

European Alliance Group

EA group members appoint new president and the group bureau



Cllr Kieran McCarthy (left) and Mr Karl Vanlouwe (right)

At our extraordinary group meeting, held in Brussels on 3 February, EA group members elected the group's new leadership.

Members elected Cllr Kieran McCarthy, member of the Cork City Council (Ireland) as the new president of the group and current president, Mr Karl Vanlouwe as its first vice president.

Mr McCarthy said he was delighted to be elected and hoped to put forward an active common platform for members within the CoR respecting self-determination, calling for more decentralisation and ensuring a balanced and sustainable territorial development of cities and rural areas with a focus on island and mountain regions. The EA group will provide members with a platform to build the bridge between their regions and the EU and we look forward to contributing to the new European Commission agenda via the Green deal, Conference on the Future of Europe and the Digital agenda. We have a huge agenda to deliver on behalf of our elected citizens across the EU.

In addition, the members voted on the composition of the new Bureau for the group, which will, in addition to Mr McCarthy and Mr Vanlouwe, include Ms Nanette Maupertuis, member of the Executive Council of Corsica, Mr Dariusz Strugała, mayor of the town and municipality of Jaraczewo (Poland) and Mr Emil Drăghici, mayor of Vulcana-Băi (Romania).

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EA Members to adopt political priorities for the 2020-2025 mandate

After a detailed discussion during an Extraordinary meeting on 3 February the European Alliance will on 11 February adopt their political priorities for the 7th term of office of the European Committee of the Regions.

No different from other years, the group remains devoted to a more democratic, decentralised and inclusive European Union, closer to its citizens. In its efforts to contribute to this goal, our group has identified seven key areas of concern for the EU during the upcoming mandate. The group has committed to making

continuous efforts to improve the EU's competitiveness, sustainability and inclusiveness, support the empowerment of its citizens, and boost investment in its culture and in territorial cohesion. Equally, the political priorities stress the importance of the subsidiarity principle to guarantee that decisions are taken at the level of government closest to citizens.

In addition, particular attention will be given to the EU rural agenda and sustainable food policy, especially the need for additional efforts in developing sus-

tainable rural development strategies. Our group also believes that cooperation with, and promotion of stability, prosperity and democracy in Europe's neighbouring countries must be enhanced and that local and regional authorities in those countries need to be supported adequately. Finally, the EA group opted for a very comprehensive approach to climate neutrality, as we strongly believe that a robust green response is required to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent.

"The European Union needs to re-engage with citizens in our regions and cities and our group want to make sure the European Committee of the Regions is pivotal to this process";

Cllr Kieran McCarthy, Cork City Councilor and newly elected President of the European Alliance group

A brief overview of the activities organised by the EA group in the past half-mandate

The second half of the 2015-2020 term of office was marked by the presidency and leadership of Mr Karl Vanlouwe. Mr Vanlouwe's priorities included a strong commitment to decentralization and self-determination in the EU and he will be remembered as one of the strongest champions of respect for fundamental rights and democracy in Catalonia. As a former CoR rapporteur on the integration of migrants and refugees, he was also active in debates on migration and integration.

What follows is a brief overview of some of our main achievements with a strong commitment to intensifying our work and playing an even bigger role in the CoR and EU policy-making during the new term of office.

Events



EA members Nanette Maupertuis and Gilles Simeoni in Aiacciu, Corsica. April 2017

During the past two and a half years, we organized a number of thematic events where stakeholders, policy-makers, representatives of the civil society and politicians exchanged views on some of our group's political priorities. They include:

Extraordinary EA group meeting and seminar "**EU policies for island, mountain and rural areas**", Aiacciu (Corsica), April 2017

EA Bureau study visit to the Irish Parliament on the **revitalization of small town centres**, Dublin and Nenagh (Ireland), September 2017

European Week of Regions and Cities Workshop "**Strengthening the role of Nations and Regions in Economic development**", Brussels, October 2017

Seminar "**Promoting cultural and linguistic heritage of Europe**", Brussels, June 2018

European Week of Regions and Cities workshop "**Local and regional authorities fostering energy transition policies**", Brussels, October 2018

Seminar "**Investment and Cohesion in Europe's Regions and local communes: promoting innovation and Cultural Heritage**", Bucharest (Romania), November 2018

Study visit on **passive housing and environmentally friendly and energy-efficient pilot project for social houses**, Pamplona (Navarre), January 2019

Extraordinary EA group meeting and seminar "**Helping towns and villages driving rural revival in the EU**", Mohill (Ireland), February 2019

Workshop on the **role of women in the fight against climate change**, in cooperation with the Government of Navarre, Brussels, May 2019

European Week of Regions and Cities Seminar "**The future of European Territorial Cooperation**", Brussels, October 2019

Primary and Secondary Schools Competitions



EA group workshop Policies, women and climate change. Brussels, May 2019

Despite being busy with turbulent political developments, we continued promoting the EU and its links with its regions among our young citizens through our annual primary and secondary schools painting and essay-writing competitions. Every year we have been more and more amazed by the amount of talent and creativity expressed and we are very much looking forward to continuing this beautiful and creative endeavor in the future.



EA Group meeting in Mohill, Ireland. February 2019

Bosch: Catalonia wants to serve as a hub for dialogue and cooperation in the Mediterranean



Mr Alfred Bosch i Pascual

On 23 January, Barcelona hosted the 11th plenary session of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM).

During the opening panel, EA member and Catalan Minister of Foreign Action, Institutional Relations and Transparency, Mr Alfred Bosch i Pascual welcomed the delegates and presented Catalonia's ambition to serve as a hub for dialogue and cooperation in the Mediterranean. Mr Bosch noted that it is more important than ever that all actors in the Mediterranean make

the effort to understand each other better and strengthen dialogue and cooperation in order to work together on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. He also singled out respect for human rights and democracy as key components of such cooperation.

The EA group was also represented by Dr Uno Silberg, member of Kose Municipality Council (Estonia) and Mr Emil Drăghici, mayor of Vulcana-Băi (Romania).

Cllr Stenson discusses rural development and smart villages

On 22 January, Cllr Enda Stenson, CoR rapporteur on Smart Villages and rural revival participated in the 10th meeting of the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) Thematic Group, which focused on Smart Villages and renewable energy communities.

After the meeting, Cllr Stenson said: "We met to discuss how renewable energy commu-

nities and Smart Villages could benefit from each other and imagine how the future CAP strategic plans and Cohesion Policy could effectively support an energy transition in rural areas. We also discussed how to obtain an understanding of the opportunities in the new policy landscape for supporting the creation and development of renewable energy communities in EU rural areas."



Cllr Enda Stenson



Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski

Truskolaski at the Sustainable Urban Mobility Conference

On 23 January 2020, Mayor of Białystok Tadeusz Truskolaski took part in the conference 'Sustainable Urban Mobility: How To Get People Out Of Their Cars?' co-organised by the CoR's Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget (COTER) and International Association of Public Transport (UITP). Transport accounts for 27% of total EU greenhouse gasses emissions, 72% of which is generated by the road transport

sector. The aim of the conference was to hear from public authorities and policy-makers what can be done to encourage and facilitate sustainable mobility while ensuring that citizens' needs are met. Under Mr Truskolaski's leadership, Białystok introduced a low-carbon economy plan until 2020 and a number of sustainable transport initiatives such as the creation of a city bike network.

McCarthy on the future of the Urban Agenda at the Cities Forum

On 30 and 31 January, Cork city Councillor and CoR's rapporteur on the Implementation Assessment on the EU Urban Agenda Kieran McCarthy took part in the 4th Cities Forum "Together we shape a sustainable urban future", held in Porto, where he spoke on the panel "Shaping together the future of sustain-

able urban development and the Urban Agenda for the EU". Cities Forum is an event where local, national and European level stakeholders meet in order to discuss: cohesion policy, future of Urban Agenda for Europe, climate change, new technologies and innovation in cities, urban housing and employment.



Cllr Kieran McCarthy

Mikel Irujo organizes major event on social innovation in Pamplona

On 6 and 7 February 2020, Director-General for External Action of the Government of Navarre Mr Mikel Irujo organised a Knowledge Exchange Platform (KEP) event on social innovation. The event was organized in Pamplona, Navarre, a region that in 2020 was awarded the title of the European Entrepreneurial Region 2020 (EER), with the Social Economy Plan being one of the main contributors.

The event focused primarily on the exchange of experiences, successes and learnings about the construction of a regional comprehensive ecosystem for social innovation. Participants attended different working sessions and presented 15 concrete European experiences with the ultimate aim of gathering concrete output that can be used by local and regional authorities as a guide to design comprehensive social innovation ecosystems.



Mr Mikel Irujo Amezaga



CoR/EA group primary school art competition 'My region, my family' exhibition in CoR

Each year the EA group organises a Primary Schools art competition "My Region, My..." This was no different in 2019 when it focused on "My Family". A competition which embraces what is similar but different across regions and lives by the ethos "United in diversity".

EA group annual Secondary Schools Competition



Winning participants of the EA Secondary Schools Competition in the CoR. Brussels, June 2019



EA members Povilas Zagunis and Karl Vanlouwe with students from the Mykolas Antanaitis Gymnasium in Krekenava, Lithuania