

European Alliance Group

Democracy, dialogue and positive engagement are key to the future of the European Union, says Karl Vanlouwe, President of the European Alliance Group



EA Group President Karl Vanlouwe with Scottish National Party Westminster leader Ian Blackford MP and Spokesperson for International Affairs and Europe Stephen Gethins MP

The European Union is at a critical juncture where there is a clear need to take decisions for and on behalf of its people. The Institutions need to open their eyes to what is happening in Catalonia where for a year we have political prisoners who only wanted to express their rights in a democratic manner. How can this be tolerated in a democratic European Union? There needs to be clear action and a start would be to let these people home for Christmas.

I welcome the move to have an agreement on BREXIT but I would prefer the UK not to leave. I see the negative consequences which this will have on Flanders and we have also discussed this at length in particular with our Scottish friends over the last two months. The EU

needs to listen to the regions' needs and help them prepare for the adjustments needed after BREXIT.

This month we hosted a hugely successful seminar in Bucharest on "Investment and Cohesion in Europe's Regions and local communes while promoting innovation and Cultural Heritage". The event was organised by our member Emil Drăghici.

Finally for the 10th year in succession we have the wonderful expressions of art by our young students from across the EU adorning the walls of the European Committee of the Regions with this year's theme being 'My Region, my Neighbourhood'. An amazing array of artistic expressions, well done to everyone!

CoR Plenary set to adopt Nanette Maupertuis' opinion on the future of European Territorial Cooperation

On 5-6 December the CoR Plenary session will vote on the main cohesion policy regulations after 2020 including the opinion on the future European territorial cooperation (ETC) drafted by Nanette Maupertuis, member of the Executive Council of Corsica Regional Authority.

In her opinion, which was adopted by an overwhelming majority in the COTER commission, Ms Maupertuis regretted the budgetary cuts proposed to the programme while underlining the great added value

provided by Interreg as it is one of the most visible programmes to citizens.

She also called for a higher budget in the future ETC and that maritime cross-border cooperation remain part of the cross-border cooperation component instead of becoming part of transnational cooperation. Ms Maupertuis also welcomed the proposal to allocate a significant part of the resources to Innovative Interregional Investments in order to promote European value chains and called for higher co-financing

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rate for regions suffering from geographical and demographic constraints in accordance with the principle of territorial cohesion.

EA Group holds external meeting on Investment and Cohesion in Europe's Regions and Local Authorities in Bucharest



On 26 November the European Alliance (EA) group held its extraordinary meeting in Bucharest (Romania). The topic of the meeting was investment and cohesion in Europe's regions and local authorities along with the promotion of innovation and cultural heritage. The meeting was hosted by the Mayor of Vulcana-Băi, Mr Emil Drăghici.

At the meeting, the EA members explored successful approaches to support investment in rural and urban areas as well as ways to effectively use EU regional development funding while promoting innovation. Members also had a



chance to discuss the proposal for the future cohesion and rural development policy after 2020

and adopt a declaration which will be sent to all relevant EU stakeholders and decision-makers.

EWRC: Locally and Regionally Determined Contributions are key to achieving energy transition



Cllr Andrew Cooper

On 9 October, in the context of the European Week of Regions and Cities (EWRC), the EA Group organised a workshop on how local and regional authorities can foster energy transition policies. The conference gathered local and regional policy makers and experts from across Europe who shared good practices and discussed innovative approaches to energy efficiency and diversification.

With the entry into force of the Paris Climate Agreement, the EU has set higher renewable energy and energy efficiency targets to accelerate the transition to a cleaner energy system. Regions and cities' role is central to make this transition happen. They are at the forefront in imple-

menting ambitious policies but they need to be empowered with adequate means and enabled to participate in the definition of national energy and climate plans.

An integrated European energy system acknowledging and connecting actions carried out at local level up, in line with a true multilevel approach, is key to achieving the transition to a low carbon economy and meeting global climate goals. Cllr Andrew Cooper, Kirklees Councillor and CoR rapporteur on Climate Governance after 2020 and CoP 24 said that, in addition to the national ones, there is a clear need for locally determined contributions in order to bridge the emissions gap and meet global climate change targets.

Delivery of Smart towns and villages are vital for rural regeneration, says Enda Stenson

Following the adoption of Cllr Enda Stenson's opinion on the revitalisation of rural areas through smart villages a major National Conference on Smart Villages took place in Mohill, Ireland on the 22nd October 2018. Speakers included Minister for State for Rural Areas Sean Canney TD and Dermot Ryan, a member of Commissioner Phil Hogan's cabinet.

Cllr Stenson said that his objective with the opinion and the conference was to see how we could use policy and funding in our villag-

es to make life better for everyone living and working in our rural communities across the European Union, adding that rural towns and villages must have access to services whether locally or remotely.

The concept of a Smart Village is one that allows people to live and work in their communities, with high speed internet, sustainable energy provision and access to vital services. By bringing government, local government, enterprises and local educa-



Cllr Enda Stenson

tion services together we can begin the discussion as to how we deliver Smart villages.

EA Group hosts SNP leaders in Westminster and a cross-party delegation of MSPs to discuss Scotland and BREXIT



Meeting between the members of the Scottish Parliament and CoR members chaired by Mr Marc Hendrickx (centre)

The European Alliance Group President Karl Vanlouwe met with Scottish National Party (SNP) Westminster Leader Ian Blackford MP and Foreign Affairs spokesperson Stephen Gethins MP to discuss Brexit and Scotland as a pro-EU nation on the 25th October 2018. They discussed the negative implications of BREXIT on Scotland as well as the position paper "Scotland's place in Europe", published by the Scottish government earlier this year. Later, both Members of Parliament met Michel Barnier, European Union's chief negotiator on BREXIT.

On 19 November, European Alliance Group hosted members of the Scottish Parliament's Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee led by Convener Joan McAlpine MSP. The delegation held an exchange of views with a group of CoR members, in a meeting chaired by EA member and a member of the Flemish Parliament Marc Hendrickx. Later in the day, Ms McAlpine and her fellow MSPs held a lunchtime briefing for CoR members and staff, journalists and officials from other EU institutions on Scotland's relationship with the EU after BREXIT.

EA members active in promoting cooperation with LRAs in enlargement and neighbourhood countries

In the past several months, members of the European Alliance (EA) Group in the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) have actively participated in different fora for cooperation between local and regional authorities from the EU and their counterparts from partner countries in the Western Balkans and the Eastern Neighbourhood.

On 11 September, Mr Tony Buchanan from East Renfrewshire Council attended a meeting of the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) CoR-Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia where he discussed fiscal decentralisation and local tax policy in the country.

On 24 September, Mr Emil Drăghici, Mayor of Vulcana-Băi, Romania discussed bilateral municipal cooperation and ways to deal with disinformation on online platforms

and the media with representatives of local and regional authorities from the Eastern Partnership countries. The discussion took place at the CORLEAP meeting in Kyiv, Ukraine.

One day later, Kyiv hosted a meeting of the CoR Task Force on Ukraine where Mr Stanisław Szwabski, from the Gdynia City Council, Poland debated how to encourage local economic development and gain the trust of European and Ukrainian SMEs.

On 17 October, Mr Declan McDonnell from the Galway City Council visited the city of Niš, Serbia for the 5th meeting of the CoR - Serbia JCC where he shared Ireland's experience in developing tourism at the local level

On 18 October, Mr Uno Silberg from the Kose municipality, Estonia took part in the 11th

meeting of the CoR-Montenegro JCC in the Montenegrin city of Nikšić where he discussed human resources management at the local level and the protection of cultural and natural heritage.

On 13 November, Member of the Flemish Parliament Marc Hendrickx participated at the 23rd meeting of the CoR Working Group on the Western Balkans which took place in Tirana, Albania. The meeting focused on EU-Albania relations and the ongoing municipal reform in the country.

Finally, on 11 December, Mr Józef Kotys, Member of the Opolskie Regional Assembly, Poland, will attend the meeting of the CoR Working Group on Turkey in Ankara where the main topic will be the integration of refugees.

10th annual CoR/EA Group Primary Schools Art Competition in progress

For the 10th year running children in Flanders, Ireland, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Scotland and Slovakia are enjoying taking part in the CoR/EA Group Primary Schools Art Competition. This year the theme is 'My Region, my Neighbourhood' and the

children, through their art, will be expressing their visions of their local surroundings, families and friends in the context of their Regions.

The winning three entries from each school will be displayed in an exposition in the

main building of the European Committee of the Regions during the December plenary week when members and visitors enjoy seeing the colourful artworks.



Mr Uno Silberg

Uno Silberg appointed rapporteur on EU framework on endocrine disruptors

At the NAT commission meeting held on 28 November 2018 in Brussels Mr Uno Silberg, member of Kose Municipality Council was appointed CoR rapporteur on the future EU-wide framework on endocrine disruptors.

Endocrine disruptors are chemical substances that alter the functioning of the endocrine system and negatively affect the health of humans and animals. The Com-

mission's Communication, published on 7 November this year, provides a comprehensive EU framework on endocrine disruptors, describing key issues, taking stock of what has been achieved so far and outlining concrete steps to be taken in the future.

Mr Silberg's opinion will first be discussed at the NAT commission meeting on 29 January 2019.