

European Alliance Group

New European Commission must be inclusive towards nations, regions and cities, says European Alliance President Karl Vanlouwe



EA Group President Karl Vanlouwe

We find ourselves at a very interesting moment in European politics. As this issue of EA Group's newsletter is being published, members of the European Parliament are holding hearings with Commissioners-designate and in less than a month from now, we will have a new College of Commissioners which will lead the EU in the years to come and the CoR must be able to guide these hearings.

The new European Commission should be inclusive towards nations and regions in order to get the EU closer to citizens, and we as a group will work closely with the new European Commission President Ms von der Leyen to ensure that Regions and Cities are at the heart of the policy agenda. We wish her and her new team all the very best.

Yet, as the new EU executive is being formed, we witness a situation in which legally and democratically elected members of the European Parliament

are barred from accessing the institution in which they are supposed to serve their citizens. I would once again like to stress that this is unacceptable and contrary to the democratic principles and values on which the EU was founded. I am sending my full support to Mr Puigdemont and Mr Comín and, of course, Mr Junqueras whose case will be heard at the European Court of Justice on 14 October.

October may also be the last month of the UK's membership in the European Union. It will indeed be not just sad but also a very dangerous event with not yet fully perceivable consequences for the UK, Ireland, Flanders and continental Europe. Brexit was also one of the topics I had an opportunity to discuss with our friends and colleagues from the European Free Alliance Group in the European Parliament, led by President Alyn Smith MEP. We will continue working hard to ensure that the negative impact of UK's departure is minimised and still hope that the devastating scenario of a no-deal Brexit will be avoided.

Finally, the youth of today are our leaders of tomorrow and the European Alliance Group has just launched its latest Primary schools Art competition which will be run in our members' regions. I look forward to seeing these wonderful pieces of art which will be exhibited in the CoR during the December plenary session.

Tadeusz Truskolaski's opinion aimed to support SMEs set to be adopted at the October plenary session

On the 9th of July, the ECON commission unanimously supported the opinion of Tadeusz Truskolaski on the contribution from regions and cities towards a new EU policy framework for SME's. On the 8th of October, the opinion is set for adoption at the CoR plenary session. As the competitiveness of many European economies is reliant upon the innovative potential of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), the rapporteur calls for a policy that addresses the future challenges of SMEs. Smaller business often struggle to keep up with the rapid pace at which digitalization, data economy, complex administrative regulations or the growing role of corporate social responsibili-

ty are transforming the European economy.

Mr. Truskolaski believes it is therefore necessary to have SMEs more involved in the shaping of EU-policy. The rapporteur calls on the European Commission to make an extra effort to reduce and simplify the rules applicable to SMEs and to make it easier for them to participate in public tenders. However, Mr. Truskolaski also points to Member States, and regions' responsibility, for example to assist SMEs in the development of skills. A level playing field for European SMEs will be of utmost importance in order to give them a chance to compete globally, the rapporteur concludes.



Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski

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Karl Vanlouwe, President of the EA Group



European Alliance

CoR plenary to adopt Andries Gryffroy's opinion on how to address climate challenges in a 'smart' way

On October 9, the CoR plenary session will vote on an opinion on smart cities, drafted by Andries Gryffroy, member of the Flemish Parliament. The opinion titled "Smart cities: new challenges for a just transition towards climate neutrality – how to implement the SDGs in real life", recommends concrete measures to guide and support cities, towns and villages in their contribution to a resource-efficient, climate neutral and biodiverse Europe.

The rapporteur, in his opinion, specifically calls for tailor-made approaches for each and every urban settlement, which often differ widely in terms of skills, digitalization and resources. In order to achieve climate neutrality, the rapporteur clarifies that besides decarbonisation, ad-

ditional efforts will be needed especially in the areas of the circular economy, sustainable agricultural and food systems, ecosystems and biodiversity. For this to be accomplished, Mr. Gryffroy calls for a smart approach by making use of, amongst others, smart technologies, innovative tools and open data. With smarter, faster and more flexible city solutions as a result, citizens would also be able to benefit from more interactive and responsive city administration.

Mr. Gryffroy, in his opinion, additionally emphasizes the need to include all citizens in this transition by upskilling those that are most vulnerable. To give smart communities more opportunities to finance and fast-track innovative solutions, Mr. Gryffroy makes several concrete proposals

such as the provision of dedicated and accessible funding instruments or the provision of less stringent rules for local zones.



Mr Andries Gryffroy

EWRC: EA Group to host seminar on the future of EU territorial cooperation



Ms Nanette Maupertuis

On the morning of 8 October 2019, the EA Group will be hosting a seminar on the future of European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), as part of the European Week of Regions and Cities (EWRC).

ETC is one of the objectives of Cohesion policy as it contributes to achieving harmonious development in the EU, while enabling regions and local authorities to work together across borders. It has proved indispensable to many regional authorities not only for exchanging expertise and best practice on key challenges, but also for building human links.

However, the future of ETC programmes as we know them is at stake since the draft regulation

proposal for the 2021-2027 period envisages significant changes to the current structure and budget cuts. Local and regional policy makers and experts will share successful experiences and highlight the importance of preserving cooperation programmes with high EU added-value in the next programming period.

Confirmed speakers in the seminar are the CoR rapporteur on the future of ETC and member of the Executive Council of Corsica Regional Authority, Ms Nanette Maupertuis, Ms Anna Augustyn, from the Białystok Functional Area, Dr Francesc Bonet Director of the Hospital de la Cerdanya, EGTC, and Mr Carlo Badino, from the Valle d'Aosta Autonomous Region.

EA president Vanlouwe discusses EFA joint priorities with MEPs in Strasbourg



EA Group President Karl Vanlouwe and European Parliament's EFA Group President Alyn Smith MEP

On 17 and 18 September 2019, EA Group President Karl Vanlouwe visited Strasbourg where he

took part in the meeting of the European Free Alliance (EFA) group in the European Parliament.

The meeting, chaired by EFA Group President Alyn Smith MEP, was an occasion to discuss common priorities for the new mandate and enhanced cooperation between the two groups.

Members reiterated that Brexit is not something they wish and expressed hope that the EU would still continue to have strong ties with the UK in case the UK indeed leaves on 31 October. The European Parliament adopted on 18 September a resolution in this respect.

Mr Vanlouwe also highlighted the joint efforts

of EA and EFA groups in calling for the release of jailed Catalan politicians and reiterated that elected MEPs must be allowed to take up their seats in the European Parliament.



EA Group Presidents Karl Vanlouwe and a group of EFA MEPs

Borrell Porta appointed rapporteur on permanent dialogue with citizens

During the June meeting of the CIVEX commission, Ms Mireia Borrell Porta, Secretary for External Action and European Union in the Government of Catalonia was appointed CoR rapporteur on the opinion “Local and regional authorities in the permanent dialogue with citizens”.

In its Communication “Europe in May 2019: Preparing for a more united, stronger and more democratic Union in an increasingly uncertain world”, published as a contribution to the informal May 2019 EU27 leaders’ meeting in Sibiu, the European Commission argued that “engaging with citizens on a constant basis is essential

to strengthen European identity and democracy and ensure greater ownership of the European project”. More recently, the European Commission President-elect Ursula von der Leyen proposed the setting-up of a two-year ‘Conference on the Future of Europe’, in which citizens will “play a leading and active part”.

Ms Borrell Porta’s opinion would look into what has been done so far and how best to structure and maintain continuous communication between decision-makers and citizens.



Ms Mireia Borrell Porta

Ms Borrell Porta’s opinion will first be discussed at the CIVEX commission meeting in December 2019 and adoption in plenary is foreseen for May next year.

Truskolaski and Strugała take part in the CORLEAP meeting in Turku

On 12 September 2019, two of our Polish members, Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski, Mayor of Białystok and Mr Dariusz Strugała, Mayor of Jaraczewo took part in the 9th annual meeting of the Conference for the Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP), which took place in Turku, Finland.

The members adopted two reports: “Promoting people-to-people contacts through cross-border cooperation programmes”, which calls on the EU to increase funding for small cross-border projects, and “Capacity building of local and regional public administration”

which proposed to establish a public-administration academy for local and regional civil servants from the



Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski and Mr Dariusz Strugała

six Eastern Partnership countries: Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

CORLEAP members also held a discussion on the future of the Eastern Partnership, during which it was proposed that the EU should deepen relations with neighbours on its eastern borders through more localised and targeted engagement. CORLEAP’s recommendations will be sent to national leaders ahead of a summit of the Eastern Partnership countries and the EU in Zagreb, Croatia in May 2020.

Uno Silberg and Kieran McCarthy debate the future of cultural heritage in Europe



Mr Kieran McCarthy and Mr Uno Silberg

On the 24th of September, EA members Uno Silberg and Kieran McCarthy participated in a conference on cultural heritage houses in Europe. The Conference, organised at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels, gathered 400 participants including policymakers,

academics, experts and next generation young heritage owners. At the conference, the key findings and main policy recommendations resulting from a brand new study on family-owned heritage houses were presented. The study predominantly focuses on the benefit of cultural heritage for Europe and on how innovative business models can support and help their sustainable preservation.

This approach was already taken on board in two declarations drawn up at the EA Group meetings in Runnymede (2014) and Aalst (2015) – indicating the importance of cultural heritage for the Group. The

declarations, like the study, emphasize that Europe’s strength is in its heritage and reiterate that promotion of heritage is essential to strengthen identity and democratic values and to contribute to social and economic cohesion. These shared views send a strong signal to the European institutions, calling for an EU-level strategy for the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage, increased exchange of best practices and the stimulation of innovative business models. Kieran McCarthy, who was invited to speak at the conference, took a strong stand for culture and history to be seen as hard priorities by EU institutions, national and regional authorities

Councillor Andrew Cooper shares experience in promoting environmental change

On the 25th of September, ECOLISE, the European Network for Community-led Initiatives on climate change and sustainability, together with Sean Kelly MEP organised a discussion in the European Parliament on how citizens and communities contribute to sustainable transformational change. Councillor Andrew Cooper was invited to sit around the table with other policy makers and representatives of community-led initiatives on climate change and sustainability in Europe.

The involvement of communities is necessary to implement the Paris Agreement on climate change and the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals. As change is implemented at local level, communities are key to

achieve a social, economic and environmental transition. The increase of community-led initiatives over the years has also been welcomed on the third annual European Day of Sustainable Communities (EDSC), on the 21st of September.

Councillor Cooper, for whom the topic is close to the heart, shared his experience in the field as initiator of some initiatives in Kirklees to promote sustainable projects and ensure transformative change in Europe. In the CoR environmental commission, Cllr Cooper already built on that experience by taking the lead on important dossiers on climate change governance post 2020 and environmental implementation review.



Cllr Andrew Cooper

COR bureau debates Finnish Presidency priorities with focus on skills and education

On 13 September the CoR Bureau held an extraordinary meeting in Turku, Finland under Finnish Presidency. Members had an exchange with Finland's Minister for economic affairs, Ms Katri Kulmuni who highlighted the Presidency priorities for the second half of the year.

A debate was also held on the topic of skills and education with a particular focus on Artificial Intelligence.

In its interventions, EA Group President, Karl Vanlouwe, highlighted that Flanders invest 32

million euros annually to promote knowledge among students, teachers and companies about Artificial Intelligence for education and training purposes.

Launch of 11th edition of CoR/EA Group Primary School Art Competition

We are excited to announce the launch of the 11th edition of the CoR/EA Group's very popular Primary School Art Competition 2019.

This year the theme will be 'My Region, my Family' in which we ask children from nominated Primary Schools who are aged between 6 and 12

years to artistically express aspects of their family life in the contexts of their region and Europe.

We look forward to seeing entries of the usual high standard showing the children's creative, innovative and decorative visions. The winning entries will be displayed in an exhibition in the CoR during the December plenary week.



CoR/EA Group Secondary School Winners visit Brussels and the CoR in June

The EA Group welcomed the winners of our 15th annual essay writing competition. Two winning pupils from each nominated school and their accompanying adult arrived in Brussels on 25 June. The young people came from 7 member states – Estonia, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania,

Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

On 26 June they had the opportunity to meet EA Group members and to give presentations on their schools and regions before attending the plenary session which gave them a taste of the EU in action.

The essay topic this year was highly relevant: "Discuss ways in which young people's participation in the European elections can be increased". We hope this helped raise awareness in schools of how important it is to vote in the European elections once reaching voting age.



CoR President Karl-Heinz Lambertz and EA Group President Karl Vanlouwe meet the CoR/EA Group Secondary School competition winners and teachers