

European Alliance Group

Regions and Cities must be given the tools to deliver projects for our citizens

by Cllr Kieran McCarthy, President of the European Alliance Group

The European Alliance group hopes the global agreement reached for the EU budget 2021-2027 will shortly be ratified. Mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that Regions and Cities can enact programmes, which will benefit citizens and lead to a faster recovery after this pandemic. The European Parliament's role in achieving an extra €15 billion for flagship projects covering research, health, climate and digital transitions and support for young people is a very welcome change.

Many of the European Alliance members have also promoted the importance of ensuring food security through CAP and allowing Rural Regions achieve their development potential.

These subjects are crucial and it is great to see two EA Group opinions linked to budget priorities on the CoR Plenary agenda which are focussed on rural areas and the impact of climate change on regions.

As a group we have always promoted the role and value of our young people and when I see the fantastic art of our young students submitted to this year's "My



Cllr Kieran McCarthy

region, my Europe" EA group Primary Schools Art Competition, it shows that what unites us and what makes Europe rich is its cultural, linguistic and regional diversity. It is something to treasure as well as being clearly what the European Committee of the Regions is about – unity in diversity.

As we close a year which has brought huge difficulty to every corner of Europe and indeed the world, let us look forward to a fresh start in 2021 where we can protect our vulnerable and create a recovery which will be fair to our citizens. We wish you all health and happiness for the future. Merry Christmas.

EA group hosts lunchtime briefing "Impact of the pandemic on regional airports and steps towards recovery"

Regional airports across Europe have seen the numbers of flights reduce by up to 70% due to the pandemic. These airports are the link with the rest of the EU and have a huge impact on tourism.

With this in mind, EA President Cllr Kieran McCarthy hosted a briefing on the

impact of the pandemic on regional airports and steps towards recovery with the Director General of EUROCONTROL, Mr Eamonn Brennan. This briefing looked at the impact the reduction of flights has had as well some suggestions towards recovery. A full report is on www.ea.cor.europa.eu.



Mr Eamonn Brennan

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"The EU must develop a strategy for rural areas to make those communities places that you can live, work and grow old – we finally have an opportunity to give rural areas the tools to make sure this is achieved"

Cllr Enda Stenson, CoR rapporteur on the EU strategy for Rural Revival

European Alliance members actively engage in the 18th European Week of Cities and Regions

The 18th European Week of Regions and Cities (EWRC), due to the extraordinary circumstances, convened online from 5 to 22 October 2020. The event gathered 800 partners in 50 virtual sessions across three weekly themes: citizens' empowerment, green Europe, and cohesion and cooperation. European Alliance Group members participated in 22 sessions as speakers or organizers. These sessions focused on the themes of green and smart innovation and rural and urban development, evidence informed policy making, citizens' participation, sustainable and resilient development, economic recovery following Covid-19, including cultural and tourism sectors' recovery strategies.

The European Alliance Group hosted the session 'How to promote the recovery of regional tourism after COVID-19' that gathered a panel facilitated by president Cllr Kieran McCarthy from the Cork City Council, Ireland. The mul-

ti-stakeholder panel included EA member Ms Nanette Maupertuis, President of the Corsican Tourism Agency, Ms Zuhail Demir, the Flemish Minister for Justice and Enforcement, Environment, Energy and Tourism, Mr Momot Milosz, Deputy Head of the "Tourism, Textiles and Creative Industries" Unit from the European Commission Directorate General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, Mr Patrick Torrent, the Catalan Tourist Board Executive Director and President of the Network of European Regions for a Sustainable Competitive Tourism, as well as Ms Marilyn Reddan, the Head of Programme of the Galway Capital of Culture 2020. The panellists discussed sector recovery opportunities emerging at the European and local level, sharing a sentiment that it was important to capitalize on the good work championed by the local and regional governments and actors, and to promote a cross-regional and multi-stake-

holder collaboration to sustain and rebuild the sector (more information is available on our website).

Meanwhile, the EA group rapporteurs - Declan McDonnell and Mikel Irujo Amezaga were invited to speak on their respective opinions - Local and Regional authorities in the permanent dialogue with citizens and Regional Innovation Scoreboard and its impacts in regional place-based policies, which were adopted at the 140th CoR Plenary that convened 12-14 of October in parallel to the EWRC. Mr Irujo spoke at the event organized by the European Commission and the Joint Research Centre Resilience of EU innovation ecosystems while Mr McDonnell presented his proposal for a permanent dialogue with citizens at the workshop Innovating citizens participation, emphasizing the need to reach out to those citizens who are usually hard to reach, listen to their needs and ensure feedback between authorities and citizens.

Cllr Enda Stenson, rapporteur on EU strategy for Rural Revival calls for a concrete policy framework for Rural Agenda

During the 141st plenary session of the Committee of the Regions, members adopted Cllr Enda Stenson's opinion on the EU strategy for Rural Revival. During the debate, Cllr Stenson highlighted that rural and intermediate areas account for 88% of the EU's territory, are home to 55% of its population, generate 43% of its gross value added and host 56% of its jobs. Rural development is therefore extremely important to the Committee of the Regions, and a vital tool for achieving the territorial cohesion objective enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty.

Cllr Stenson underlined "the new long-term vision for rural areas should be transformed into a concrete policy framework – the Rural Agenda. The Rural Agenda should propose a set of integrated policies that enable and empower rural communities to turn

challenges into advantages; these challenges include decarbonisation, climate change, digitalisation, sustainable mobility and fair job and income opportunities, generational change and social innovation".

The opinion also argues that the Rural Agenda should ensure that mutually beneficial rural-urban linkages are integrated into all EU policies in line with territorial cohesion objectives by making the most of the strong interdependencies between rural and urban areas.

Presenting the opinion, Cllr Stenson said "We need to combat depopulation and social exclusion by promoting the smart villages initiative and social innovation and closing the digital divide. I would like to strongly highlight the objective for formulating a true agenda for rural revival which must incorpo-



Cllr Enda Stenson

rate the following: support sustainable and vibrant rural communities, support enterprise, employment and job creation, improve digital and infrastructure connectivity, maximise the potential of rural tourism in a healthy and diverse natural and agricultural landscape and embrace rural areas' creativity and cultural potential".

EA members fostering connections with local and regional authorities in the Western Balkans

Every autumn, EA group members are active in fostering connections with the EU's neighbourhood and enlargement countries, participating in meetings with their peers from the Western Balkans and Turkey in the framework of the CoR's various Working Group and Joint Consultative Committees. Due to the COVID pandemic,

this year's meetings are being held exclusively online.

Mr Miloslav Repaský, member of the regional parliament of the Prešov Self-Governing Region (Slovakia), took part at the meeting of the Working Group on the Western Balkans, held on 5 November on

focused on handling of the Covid-19 pandemic in Kosovo.

On 18 November, Mr Bronius Markauskas, Mayor of Klaipėda (Lithuania) discussed the recovery and lessons learnt during the Covid-19 with representatives of local and regional authorities and civil society from Montenegro.



Mr Miloslav Repaský and Mr Bronius Markauskas

CoR Plenary to adopt Gryffroy's opinion on Green Deal assessment and impact of climate change on regions



Mr Andries Gryffroy

On 8-10 December, the CoR Plenary Session will adopt Mr Andries Gryffroy's opinion on the Green Deal assessment: the impact of climate change on regions.

In his opinion, Mr Gryffroy, member of the Flemish Parliament, highlights the key role of local and regional authorities in ensuring the transition to a climate neutral Europe.

"To achieve climate neutrality, the Green Deal must be shaped bottom up and have regions and cities at its core", said Mr Gryffroy ahead of the CoR Plenary. "The role of local and regional authorities in tackling climate change is widely recognised. However, this is not reflected in governance and funding mechanisms", Mr Gryffroy added, calling for cities and regions' plans and contributions to be taken into account in every phase of the process in a continuous and structured manner.

"We request that mandatory consultations of local and regional authorities are extended to all areas of

the Green Deal and that subnational governments are fully engaged in the development and implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans while being granted easier and direct access to funding".

Moreover, he calls for the development of socio economic and environmental indicators seeking cost efficient approaches, synergies and complementarities building on existing mechanisms.

"We propose a European Regional Scoreboard to track the progress in the implementation of the Green Deal and recovery plans locally, but also as a knowledge tool to help represent the diversity of territories' needs, identifying and replicating best practices, including finance-ready pilot actions at the local and subnational level".

McDonnell pushing for a permanent dialogue with citizens

At its October plenary session, the CoR unanimously adopted Cllr Declan McDonnell's (Galway City Council, Ireland) opinion on establishing a mechanism for a permanent dialogue between the EU and citizens, mediated by local and regional authorities.

Since the adoption, Cllr McDonnell has participated in a number of events when he explained the concept and pushed for its piloting during the forthcoming Conference on the Future of Europe.

Cllr McDonnell presented the ideas outlined in his opinion at the opening session of the European Week of Regions and Cities in the presence of Ms Elisa Ferreira, European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, as well as on the EWRC workshop "Innovating citizen participation" together with Noelle O'Connell, Executive Director of the European Movement Ireland and other stakeholders.

Cllr McDonnell also explored links between one such mechanism and other EU policy priorities. On 21 October, he spoke on the links between citizen engagement and Green Deal at the "Green Deal Going

Local" event organised by the CoR, while on 16 November he took part in the kick-off event of the European Commission's European Citizens' Initiative Week "The European Citizens' Initiative 2.0: design, engage, impact!" when he called for greater visibility of the European Citizen Initiatives at the Committee of the Regions and suggested ECIs could become components of the future CitizEN network, the establishment of which is one of the pinnacles of his opinion.

On 25 November, Cllr McDonnell spoke at the "4 Motors for Europe" network's event "Four motors for Europe in a dialogue with citizens" with representatives of Catalonia, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, Baden-Württemberg and Lombardy.

On 11 December Cllr McDonnell will participate at the 3rd edition of the Citizen Engagement and Deliberative Democracy festival organised by the European Commission which this year coincides with the adoption of the European Democracy Action Plan.

Finally, establishment of a permanent dialogue with citizens and the CitizEN net-



Cllr Declan McDonnell

work has also been included in the CoR's communication priorities for the coming year.

Establishing a permanent dialogue with citizens will be one of the CoR's contributions to the Conference on the Future of Europe and we will continue pushing for it to be piloted during the process with a view of becoming a permanent mechanism afterwards.

CoR/EA Group's Primary Schools drawing competition 2020

Despite the difficult circumstances this year the EA Group is delighted to

announce we have been able to run the 11th version of our very popular and

indeed inspirational Primary School Art Competition.



We have been very happy to see the wonderful and colourful artworks sent to us by children aged 6-12 years from regions in 9 EU member states. This year we will be launching a virtual expo of the paintings and captions due to the constraints for physical events and this will be available to view online on the EA Group website in December

The theme for this year is 'My region, my Europe' and the positive and inclusive vision of these young people surely gives us optimism for the future of the EU and its diverse regions.