

## European Alliance Group

### Regions' and cities' role is central in the Conference on the future of Europe, said Karl Vanlouwe President of the European Alliance Group



Mr Karl Vanlouwe

As the new European Commission has just taken office and already announced new initiatives, it will be important to ensure the views of the Regions and Cities of Europe are taken into consideration during its first one hundred days.

The EU is at a crossroads and expectations for it to deliver are very high. It still has to prove to the ordinary citizens that it can tackle regional and local challenges, create added value in its action, and connect better to the citizens, thus strengthening its democratic dimension.

Enhancing the involvement of local and regional authorities in EU policy and decision-making is crucial to bring the EU closer to its citizens. As the CoR celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we look not only at the past achievements but also at its future role in the EU.

The Conference on the future of Europe should be an opportunity to mainstream the concept of Active Subsidiarity and ensure regions and cities, in particular those with legislative powers, have a stronger role in shaping EU legislation. Local and regional authorities are the most trusted level of government and they are best placed to facilitate a greater participation of citizens in the decision-making process.

Local and regional elected representatives' mandates are legitimised by the will of the people, as is the case for MEPs. In this regard, we call upon the EU to enable Catalan MEP Junqueras, Puigdemont and Comin to take up their seats in the European Parliament as democratically elected representatives. We demand that the EU take a clear stance on the situation in Catalonia and facilitate dialogue between Barcelona and Madrid. It is simply unacceptable that the EU stays silent when within its borders political and activist leaders are jailed and condemned (100 years of prison in total) for having organized a referendum in a democratic and peaceful manner.

In a few days, UK citizens will have their say in the UK General election the outcome of which could be decisive for the Brexit process. We are hopeful that an agreement can be found to avoid the devastating effects of a hard BREXIT for jobs and businesses across Europe's regions, in particular my own Flanders and of course Ireland. I would like to send my best wishes to our group members from the UK and Scotland. It may soon be time for the people of Scotland to decide on its own future as a country which firmly wants to stay in the EU.

Finally, the December Plenary does not only mark the end of the CoR's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, celebrations it is also the moment when drawings of our annual Primary school competition winners will be exhibited in the European Committee of the Regions. This year's theme is "my region, my family and I am amazed by the creativity of young pupils and their enthusiasm in connecting their daily lives and their regions with the EU. The theme of family is particularly relevant coming up to Christmas and on this note

*I wish all of you and your families a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.*

### Former EA Group presidents Ó'Neachtain and Szwabski to take part in CoR's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary ceremony

The December Plenary session will mark the end of the CoR's 25 year anniversary celebrations.

The final ceremony will be held during the Plenary session and will gather former CoR Presidents, representatives of other European institutions (European Parliament, Commission and Economic and Social Committee) who witnessed the evolution of our institution over the last 25 years and its growing influence in the inter-institutional context. It will also be an opportunity to discuss the way local and regional authorities could enrich the work of the European Union in the future, starting with an active involvement with the Conference on the Future of Europe

The ceremony will also be attended by former EA Group Presidents Seán Ó Neachtain and Stanisław Szwabski, who will reflect on our past achievements and share their thoughts on the future of the group and the CoR.



Mr Seán Ó Neachtain (left) and Mr Stanisław Szwabski (right)

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**Ms Mireia Borrell Porta, Secretary of Foreign and European Union Affairs of Catalonia and CoR rapporteur on the opinion "Local and regional authorities in the permanent dialogue with citizens"**



## Tadeusz Truskolaski shares knowledge on SMEs in Helsinki

On 27 November, Mayor of Białystok, Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski attended the ECON commission's external seminar in Helsinki, Finland. The seminar - which had been integrated in the SME Assembly 2019 programme - focused on how regions and cities can provide leverage for entrepreneurship and how SMEs can mobilise resources for R&D and innovation, invest in education and skills and promote internal and external collaboration and knowledge

transfer. Mr Truskolaski took part in a panel discussion on how local and regional authorities can promote the sustainability shift of the EU economy and industry. As CoR rapporteur on the opinion 'Contributions from regions and cities towards a new EU policy framework for SMEs', Mr Truskolaski shared his experience on available tools to support sustainable growth and scaling-up of SMEs and the financing aspects of the sustainability shift.



Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski

## Andries Gryffroy to discuss global climate change at the COP25 in Madrid



Mr Andries Gryffroy

From 2 to 13 December, politicians, businesspersons and high-profile activists from across the world are gathering in Madrid for the 25th United Nations Climate Change Summit – COP25. Member of the Flemish Parliament Andries Gryffroy will be contributing to these high-level discussions as part of the official delegation of the European Committee of the Regions.

During his time at the Climate Summit, Mr Gryffroy will be attending seminars, tech-

nical sessions and events and debating with other participants on how to address the global climate crisis. As a member of the CoR and rapporteur on the opinion on the smart cities' role in guaranteeing just transition toward climate neutrality and implementing the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level, he will be especially focusing on the key role EU cities, regions and communities have in offering solutions for the crisis.

## Subsidiarity Conference: Involvement of LRAs in EU policy making must be improved as they are the closest and most trusted link to citizens

On 22 November, the 9th Subsidiarity Conference, titled 'Active Subsidiarity: Creating EU added value together', was held in Rome.

In the presence of the President of the Italian Senate, Mrs Maria Elisabetta Casellati and the President of the European Parliament's AFCO committee Mr Antonio Tajani, members examined the outcomes of the 'Task force on subsidiarity, proportionality and doing less more efficiently', specifically highlighting how the EU system can be made more accessible to local and regional authorities.

Cork city Councillor Kieran McCarthy highlighted the importance of moving quickly to the imple-

mentation phase of the recommendations and encouraged other institutions to adopt the subsidiarity grid developed by the CoR to assess the compliance of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality with new legislative proposals.

Participants also discussed how regions and cities could have a stronger say in the development of EU policies.

Secretary of Foreign and European Union Affairs of Catalonia and CoR rapporteur on the opinion "Local and regional authorities in the permanent dialogue with citizens", Ms Mireia Borrell stated that it is essential new instruments be deployed to

involve citizens in a structured and stable manner. In this context, she added that the CoR is the natural interface to facilitate dialogue at EU level as local and regional authorities are the closest and most trusted link to citizens.

The conference was attended by the following EA members: Cork City Councillor Kieran McCarthy, Regional Councillor of the Autonomous Region of Valle d'Aosta Pierluigi Marquis, Mayor of Białystok Tadeusz Truskolaski and Catalan Foreign and European Union Affairs Secretary, Mireia Borrell.



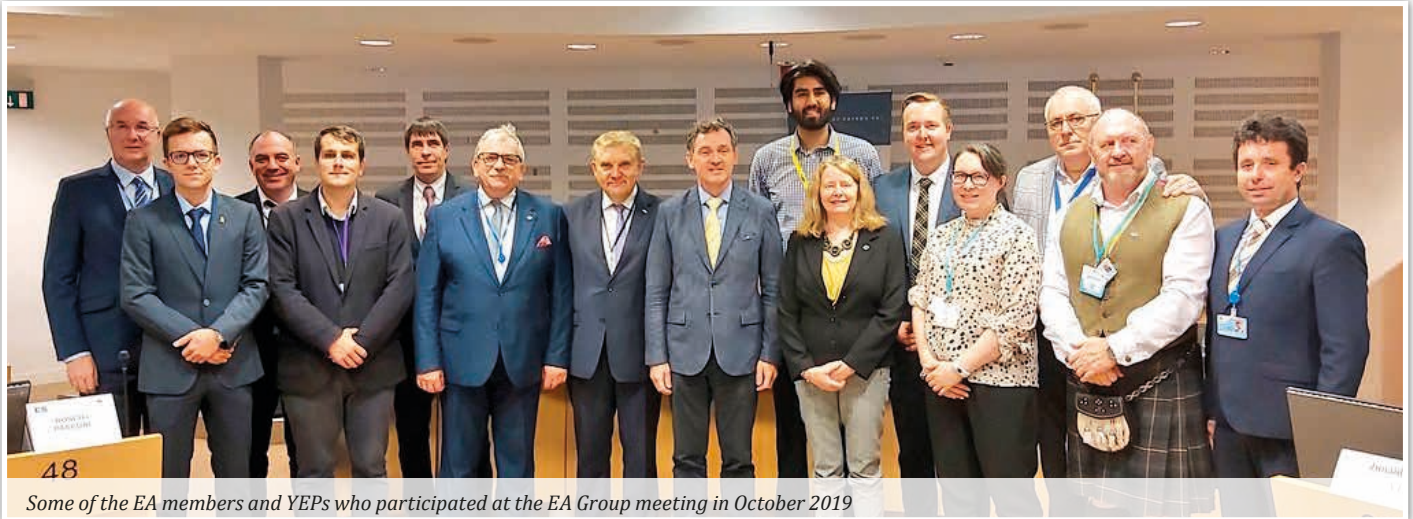
From left to right: Mr Pierluigi Marquis, Mr Kieran McCarthy, Ms Mireia Borrell and Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski

## Young EU politicians discuss climate action during CoR plenary session

28 Young Elected Politicians (YEPs) from across the EU were invited to take part in an event titled: "Accelerating climate action locally" which is to be held during the December Plenary Session of the European Committee of the

Regions, between 3 and 5 December. The young politicians will be exchanging views with each other and with members of the CoR on the role cities and regions have in achieving EU climate neutrality and in the implementation of the

Paris Agreement. This debate is of particular relevance in the context of the United Nations Climate Conference (COP25), at which an official CoR delegation participated.



Some of the EA members and YEPs who participated at the EA Group meeting in October 2019

## EA members active in cooperation with local and regional authorities from the Western Balkans and Turkey

As happens every autumn, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), in cooperation with local government associations and ministries from the Western Balkan countries and Turkey, is organising a series of meetings between CoR members and their counterparts in EU candidate and potential candidate countries.

On 15 October, Dr Uno Silberg, Member of Kose Municipality Council (Estonia), took part in the meeting of the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) CoR - Montenegro where he discussed the system of financing and the maintenance of municipal infrastructure, as well as the role of manufacturing industry in local economic development.

The election deadlock in the city of Mostar was the topic of the meeting of the Working Group on Relations with the Western Balkans, held in the city of Mostar itself on 22 October. The EA Group was represented by Dr József Kóbor, representative of Local Government of Pécs (Hungary).

On 27 November, Mr Declan McDonnell from the Galway City Council (Ireland) took part in the meeting of the JCC Cor-Serbia where he carried his experience in the planning and implementation of e-governance strategies.

On the same day, member of the London Borough of Havering Council, Ms Gillian Ford attended the meeting of the Working Group on

Relations with Turkey in the town of Edirne, where she discussed cross-border and territorial cooperation.

Finally, on 11 December, Cllr Tony Buchanan, leader of the East Renfrewshire Council (Scotland) will take part in the meeting of the JCC North Macedonia in Skopje, where members will discuss sustainable local economic development.

EA Group members will continue to transfer their experiences and knowledge to their counterparts in the Western Balkans and will continue to emphasize the often-overlooked yet hugely important role local and regional authorities have in the EU accession process.



From left to right: Dr Uno Silberg, Dr Dr József Kóbor, Mr Declan McDonnell, Ms Gillian Ford and Mr Tony Buchanan

## EA Group to hold its last meeting in the current mandate on 12 December

On 12 December 2019, the European Alliance Group will hold its extraordinary group meeting in Brussels. It will be the last group meeting in the current mandate, which will offer an opportunity to review our achievements in

the 2015 – 2020 legislature and to discuss political priorities for the next 5-year term of the European Committee of the Regions. The past 5 years have been very successful and fruitful in terms of members' activities and contribu-

tion to the development of citizen-focused EU policies and that will certainly remain our priority in the period to come.

## Enda Stenson to take part in the 5<sup>th</sup> EU Agricultural Outlook conference

On 10-11 December 2019, Leitrim Councillor Enda Stenson will attend the fifth EU Agricultural Outlook conference in Brussels. The annual conference brings together stakeholders to discuss the future and potential challenges that lie ahead in European agriculture. The conference will be opened by the new European Commissioner for agriculture and rural development, Mr Janusz Wojciechowski, and participants from EU institutions, governments and international organisations.

Day one of the conference will focus upon sustainability "from farm to fork" and involve high-level panellists that discussed scientific developments and initiatives to improve the economic, environmental and social sustainability of production, consumption and trade. The second day will explore the impact of increasing societal demands on food prices followed by a debate on EU agriculture markets.

Cllr Enda Stenson is the CoR's former rapporteur on the 'Smart Villages' initiative and designate rapporteur on the revival of rural areas.



Cllr Enda Stenson

## Flanders adopts Resolution to support Catalonia

On 16 October 2019, Members of the Flemish Parliament unanimously approved a resolution on the independence referendum in Catalonia. The resolution condemns the severe penalties that the Spanish Supreme Court awarded to nine Catalan politicians and activists. Mr Karl Vanlouwe, Flemish Member of Parliament and front-runner of the resolution, is clear: "Flanders does not ig-

nore the events in Spain and Catalonia and takes - with this resolution - a strong position on the excessive violence of the Spanish authorities. It is unacceptable for democratically elected citizens to be locked up for exercising their political activities. What we need is a dialogue between Barcelona and Madrid mediated by the international community. Europe must continue to defend the fundamental

rights to freedom of expression and democracy." Flanders does not stand on its own. In addition, the Valle D'Aosta Regional Council adopted a resolution expressing solidarity to the Catalan people and calling for a political solution in order to respect the will of Catalan people and their right to self-determination.

## CoR/EA Group 10<sup>th</sup> Primary Schools Art Competition 'My region, my family'

The EA has for the 10th year running organised this very popular art competition in 12 schools from 9 countries: Estonia, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Scotland and Slovakia. The children are aged between 6 years and 12 years and, as always, we have been amazed at the level of talent out there in the regions of the European Union. The theme is 'My region, my family' and we have loved seeing the children's visions of their family life in the context of their regions.

The winning three entries from each school will be presented with prizes by local members of the European Committee of the Regions - including a keepsake booklet and postcards showing the artwork. The paintings will be exhibited during the week of the CoR Plenary Session in the CoR building.

