

## European Alliance Group

### Engaging with Citizens is key for the future of the EU European Alliance Group

■ *President, Mr Jerzy Zająkła, Mayor of Łubianka*



Mr Jerzy Zająkła

On the 1<sup>st</sup> April the European Union's Citizens Initiative was launched, and I welcome the fact that one million signatures will allow citizens to ask for the EU to look at issues of concern to them. But we also need to look further and see how the EU institutions with elected members such as the European Parliament and Committee of the Regions engage in a dialogue with citizens in their regions. How do we bring forward the initiatives they propose in a democratic, trans-national, trans-regional approach. I hope that the Citizens Initiative will make a difference in engaging people with the EU but first a coherent approach must be taken in promoting the initiative.

There are other initiatives which are worthy of a mention such as the Covenant of Mayors. This worthwhile initiative has not been given the adequate resources yet to make it operational in the towns and cities of the EU and I hope this can be addressed. Our group will also hold our external meeting in Łubianka, Poland on the 15<sup>th</sup> May and we will focus on the subject of: **RENEWABLE ENERGY – FROM POLICY TO REALITY.**

It is the EA group's view that the focus on renewable energy is not only of huge benefit to the environment, but it also has a huge job creation potential. This is why we will be discussing not only the EU policy but giving clear examples of how different regions are harnessing renewable energy potential.

Lastly, we will host the winners of our annual Secondary Schools competition at this May CoR plenary. The 7th edition of this excellent competition will hold discussions with CoR members and see how the CoR works in practice. If I go back to the beginning of this introduction to our newsletter, what better way of engaging with Citizens: allowing young people to discuss the EU and its future – a true citizens dialogue.

### The 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the EA/CoR secondary schools competition closes with the winners' visit to the CoR

Winners of the 7th edition of the EA/CoR Secondary Schools competition have been announced on the 30th of March. The competition took place in eight member states, involving pupils with ages between 14-18 years. The competition's first stage measured the pupils' knowledge on the European Union and the EU institutions, the second part representing a role play giving them the freedom to write a

strategy, as a mayor, with initiatives to be taken locally in order to tackle the future issues connected to active ageing.

Two pupils, from each participating school, with the best results on both stages

participate in a two days study trip to Brussels, meeting the members of the EA group in the Committee of the Regions, and visiting several EU institutions, learning about the functioning of the European Union.

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*“It is extremely important to support our friends from the Southern shore of the Mediterranean in their democratic transition process”.*

*Francesco Musotto, EA Member*



**European Alliance**

## At a crucial juncture of negotiations on the future of Structural and Cohesion funds a reminder of Mr Musotto's opinion should be taken into consideration

*Francesco Musotto (EA/IT), Rapporteur for the opinion on 'The complementarity of national and EU interventions aimed at reducing the disparities in economic and social growth'.*

*"I insist that cohesion policy can and should continue to play a critical role specially in reducing disparities between European regions but also in promoting*

*the harmonious overall development of the EU. Cohesion policy can help all regions to contribute to a sustainable and prosperous Europe. The Cohesion Policy provides an ideal instrument to deliver the concrete results required to create jobs, promote growth and show effects."*

According to Mr Musotto integration, synergy and complementarity between national and European actions are key to bolstering the institutional and administrative capacity of Member States. When the objectives and priorities of each level of government are defined, wasteful overlaps between the various actions in a given area can be avoided and the quality of public intervention improved, thus making the EU's cohesion policy more effective. It is therefore important to stress the wish of local and regional authorities to be more involved on a permanent basis



Mr Francesco Musotto

throughout the programme design and implementation process.

## MEANEY'S OPINION ON EU PRESIDENCY REFERRAL ON ENERGY EFFICIENCY TO BE ADOPTED

The CoR Plenary session will adopt on 4<sup>th</sup> of May the opinion of Mr. Brian Meaney, upon the request of the Danish Presidency, on energy efficiency in cities and rural areas.

He calls for a better urban-rural balance in sustainable energy policies across the EU and stresses the need to tap the potential of rural areas for the achievement of the

Europe 2020 energy efficiency objectives.

The EA member and Clare County Councillor, recalls in its opinion that LRAs must be empowered in terms of funding and governance to be able to play their part.

The Danish Ambassador to the EU will present the Presidency priorities in relation to this very important subject which has become the object of heated discussions.

In this respect Mr Brian Meaney, has made it clear that he expects an ambitious text on the Energy Efficiency Directive as well its call for binding targets.



Mr Brian Meaney

## EA Group to host seminar in Łubianka, Poland on the subject of Renewable Energy – From Policy to reality

The renewed focus by the European Commission on renewable energy is very welcome as the tangible benefits of renewables is becoming very clear. Sources of energy include **wind power** (both onshore and offshore), **solar power** (thermal, photovoltaic and concentrated), **hydro-electric power**, **tidal power**, **geothermal energy** and **biomass** (including biofuels and bio liquids). They can have clear aims in reducing pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. It diversifies energy supplies and will make Europe less dependent on imported sources of Energy. It is also clear that this could potentially lead to a huge number of new jobs to be created over the coming years – badly needed in the current difficult economic times in Europe.

This is the reason why the European Alliance group will focus a meeting in the Polish commune of **Łubianka** on bringing a sense of reality to these policies. We

will be bringing together experts from across the regions with the policy makers in the European Parliament and also the

European Commission. More information is available on our website: [www.ea.cor.europa.eu](http://www.ea.cor.europa.eu)



Windmill in Łubianka

# Scotland's Independence Referendum

by Mr Stewart Maxwell, MSP



Scotland is one of the oldest nations in Europe and its strong and distinctive sense of national identity is known all over the world. Yet, Scotland is a nation that is not a fully independent state, and it can often be difficult to define what Scotland's exact constitutional situation is. The United Kingdom falls short of federalist system as may be understood in Germany or Switzerland; however, Scotland has maintained control over its education and legal systems since the union of Scotland and England in 1707. Indeed, since the reestablishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, Scotland has increased powers,

yet retains only limited control over the economy, as most key economic powers remain reserved to the UK Government in London.

However you define the current UK system that includes England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, it is now clear that since the Scottish Parliamentary election of 2011, Scotland's constitutional future is about to undergo its most radical change in 300 years. The centre-left Scottish National Party (SNP), which advocates independence for Scotland, won an overall majority for the first time, meaning there are now no barriers to a referendum being held on Scottish independence.

The Scottish Government has subsequently proposed a referendum date of Autumn 2014, and issued a public consultation on the date, wording and franchise of the referendum. One of the most controversial aspects currently being debated is the potential inclusion of a third option on the ballot paper. It is proposed that voters may be eligible to vote for Yes to Independence, No to Independence or a third option of further powers for the Scottish Parliament, yet remain in the UK. Crucially, it remains unclear what exactly these new powers would entail, and support for independence continues to grow in the face of increasing resentment with the policies of a Conservative UK Government which only has one member in Scotland.

Stewart Maxwell, who is an SNP Member of the Scottish Parliament for the West Scotland region, will be one of the elected



Stewart Maxwell

members campaigning for a 'yes to independence' vote in the referendum. He said,

"The people who live in Scotland are the people best placed to make the decisions that affect Scotland's future. We are a wealthy nation, we have the richest fishing waters in Europe, 25% of Europe's renewable energy potential and we are currently the EU's leading producer of oil and gas. Combined with the full legislative powers of a normal country, Scotland will be able to deliver better and fairer policies than the ones currently being pursued from the UK Government. I am confident that when the people of Scotland review the evidence leading up to the referendum, we will soon be on an equal footing as an independent nation with our European friends and neighbours."



Mr Witold Krochmal

## WITOLD KROCHMAL APPOINTED RAPPOREUR ON COSME (2014 - 2020)

Though they have been seriously hit by the current crisis, SMEs are the backbone of the EU economy and represent the key to restore growth and create employment in our economy.

The COR has recently appointed the EA member, Mr. Witold Krochmal, as rapporteur

for the COSME programme, which is the continuation of the current Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (2007-2013) and whose allocation is worth € 2.5 billion over the 2014-2020 period.

This financing instrument will be extremely helpful for SMEs in addressing current challenges such as access to finance in the form of equity and debt, improving the competitiveness of the enterprises and access to markets inside the Union and globally.

## COR PLENARY TO VOTE SZWABSKI'S OPINION ON ENLARGEMENT PACKAGE

With Serbia being granted the candidate status, Iceland making significant progress in complying with the EU acquis and Croatia soon becoming the 28th Member state, enlargement remains high in the EU Agenda. The CoR that keeps monitoring on the developments of the candidate and precandidate countries to the EU is to adopt its opinion on the EU enlargement package drafted by Mr Stanislaw Szwabski, Chairman of the municipality of Gdynia and EA group coordinator in the CIVEX commission.

guarantee the judiciary independence and ensure fundamental rights, Mr Stanislaw Szwabski's opinion highlights the progress made by Serbia, Montenegro and FYROM, notably in the devolution of powers to local authorities.

However, the rapporteur expresses his concerns about the lack of progress in Albania and Bosnia Herzegovina where political stalemate and poor dialogue between parties are slowing down the process.

Though most of the countries of the Western Balkans shall make effort to tackle common challenges such as widespread corruption,

With regard to Turkey, the rapporteur points out that empowerment of local government and civil society remains



Mr Stanislaw Szwabski

limited and concerns remain over the sharp decline in public and media interest on EU membership.

## ENVE appoints rapporteur on Water Policy

EA member Ms Urve Erikson has been appointed rapporteur in the ENVE commission on: *Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directives 2000/60/EC and 2008/105/EC as regards priority substances in the field of water policy*

COM(2011) 876 final – 2011/0429 (COD)



Ms Urve Erikson

## Retiring members

The EA group wishes the very best to EA bureau member and EDUC coordinator, Roger Knox, and alternate member, Sandy Park, who will both stand down at the next local elections in Scotland. We would like to thank them for their work in the CoR and the EA group.



Mr Roger Knox

## Meaney participates in Informal Meeting of Energy Ministers, 19-20 April 2012 – Horsens, Denmark



DANISH PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION 2012

CoR rapporteur on Energy Efficiency in cities and rural districts, Brian Meaney participated in the Informal Meeting of Energy Ministers in Denmark on behalf of the CoR President. The meeting was focussed on the current status of negotiations of the Energy Efficiency Directive. In the perspective of a European vision for energy by 2030, ministers will

continue with a session covering different aspects of the EU's energy policy based on the Commissions Communication on Energy Roadmap 2050. Cllr Meaney added that it was fundamentally important that Local and Regional governments participate in discussions on the future of Energy policy as in the end they will have to be involved in the implementation of any final agreements.

## 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Association of Communes in Romania



Mr Emil Drăghici

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of March the Association of Communes in Romania held its extraordinary meeting, celebrating the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its foundation, whose President is Mr Emil Drăghici. The event has been organized under the patronage of the Committee of the Regions, being represented by Mr Jerzy Zająkalla, President of the EA group.

More than 300 mayors attending the meeting have adopted the agenda of Romanian Communes 2012 – 2030, which represents the future development plans of the

Romanian rural area. Mr Drăghici expressed his regret that the allocated budget for communes in Romania is insufficient to create an efficient sector from the Romanian agriculture, where the majority of the population lives in rural areas. An ageing population and an emigration of the young generation from the rural areas represent one of the greatest challenges for local authorities. Mr Drăghici's future priority is to communicate the common vision on the future development of villages in Romania in the hope of a better collaboration with all levels of government.

## Upcoming Events:

May	7/06	July
3-4/05 CoR's plenary session, Brussels	Joint Consultative Committee on FYROM, Stip, FYROM	2/07 Meeting of teh COTER Commission
11/05 Meeting of the COTER Commission, Brussels	14-15/06 External meeting and seminar of the NAT Commission, Rovaniemi, Finland	5-6/07 Meeting of the EDUC Commission
14-15/05 EA external meeting and seminar, Łubianka, Poland	21-22/06 External meeting and seminar of the CIVEX Commission	17/07 Meeting of the CoR's Bureau, Brussels
22/05 Working group on Western Balkans, Sarajevo	25-26/06 External meeting and seminar of the ECOS Commission	Meeting of teh EA group's Bureau, Brussels
29/05 Ad-hoc Commission on Budget	28/06 Meeting of the ENVE Commission	18/07 Meeting of the EA group
<b>June</b>	29/06 Meeting of the CAFA Commission	18-19/07 Plenary session of the CoR
4/06 Working Group on Turkey, Mugla, Turkey		

EUROPEAN UNION



Committee of the Regions

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