on the challenges and opportunities for economic, social and territorial development in the outermost regions will take place in Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Canary Islands.

The seminar will aim to assess the implementation of the new European strategy on outermost regions and enable COTER members to discuss the particular issues which impact the economic and social development of such territories as well as the opportunities they can offer the whole of the EU.

The seminar will also provide useful input to the COTER commission's ongoing reflection on the best tools for future cohesion

policy post-2020 which should support growth and employment, trans-European transport network and other EU programmes that are of high relevance to Europe's peripheral regions.

The EA Group coordinator Marie-Antoinette Maupertuis, member of Corsica's regional government and rapporteur on the opinion "Entrepreneurship on Islands: contributing towards territorial cohesion" adopted in May 2017, this recalls that like outermost regions, island regions are in general more in need of particular attention from the EU and calls for tailored measures to improve their basic condition in the post-2020 cohesion policy framework.



Ms Marie-Antoinette Maupertuis

Mr Mirosław Lech and Mr Dariusz Wróbel sign #CohesionAlliance

On 01 February 2018, Mr Mirosław Lech, Mayor of Korycin municipality and Mr Dariusz Wróbel, Mayor of Opole Lubelskie added their names to the list of signatories of the #CohesionAlliance, a coalition of local and regional authorities, associations, non-governmental organisations, educational institutions and individuals who believe that EU cohesion policy must continue to be a pillar of the EU's future.

The Alliance was created through cooperation between the leading European



Polish members signing the #CohesionAlliance with CoR President Karl-Heinz Lambertz

associations of cities and regions and the European Committee of the Regions and it demands that the EU budget after 2020

makes cohesion policy stronger, more effective, visible and available to every region in the European Union.

EA Primary Schools competition winners visit CoR

On 31 January, the winners of the EA Primary Schools drawing competition from the Polish town of Nosków, accompanied by EA group member and Mayor of Jaraczewo, Mr Dariusz Strugała, attended the 127th CoR plenary session, presented their town and school to EA group members and had a tour of the city of Brussels.



Winners of the EA Primary Schools drawing competition with Mr Vanlouwe and Mr Strugała

The Committee of the Regions can play a positive role in cooperation with the local government in Ukraine

In early 2015 the European Committee of the Regions decided to set up a task force with local authorities from Ukraine with an idea to exchange best practices on decentralisation and discuss other relevant topics, such as territorial cooperation and regional policy. Since the beginning of this project, First Vice President of the European Alliance group and member of the Gdynia City Council Stanisław Szwabski has played an important role in contributing to its work in particular in the areas of decentralisation, local government reform and capacity building.

An important next step in the cooperation with Ukrainian local authorities is the development of peer to peer initiative where cities and regions from the European Union can give valuable advice to their counterparts in Ukraine on a number of specific topics, with current focus being on public service training, education and local economic development to name but a few.

The CoR Task Force on Ukraine met in Brussels on 8 March and is scheduled to have its next meeting in Ukraine in September.



Mr Stanisław Szwabski at the meeting of the CoR Task Force on Ukraine

Cllr Hughie McGrath leads Nenagh delegation in EU fact-finding mission

During the last CoR Plenary a delegation from Nenagh, County Tipperary visited the EU institutions to discuss issues surrounding small town development and also the development of rural areas. They met with key commission officials including members of Commissioner Hogan's cabinet.

Cllr McGrath highlighted that it is important that delegations give a message to the European Union

that small towns are often forgotten, being too small to be considered for urban funding and too large for rural. This needs to change and the value of towns like Nenagh has to be considered in EU policies.

The delegation was also welcomed by European Alliance group President Karl Vanlouwe who visited Nenagh last September.



Cllr Hughie McGrath and a delegation from Nenagh visiting the CoR Plenary

100 years of Baltic States



2018 is a very important year for Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as it marks 100 years since the three Baltic States declared their independence.

In the turmoil of the final year of the First World War and the beginning of the Russian Civil war, first Lithuania declared its independence on 16 February 1918, 130 years after the partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, followed by

Estonia on 24 February and Latvia on 18 November. The latter two thus became independent states for the first time in their history.

This period of self-rule was interrupted in 1940 when the three countries became part of the Soviet Union. However, independence was restored in 1990 and 1991. All three countries became part of the European Union in 2004.

Forthcoming events

11 April: CIVEX commission meeting

24 April: ECON commission meeting

12 April: ENVE commission meeting

27 April: COTER commission meeting

23 April: SEDEC commission meeting

4 May: Enlargement Day