

European Alliance Group

Empower the Regions and the EU will be a success

by Kieran McCarthy, President of the European Alliance Group

Cities and regions need to be at the heart of the delivery of the priorities outlined in the Commission President's State of the Union address. The delivery of the Commission President's targets can only be achieved in collaboration with the cities and regions. Many of the priorities outlined are common challenges for the over 95,000 local and regional authorities across Europe. We must be at the heart of the delivery process and the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) is willing to collaborate with the other EU institutions in the delivery of this vision.

The CoR has welcomed the Next Generation EU funding, has penned several opinions and continues to meet commissioners so that the challenges expressed by local and regional authorities can be heard. European Alliance members continue to lobby on policy priorities such as Rural Revival and delivery of broadband and the digital agenda; smart specialisation; smart villages; urban areas; capital markets union and the integration of migrants to name but a few.

Our group has been very clear that we need to support our cultural and tourism industry to help recovery from the current pandemic and this is why we are organising a seminar during this year's "European Week of Regions and Cities", an event

which will be online this year but will still remain a huge platform for regions and cities to cooperate and share experiences.



Cllr Kieran McCarthy

This year, as we take the first steps towards the Conference on the Future of Europe our primary schools art competition will have the title "My Region, My Europe" and we look forward to the wonderful depictions of art by the students which will be exhibited in Brussels during the December Plenary.

Now is not the time for opinions and reports to be put on the back burner or wait for a rainy day. This is the rainy day and action and practical steps for implementation are required. Empower the Regions and the EU will be a success.

CONTENT

Truskolaski: "Single Market is one of the EU's greatest achievements guaranteeing free movement of people, goods, services and capital"

Mikel Irujo's opinion on the Regional Innovation Scoreboard due to be adopted at the CoR Plenary

CoR plenary to vote on the proposal to establish a permanent dialogue with citizens

The European Alliance group welcomes the setting up of the CoR-UK Contact Group

ENVE discussed Andries Gryffroy's opinion on Green Deal assessment

CoR/EA Group launches 12th Primary Schools' Art Competition 2020 - "My Region, My Europe"

McCarthy and McDonnell call for respect for democracy, political rights and the role of local and regional authorities in Belarus

The EU begins on its eastern border

EA Group workshop: 'Promoting Regional Tourism recovery after the Pandemic: sharing experiences and know-how'

The tourism, hospitality, culture and arts sectors have been decimated by the COVID 19 pandemic, which has led to huge unemployment and uncertainty in these sectors. It is clear that every region of Europe has been affected and during this year's European Week of Regions and Cities, the European Alliance group intends to focus

its attention on how we can help economic recovery by promoting tourism.

Our seminar will be online but will include some high profile speakers such as Ms Zuhaila Demir, Flemish Minister for Justice and Enforcement, Environment, Energy and Tourism; Mr Patrick Torrent, president of the Network of European Regions

for a Sustainable and competitive Tourism (NECSTOUR) and Ms Nanette Maupertuis, President of the Corsican Tourism Agency.

This will be an interactive session so join us on <https://europa.eu/regions-and-cities> our event is scheduled for Thursday, 15 October 2020.

"Flanders is still hoping for a good trade agreement with the United Kingdom which would be in the interest of our SMEs and ports. Otherwise, the Brexit Adjustment Reserve must be sufficient to compensate the damage incurred on our economies, which is currently not the case"

Karl Vanlouwe, member of the Flemish Parliament and 1st vice president of the EA group

Truskolaski: "Single Market is one of the EU's greatest achievements guaranteeing free movement of people, goods, services and capital"



Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski

During the October 2020 Plenary session, the members of the European Committee of the Regions will adopt the opinion on Single Market Barriers Report and Single Market Enforcement Action Plan by Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski, Mayor of Białystok and the EA Coordinator for ECON Commission.

Mr Truskolaski emphasized that the European single market is one of the EU's greatest achievements, guaranteeing free movement of people, goods, services and capital throughout the Union and added: "Policy on the EU Single Market plays a key role in carrying out the strategy for sustainable growth and greater economic, social and territorial cohesion in the EU. The creation of a European single market stimulates trade and makes Europe more attractive for foreign investment. The European single market provides EUR 14 trillion in gross domestic product (GDP) annually, which ensures the functioning of the European economy and growth for Europeans."

As a previous rapporteur on small and medium-sized enterprises, Mr Truskolaski agrees with the European Commission that regulatory differences are particularly im-

portant for SMEs, including start-ups and scale-ups, innovators and promoters of new business models. "I would like to stress", he added, "that SMEs in particular have limited administrative and human resource capacities to be able to cope with complex red tape. A major barrier to cross-border cooperation in the Single Market is the A1 certificate, for which time-consuming formalities need to be completed when workers are posted, even for regular postings in a neighbouring country. These formalities could consequently considerably reduce cross-border activities and thus significantly hamper the functioning of the single market. In this regard, the CoR calls on the Commission to be proactive and, together with the EU legislators, ensure that the existing procedures for A1 certification in border regions are simplified".

Mikel Irujo's opinion on the Regional Innovation Scoreboard due to be adopted at the CoR Plenary

During the 140th Plenary session of the European Committee of the Regions, the members are set to adopt the opinion "Regional Innovation Scoreboard and its impact on place-based policies", drafted by Mr Mikel Irujo, EA group's SEDEC coordinator and Director General for Foreign Action in the Government of Navarre.

The Regional Innovation Scoreboard a comparative assessment of innovation performance of Europe's regions based on the methodology of the European Innovation Scoreboard and also containing contextual

data that can be used to analyse and compare structural economic, business and socio-demographic structure differences between regions.

In his opinion, Mr Irujo makes a number of suggestions on how future editions of the Scoreboard could be improved from the point of view of methodology and transparency and how it can increase its political impact and influence the development of regional innovation policies by developing synergies with some of the EU's key policies and programmes.



Mr Mikel Irujo Amezaga

CoR plenary to vote on the proposal to establish a permanent dialogue with citizens



Cllr Declan McDonnell

At the CoR's 140th Plenary session, which will be held from 12 to 14 October, the

members are due to vote on Cllr Declan McDonnell's opinion on establishing a permanent dialogue between citizens and the EU institutions, mediated by local and regional authorities.

In the opinion, Cllr McDonnell, who is a member of the Galway City Council and chair of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (Ireland) is proposing a way to organise and coordinate different mechanisms for direct consultations with citizens which already exist or will be set up at the local and regional level across the EU, and channel their results to the EU

institutions ensuring an appropriate feedback mechanism.

Cllr McDonnell expressed hopes that such a mechanism, once adopted by the CoR, can be tested and piloted during the Conference on the Future of Europe and also become a norm after the Conference is concluded.

Cllr McDonnell's proposal builds on the great work of Ms Mireia Borrrell Porta, former Director General for Foreign Relations in the government of Catalonia, who started developing the proposal in June 2019.

The European Alliance group welcomes the setting up of the CoR-UK Contact Group



Mr Karl Vanlouwe

The first meeting of the CoR-UK Contact Group, set up to maintain lines of com-

munication between local and regional authorities in the EU and the Devolved Nations and local authorities in the UK, was held by video conference on 22 September as a preparatory meeting for politicians from the 27 member states of the EU. Members were addressed by Michel Barnier, the Chief Negotiator for the European Union, and by Kati Piri (NL/PES), the European Parliament's co-rapporteur on negotiations for a new partnership with the United Kingdom.

The European Alliance 1st Vice President Karl Vanlouwe welcomed the setting up of the contact group and highlighted the need

to preserve peace on the Island of Ireland which is why the UK's Internal Markets Bill is so worrying. Mr Vanlouwe also said that a trade deal would be good for Flanders and also good for Europe and this needs to be a priority.

Finally, Mr Vanlouwe asked that the Brexit adjustment fund be sufficient to aid regions which will be most impacted by Brexit and highlighted the need to remain in active contact with the Devolved Nations, offering our group's help in the contacts with the Scottish and Welsh Parliaments as well as the Northern Ireland Assembly.

ENVE discusses Andries Gryffroy's opinion on Green Deal assessment

In December 2019 the European Commission announced the Green Deal with the objective of resetting the Commission's commitment to tackle climate change while outlining a new EU growth strategy to transform the EU into a fair, resource-efficient and competitive economy paving the way to achieving climate neutrality.

The German Presidency requested the CoR to produce an opinion assessing the European Green Deal and the impact of climate change on regions and EA Group coordinator Andries Gryffroy was appointed rapporteur.

During the exchange of views, held on 9 September at ENVE commission meeting in presence of Energy commissioner Kadri

Simson and a representative of the German Presidency Ms Nina Alsen., Mr Gryffroy who is also member of the Flemish Parliament and energy spokesperson for the N-VA party said: "The Green Deal could be instrumental to achieve climate goals as long as it promotes a balanced and targeted approach which takes into account the economic and social situation in the regions and prioritises sectors with more job-creating potential while minimising the costs."

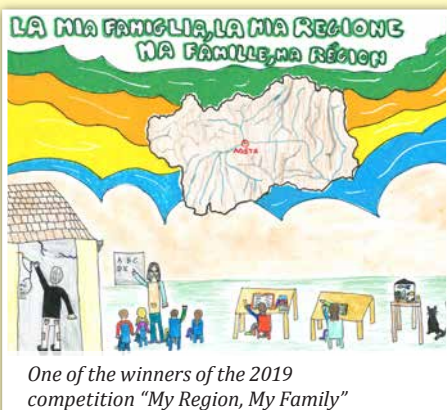
He also underlined the importance of establishing an inclusive governance system in accordance with regions' remits and competences. "A top down approach would make the Green Deal fail. The National Recovery and Resilience plans will have to be

able to respond to the specific needs of territories in order to ensure their effectiveness. Local and regional authorities must have a greater say in their definition and implementation, in line with the principle of subsidiarity", Mr Gryffroy added.



Mr Andries Gryffroy

CoR/EA Group launches 12th Primary Schools' Art Competition 2020 - "My Region, My Europe"



One of the winners of the 2019 competition "My Region, My Family"

For the 12th consecutive year, members of the European Alliance group have decided to run our popular Primary Schools' Art Competition which was launched to nominated schools in late September 2020. The theme this year is 'My Region, My Europe'.

The competition is aimed at the age group 6-12 years. The theme is broadly for children to describe aspects of their region in the context of Europe. This is especially relevant this year as the year of the Conference of the Future of Europe and tumultuous events such as the COVID-19

pandemic and Brexit. The children may address how all kinds of topical issues have affected them in a regional and European context and are asked to write a caption for the drawings.

Three winning drawings from each nominated school will be exhibited together with their captions in the Committee of the Regions during the Plenary Session week beginning 7 December 2020. As always, we look forward to enjoying original and colourful artwork from our talented young people.

McCarthy and McDonnell call for respect for democracy, political rights and the role of local and regional authorities in Belarus

McCarthy and McDonnell call for the respect for democracy, political rights and the role of local and regional authorities in Belarus

During the CoR Bureau meeting held by video conference on 11 September, CoR members adopted a resolution on the situation in Belarus in which they launched an appeal to the Belarusian authorities to ensure the respect for fundamental values, human rights and freedoms, and strongly condemned all violence and disproportionate state actions against peaceful protesters.

In the Declaration, CoR members called on the local authorities in Belarus to seize the opportunity to bridge the existing confidence gap between institutions and cit-

izens and pointed out to the potential of the Conference of the Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP), a CoR-run platform which provides an institutional communication channel with locally-elected representatives in Eastern Partnership countries, including Belarus, and promotes local and regional initiatives promoting sustainable territorial development and decentralisation reforms.

At the same time, the Declaration calls on the European Commission to ensure that a re-orientation of financial assistance will not weaken the capacity of local and regional authorities in Belarus to connect with citizens and to strengthen the resilience of communities, already strongly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

EA group's president, Kieran McCarthy supported the Declaration and stressed the importance of dialogue and discussion both inside the EU and with Belarusian local and regional authorities in order to overcome the current democracy deficit and the crackdown on peaceful protests.

Meanwhile, during the September CIVEX commission debate with the European Parliament's Standing Rapporteur on Belarus, Petras Auštrevičius, Cllr Declan McDonnell invited the CoR and other EU bodies to support Belarusian local and regional authorities and promote the importance of their role. Also, Cllr McDonnell called on Belarus to organise free and fair elections with credible international scrutiny.

The EU begins on its eastern border

by Mr Krzysztof Iwaniuk, Mayor of Terespol, Poland

The small commune of Terespol is situated between Berlin, Warsaw, Minsk and Moscow on the European A-2 route. Since 2004 and Poland's accession to the EU, this is where the border between two political and economic systems has been. This is where the European Union begins from the east.

The border on the Bug River, which now separates Poland and Belarus, was established as a result of the Yalta agreements in 1945. Previously, we had lived in central Poland, which meant that after World War II, the Bug divided those living in the east who subsequently found themselves on the territory of the USSR, and us on the western side of the Bug who remained within the Polish borders.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, a Polish president Lech Wałęsa opened a monument of solidarity in our commune which con-

tained an authentic fragment of the Berlin Wall, donated by our German friends. This new "Berlin Wall" on the Bug river was to be a warning that such divisions in Europe should never exist again. Yet today, despite being in the centre of Europe, there is still no so-called "local border traffic" that would facilitate neighbourly relations in the immediate vicinity of the border.

It is unbelievable that in today's global world it is possible for the border crossing not to become more smooth over the past thirty years despite modern infrastructure and a significant increase in the number of border officers. Crossing it is an unbelievable nightmare, especially for those who are doing it for the first time.

I am convinced that it is worth strengthening the policy of a 'good neighbourly' Poland and the Eastern Neighbourhood policy of the EU, especially in the border area. This is all the more important as there are areas such as ecology, culture and business that cannot be closed off by a border.

Our local government sees the development of this eastern border of the European Union as an opportunity for the accelerated development of small businesses in the economically neglected parts of eastern Poland and for reversing the trend of rapid depopulation of our areas.

We, the inhabitants of the border areas on both sides of the river, do not want a new Berlin Wall on the Bug river.



Warsaw Bridge in Terespol which connects Poland and Belarus