

## European Alliance Group

### Delivery on behalf of our regions and cities is now more important than ever, says Kieran McCarthy, Cork city councillor and president of the EA Group

There are many social and economic challenges of our time. Regions and cities across the EU remain at the frontline of the response to such challenges – acting upon them, finding resolutions, whilst all the time moving forward in an ambitious and sustainable way. The recent coronavirus pandemic has also graphically illustrated how important local and regional authorities are to the lives of EU citizens.

Across Europe, presidents of regions, mayors and regional and local councillors have enormous amounts of knowledge and experience that can be shared – we must strive to feed such knowledge and experiences into present and future EU policies. I appreciate greatly the CoR's COVID-19 platform and also many of the initiatives which the EU has taken to ensure that national and regional governments have access to funding. The short term flexibility in certain programmes is welcome but we should not lose focus on the long term objectives of structural funds for our regions, cities and rural areas. We also welcome the EU recovery plan but we need to ensure that this is available to the level of governance closest to the citizens.



Mr Kieran McCarthy

Another crisis is also looming, namely the lack of progress in the EU – UK trade negotiations following Brexit. Without a serious engagement from the UK, we are very worried that regions across the European Union will suffer a second unnecessary and totally avoidable economic hit.

The role of local and regional governments has been clear throughout this crisis and it is vital they have a strong voice in the EU decision making system. The European Committee of the Regions and indeed our group are ready to work towards achieving progressive policy development on behalf of our citizens.

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## EA Group members at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19 pandemic



The corona pandemic hit the European regions and cities with an unanticipated speed and reach, and within days, life, as we knew it, changed. In addition to putting an enormous strain on medical service provision, it has created unprecedented socio-economic challenges threatening not only to people's

health but also their livelihoods. Aside from being key actors in monitoring spread of diseases locally, implementing national directives on public health measures and mobilizing all available fiscal and human resources to fight the pandemic, EA members search for solutions to ensure that no one is left behind during and in the aftermath of the pandemic.

At the beginning of the pandemic, we set up a dedicated page on our website where

members shared information on what they are experiencing and doing in their constituencies to tackle the health, economic and social challenges imposed by the pandemic. The result is a rich and easily accessible body of knowledge and diverse experiences gathered from the west of Ireland to the east of Poland and from Flanders to Corsica.

As the battle for economic recovery has started, we are sure we will be able to share more experiences and best practices.

"Across Europe, presidents of regions, mayors and regional and local councillors have enormous amounts of knowledge and experience that can be shared – we must strive to feed such knowledge and experiences into present and future EU policies."

Kieran McCarthy, president of the EA Group



## CIVEX

### Kóbor: "Dialogue with citizens and better connections with the Neighbourhood among EA group's priorities"

The new mandate of the Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX) will see a number of important developments and potentially big changes in how the EU works and positions itself within its neighbourhood and the world. With the COVID-19 crisis, we could already see the new realities and challenges we hadn't thought were likely before. The pandemic has raised many questions related to the EU's decision-making, competences, finances, values, founding principles, geo-political positioning, its role in its neighbourhood, communication strategy, perception by its citizens, and many others. In some Member States, further tensions have arisen between the central government and local governments, and the principle of subsidiarity has been further violated.

It is clearer than ever that we need a comprehensive deliberative process and an all-encompassing debate on where and how we see the EU in the future.

Consequently, as a group, one of our main priorities will be the establishment of a permanent mechanism for consultations with citizens. The opinion on this topic is currently being prepared by our member Declan McDonnell, after being started with excellent work

by Ms Mireia Borrrell Porta, and it is due to be adopted in October. It will propose concrete measures on how to establish and institutionalise two-way communication between citizens and EU institutions and ensure that the citizens understand and influence the ways EU affects their daily lives.

As a councillor in the city of Pécs, which is very close to the Balkan region, I will push for the CoR to promote greater cooperation with Europe's neighbourhood, in Eastern Europe, in the Mediterranean and in the enlargement candidate and potential candidate countries of the Western Balkans. Many of the connections which existed historically between the regions now in the EU and those outside of it have been severed and we must re-establish them to truly promote cooperation and European values with our counterparts from neighbouring countries. Therefore, we will strongly support and promote initiatives to forge closer ties with the EU's neighbouring regions which harbour specific national, ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic characteristics and have close historical links to those inside the EU.

On the subject of values, we will insist that the founding principles of the EU, to which our



Mr József Kóbor

countries willingly and enthusiastically subscribed, be upheld and respected and that the freedoms the EU gave us be not taken for granted or questioned for the sake of narrow political interests. Throughout this mandate, we will strongly promote the protection of democracy and the rule of law in EU's member states, as well as in partner countries.

Finally, we cannot ignore the issue of migration. We need a pan-European response to ensure that we protect our borders and safety and, at the same time, offer help and asylum to those who need it. Therefore, we will support the reform of the Dublin Regulation and look into ideas to tackle the root of the problem so that we, as Europeans, can respond adequately.

## COTER

### Maupertuis: "Reinforcing the EU's financial capacity and strengthening cohesion policy are key measures to combat the impact of COVID crisis and the economic recession"



Ms Nanette Maupertuis

Following the presentation of the new Multiannual Financial Framework and EU recovery plan, Ms Nanette Maupertuis, EA group coordinator in the COTER commis-

sion and member of the Executive Council of Corsica is convinced that, in the current situation, the most appropriate response to the crisis is to equip the EU with more resources.

"Reinforcing the EU's financial capacity would send a strong message to the populists and Member States must endorse a bold package that is commensurate to people's expectations. Otherwise, we could face a real catastrophe which could threaten the EU as a whole.

As part of a more ambitious EU budget, it is important we fight for a stronger Cohesion Policy as economies in many European regions, such as insular regions, are severely weakened.

Corsica itself will be hit hard by the reduction of economic activities in the field of tourism, an important source of revenue on the island, and I welcome that the new EU recovery plan is based on cohesion, which will make it possible to support tourism activities.

I also believe it is crucial to promote employment and help the job market while investing in sustainable mobility and digitalisation.

It is important to evolve and move towards a new economic model, supporting a green and digital transition, which would be more in tune with people's expectations", Ms Maupertuis added

## ECON

# Truskolaski: “From trade to the Single Market and COVID-19 recovery, a busy agenda lies ahead for the ECON Commission”



Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski

The Commission for Economic Policy (ECON) 's new mandate begins with an exceptionally busy agenda. Together with other political groups' representatives, EA coordinator Tadeusz Truskolaski has been promoting CoR's priorities in the areas of trade and globalisation; local and regional government and

the economic governance in the EMU; Sustainable development goals; SMEs, Entrepreneurship and Industry; the Single market and competition policy. Mr Truskolaski also supported the continuation of the innovative European Entrepreneurial Region award and the work of the Regional Hubs.

Speaking about the impact of the coronavirus on ECON's remit, Mr Truskolaski said: "The COVID-19 pandemic is having substantial repercussions on European economies. In my own area, the city of Białystok, SMEs and citizens are the most likely to suffer, due to their limited resources. An increasing number of public administration areas are digitalized in order to avoid direct contact; the city has launched toll-free remote access lines for contacting specialists including legal advisors and psychologists; and we refrain from imposing fines on residents who do not meet the deadlines related to cer-

tain public payments. As president of the Union of Polish Metropolises (UPM) and member of the Association of Polish Cities and the Association of Polish Counties, I am also actively involved in supporting swift legal changes that will help local government units to function during the COVID-19 pandemic."

"ECON will prepare regular economic bulletins on recent research, articles and discussions on the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic in Europe and on the different economic response measures planned and implemented at EU, national, regional and local level. I find this initiative very useful and the study of the different cases can help us to proceed with the good practices better and quicker. In this light, I can say that, as a group, we welcome the new EC proposal for a €750 billion Recovery Fund", Mr Truskolaski added.

## ENVE

# Gryffroy: “Innovation is key to achieving climate neutrality”

The Green Deal, the EU's growth strategy which includes sectorial initiatives aimed at achieving climate neutrality, is making headlines on a daily basis.

The European Commission, with its freshly released proposal for a Recovery Instrument and revamped long-term budget 2021-2027 is committing a great share of the total financial firepower to achieving a Just Transition. New initiatives in the areas of building renovation, sustainable mobility, renewables energy will be central to support a greener recovery.

The EA Group believes that EU's response must be strong, whilst taking into account the affordability of measures for our citizens and the competitive position of our enterprises.

"Regions and cities are at the forefront in promoting green investments in new technologies and sustainable mobility," said EA Group's ENVE coordinator and member of the Flemish Parliament Andries Gryffroy.

Mr Gryffroy added that "we are committed to helping LRAs decrease their carbon footprint: Flanders itself supports the objective of a climate-neutral Europe by 2050 and has already announced in the Flemish Climate Strategy 2050 that it will be able to contribute 85 percent CO2 reduction itself".

The EU climate law will also be an important piece of legislation as it will provide investors with a stable and predictable framework to plan investments and will confirm the EU's ambitions.

It is important we link ambition with pragmatism, base our action on an evidence-based assessment of the economic and social situation in the EU and focus on innovation without bias.

In order to achieve the objective of climate neutrality, the EU must use the force of its innovative potential and focus on new approaches that would promote small businesses and real job creation while ensuring the transition is just and fair.



Mr Andries Gryffroy

"We look forward to a wave of EU recovery initiatives and massive plans of building renovation which will make it possible to achieve higher energy efficiency in hospitals, schools and social housing and create new jobs, thus driving EU recovery from the local level", Mr Gryffroy added.

## NAT

# Strugała: “We need to develop a real and deliverable Rural Strategy”

Recent developments illustrate the continuing and renewed significance of the NAT Commission's remit for European regions and cities. This is a time in which the European Union faces a growing urgency to prevent and reverse the depletion of natural resources, to adapt to rapid technological advances, and to address the consequences of the demographic change. As such, the

NAT commission has a unique window of opportunity to use the power of its cross-sector policy expertise to strengthen the CoR's position in these pressing debates.

Mr Dariusz Strugała, mayor of Jaraczewo, Poland and EA Group's NAT coordinator underlined that the NAT's priorities are key socio-political challenges. These are to support viable agricultural production, sustainable

maritime ecosystems, innovative health interventions, sustainable food policies all across the production and consumption chain, and promote low impact tourism. Such matters affect the daily lives of 500 million EU citizens in terms of food, wellbeing, and livelihood.

"Nevertheless, as a Board Member of the Main Rural Authorities Association in Poland I am very happy that



Mr Dariusz Strugała

the main priority for NAT is the Rural Agenda this year. We need to have new and valuable initiatives to develop a long-term vision for rural areas. The CoR has for a long time asked for the needs of rural areas to be recognised and addressed by a proper EU policy”, he added.

“The CoR’s quick first reactions to the COVID-19 crisis should be welcomed”, Mr Strugała said, “From the NAT perspective, we have called for the urgent use of the European Union’s budget and intervention capacity for our citizens. We will propose an opinion on the special Mechanism to assure fast health measures in the moments of crises.”

Mr Strugała further highlighted that “the unprecedented shock of COVID-19 requires immediate action and a bold economic and social recovery plan for the European Union, based on solidarity, sustainability, resilience and social justice, in line with the European Green Deal programme and the digital transformation programme”.

“In these difficult times, our priority as regional and local authorities is to continue to provide healthcare and public services to our communities, while making

sure that no-one is left behind. We are working hard to support the local economy, save jobs, create new employment opportunities, help all companies continue to work and provide quality education. Our work on the ground is complementary to the efforts undertaken at EU and Member State level, but more needs to be done, in particular in terms of solidarity across borders. The crisis has clearly shown our deficiencies. In Poland for example there was a lack of everything, especially in small hospitals. My municipality was obliged to provide PLN 50.000 for necessary protective equipment and other measures.”

Finally, Mr Strugała concluded by saying “I am happy to see that in the new MFF proposal the European Commission presented in May, €15 billion in additional support is foreseen for rural development which is a longstanding claim of the CoR.”

## SEDEC

### Irujo: “Sustainable work, quality education and strong support for R&I amongst the SEDEC priorities for the next mandate”

Our aim in the coming period, especially after the heavy impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had and will have on the EU’s economy, must be to improve employment and social policies in order to provide decently-paid and sustainable jobs. In particular, our young people need and deserve a helping hand. But we must also support those regions that are strongly affected by demographic change. More attention needs to go to the social economy and social innovation, as they may offer a solution for many of today’s societal challenges.

As accessible quality education is key to socio-economic development, identifying skill shortages, focusing on re-skilling and up-skilling and promoting mobility while, at the same time, offering solutions to brain drain will be of utmost importance.

An innovative working environment can attract people to use the skills they acquired. To achieve this, a

substantial support for research and innovation is crucial. The keys to our economic recovery, empowering of our health systems, achievement of our climate goals and transformation of our industries all lie in research and innovation. That is why we will insist that research and innovation be allocated adequate funding in the next programming period and that those funds are deployed in the best possible way. There are some positive signals coming from the European Commission, such as the proposal to increase funding for the Horizon Europe programme, but that might still not be enough given the fundamental importance of new technologies for our ambitions across all policy areas.

Finally, let us further promote our cultural heritage as it inspires creativity, ignites the concept of active citizenship, and is one of the important foundations underpinning strategies for urban and rural develop-



Mr Mikel Irujo

ment. Creative sector has been among those hit the hardest by the pandemic and it will be challenging to secure enough resources for its adequate recovery but we must not forget that our identities are rooted in our cultures.

## Update on the ongoing opinions drafted by EA group members

Mr Declan McDonnell (Galway City Council, Ireland) has been appointed new rapporteur on the opinion “Local and Regional Authorities in a permanent dialogue with citizens” after Ms Mireia Borrrell Porta’s mandate expired in April. The opinion is scheduled for adoption at the CoR plenary in October.

NAT commission members will exchange views on Mr Enda Stenson’s (Leitrim County Council, Ireland)

opinion “EU strategy for Rural Revival” at the NAT meeting in June, while the adoption of the opinion is foreseen for the September NAT meeting and the December plenary session.

“Regional Innovation Scoreboard and its impact in regional place-based policies” prepared by Mr Mikel Irujo Amezaga (Director-General for External Action of the Government of Navarre) is fore-

seen for the July SEDEC meeting and the October plenary session.

Mayor of Białystok, Poland, Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski will present his opinion “Identifying and addressing barriers to the Single Market” at the ECON commission meeting in June and the plenary session in October.