

European Alliance Group

The conference on the future of the EU needs to embrace citizens' views



Cllr Kieran McCarthy

On the 9th May we will celebrate Europe day which is also the 70th anniversary of the Schuman declaration which is the basis of the European Union we have today. When Ireland joined the European Communities in 1973, few people could foresee that it will evolve in the union we have today. This sense of community needs to be the centrepiece of the conference on the future of the EU. The conference cannot be a top down exercise but a

real participatory mechanism which embraces the needs of the citizens whether they are in Cork or Corsica; in Brussels or Białystok. Local and regional authorities can build bridges between the EU institutions and the citizen and I hope the European Committee of the Regions can be pivotal in these discussions.

As vaccinations roll out we need to look towards the recovery in our communities and allowing people a step towards normal life. This is why we welcome the Digital Green Certificate as a step to allow European citizens to visit family and friends in different regions or allow business to recover, in particular in our tourism sector.

The Next Generation EU is now available for boosting our recovery, this needs to be made available to finance local projects. This is how we will ensure local sustainable and green jobs which will help the social and economic development of our cities, villages and local communities. The CoR is a willing partner to make this happen.

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Finally, after a long way, there is light at the end of the tunnel and we need to #HoldFirm and #Staysafe,

Kieran

Let's get Europe vaccinated and restore confidence

The European Alliance Group and its members fully support the European vaccination campaign as one of the key ways of reopening Europe and ensuring recovery in our regions, cities, villages and rural communes. The objective of the European Committee of the Regions' campaign is to join communication efforts and tackle vaccine hesitancy through a coordinated and multilingual outreach by the CoR members towards citizens.

The European Alliance group wishes to see all regions having proportional and timely access to vaccines which will benefit rural areas and capital cities equally. Our members are committed to getting Europe's regions back to recovery as quickly as possible. Please get involved and promote the safe vaccines which have been approved using the following social media hashtags: #SafeVaccines, #VaccinesWork and #StaySafe.



"Every working person has a right to a decent living from their work. A common EU framework for the calculation of the minimum wage would help reverse depopulation trends in many economically disadvantaged areas of Europe."

Cllr Declan McDonnell, Galway City Council

EA and EFA presidents discuss joint approach on the Conference on the Future of Europe



Cllr Kieran McCarthy and Ms Lorena López de Lacalle

On 16 March, our president Kieran McCarthy held a meeting with the president of the European Free Alliance party, Ms Lorena López de Lacalle to discuss a joint approach on the Conference on the Future of Europe.

The presidents agreed to coordinate work on the Conference in the European Committee of the Regions, European Parliament and other relevant fora and promote our shared values and principles based on the respect for self-deter-

mination, multilingualism, gender equality, increased citizen participation in EU decision-making and more devolution of powers to local and regional levels.

EA group members are already active in the debates on the Conference. Cllr Declan McDonnell's proposal to establish a permanent mechanism for a dialogue with citizens was endorsed unanimously by the CoR plenary session in October 2020, while Karl Vanlouwe has been very vocal in insisting that the Conference must lead to an open and in-depth debate on subsidiarity, proportionality, efficiency and role of the regions in the EU. At the same time, József Kóbor, insisted on the pan-European character of the Conference and called for the inclusion of local and regional authorities and citizens from the enlargement countries in relevant debates.

Rural areas should not be left behind in the recovery plans



Cllr Enda Stenson

At the start of the Rural Vision Week, members of the NAT Commission of the Committee of the Regions have expressed concern that rural areas may benefit less from the European Union's plans to help rebuild a post-COVID-19

Europe that is greener, more digital and more resilient. This statement is supported by the European Parliament's Intergroup on Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas & Smart Villages, which strongly rejects any plan that does not follow the partnership principle and associates rural areas in the drafting.

The pandemic is serving to exacerbate many of the already existing problems in rural areas and highlighted once more the vulnerability of these regions, notably in terms of digital capacity, quality and delivery of health services, education, access to broadband, specific needs of the population, resilience of distribution chains, and innovation skills. A clear strategy is needed to avoid recovery plans worsening the gap between lagging rural communities and urban areas accelerating towards sustainability and digitalisation. Otherwise, we risk missing

a key economic and social growth opportunity for the whole Union as well as losing the consensus of future generations in the largest part of EU territories.

"The European institutions have to adequately fund the revival of rural areas – post Covid-19. Living in the North West of Ireland and being a full time farmer I have experienced the devastation that Covid-19 has imposed in rural areas, particularly in the hospitality, tourism, health and food sectors. We need further investment in critical infrastructure and job creation opportunities to bridge the gap between rural and Urban areas", said Cllr Enda Stenson, Member of Leitrim County Council and CoR Rapporteur on Smart Rural Areas and the Rural Agenda during the main Plenary Session of the Rural Vision Week representing the CoR position."

Gryffroy and McCarthy appointed Covenant of Mayors ambassadors to promote climate action locally



Mr Andries Gryffroy

On April 21st, the Covenant of Mayors organized a signing ceremony in order to promote the new Covenant to a wider audience and to renew their signatories' commitment in relation to climate action.

The European Commission decided to create, in addition to the Political Board, a second chamber with the aim of including a national angle to the work of the Covenant. The CoR has appointed 27 members for this Chamber, one per Member State to promote and reinforce the Covenant of Mayors

initiative in their own Member State, while enhancing role of regions, town and cities, in cooperation with the European Commission, the Covenant of Mayors Office and the National Associations, when relevant.

Kieran McCarthy, European Alliance Group President and Cork city councillor, and Andries Gryffroy, EA coordinator in the ENVE commission and members of the Flemish Parliament, have been appointed respectively Covenant Ambassadors for Ireland and Belgium.

Karl Vanlouwe's opinion on counter-terrorism to be adopted at CIVEX

On 11 May, CoR members will convene for the 8th meeting of the Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional & External Affairs (CIVEX) where they will debate the draft opinion on the EU Counter-Terrorism Agenda, prepared by our first vice president Karl Vanlouwe, member of the Flemish Parliament.

Building on the existing legislation and measures, the Agenda, published by the European Commission in December 2020, announces future proposals and actions to be taken by the Commission, member states and local and regional authorities in order to anticipate, prevent, and ensure protection and adequate response to terrorist threats.



Mr Karl Vanlouwe



Mr Mikel Irujo

SEDEC adopts Irujo's opinion on EU Social Economy Action Plan

On 22 April, members of the CoR's Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC) adopted Mr Mikel Irujo's draft opinion on the future EU Action Plan for Social Economy.

This outlook opinion sets out a number of concrete proposals to take into

account in the Action Plan which the Commission has committed the publishing by the end of this year, stressing that harnessing the full potential of social economy enterprises and organisations can ensure economic recovery, promote collective entrepreneurship and create high-quality jobs in the EU.

Tadeusz Truskolaski appointed CoR's rapporteur on Competition Policy

During the last ECON meeting, which took place on the 20th of April, members agreed to nominate Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski, EA Coordinator and the Mayor of Białystok (Poland) as the Rapporteur on the EC Report on Competition Policy 2020. Competition policy is of particular interest this year as state aid rules have been drastically relaxed, albeit temporarily, in an

attempt to mitigate the devastating economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. A possible consequence of this is that the differences between richer and poorer regions may have further increased, as richer regions have had the financial means support businesses to a greater extent than poorer regions.



Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski

“We need to build on the legacies of Bauhaus which still echo throughout Europe”, says Kieran McCarthy

On 14 April, our president Cllr Kieran McCarthy took part in a high-level debate “The New European Bauhaus and its territorial dimension” with Ms Mariya Gabriel, European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth and Ms Elisa Ferreira, European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms.

In a passionate speech evoking the power of culture and cultural movements to stir emotions, Cllr McCarthy stressed the im-

portance of local and regional governments as the gate-keepers, a key guardian to unlocking the spirit of culture.

“If we wish to emulate or reinvent a cultural movement from 100 years ago, we all need to understand more of the heritage of the Bauhaus movement, its actual moving parts, narrative and its legacies,” he said.

As the CoR rapporteur on the EU Urban Agenda, Cllr McCarthy evoked his work on

the New Leipzig Charter and the legacy of the Bauhaus movement he could recognize in the productive city concept. “The Bauhaus movement still has echoes within the EU and we need to build on it,” he noted, adding that the EU and CoR flagship projects such as Urban Agenda partnerships, Urbact, Interreg, Horizon Europe, RegHubs and the Cohesion Alliance, to name a few, should all be used as strong foundations in developing the revived Bauhaus in Europe.

Green deal working group discussed role of local authorities in delivering global sustainable development agenda

On 29 April, the CoR's Green Deal Working Group held a discussion on the role of local authorities in promoting the EU Green Deal and delivering the global 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimates that 65% of the 169 targets of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cannot be reached without coordinating with local and regional authorities.

Highlighting the positive experiences of Catalonia and Flanders that have adopted

strategies and plans to achieve the 2030 targets, our member József Kóbor (Pecs City Council, Hungary), said that more needs to be done to raise awareness about SDGs at the local level and that municipalities must be supported in their implementation efforts.

Speaking about Europe's climate ambition and the upcoming COP26 global summit, Mr Kóbor reiterated the EA Group's call for locally-determined contributions to be integrated into the nationally-determined contributions (NDCs) and stressed that

the EU must support investments in energy sources that are unquestionably green and not harmful to the environment.



Mr József Kóbor