

European Alliance Group

Time for 'action', time for 'engagement' with local and regional authorities says Stanisław Szwabski, President of the European Alliance Group



EA President with the EIB President Mr Hoyer

For too long EU policies have not allowed for adequate interaction and engagement with local and regional authorities, the people who are at the forefront of endeavouring to create the conditions for jobs and growth across Europe, at the same time this is the level of governance which has to deal with the very difficult refugee and migration crisis.

At a recent meeting with the President of the European Investment Bank, Mr Hoyer, I expressed the disappointment that there are no geographical quotas to the EIB funding in the Juncker Investment Plan. I believe that this does not help in creating a balanced investment as the 'push' will be towards projects with

larger cities and richer regions. I believe that this should be revised to help all our regions.

The EU is facing its biggest challenge when dealing with the refugee and migration crisis. A coherent and sustainable solution should be found and local and regional authorities need assistance in particular in the Member States which are the point of entry into the EU. I would also call for a greater development policy in neighbourhood policy. I believe that CORLEAP and ARLEM have a role to work with the Commission and External Action service to assist in this development.

'EU policy for regenerating town and city centres'

Across the European Union the centres of many of our towns and cities have fallen on hard times. The lack of development including the shortage of parking has led to a huge under investment and local and regional authorities are trying to face up to the challenges of regenerating their town

and city centres. Many of these centres have lost their 'focus of activity' due to the development of large-scale shopping outlets on the outskirts of towns and the development of estates around towns and cities. There are also issues concerning planning and a lack of investment in urban centres which may be discussed.

The President of the European Alliance Group, Mr Stanisław Szwabski, a member of Gdynia City Council, says some of the focus of EU urban policy needs to be placed more on these city and town centres. This seminar

CONTENT

*CoR Plenary to adopt
Uno Silberg opinion on
the Draft EU budget for 2016*

*Cllr Tony Buchanan
stresses the need to simplify
the Common Agricultural policy*

*Ocean Energy a key
development for Europe's
energy needs says Rhodri Glyn Thomas*

*Students of the 10th
edition of the EA Secondary
Schools competition
participate in July CoR plenary*

*Dariusz Wróbel calls for
more cooperation with
Eastern Partnership's
local and regional authorities*

*Peace Process in Nagorno-
Karabach must go on
says Karim Van Overmeire*

We approach another Open Days of regions and cities and our group on this occasion has organised a seminar on 'regenerating town and city centres'. So many of our town centres have had huge problems with lack of investment and the development of out of town shopping centres. A portion of Urban funding should be focussed on bringing life back into these town and city centres.

organized by the EA group during Open Days will serve to bring together practitioners so that people learn from what is happening across Europe.

Cllr Hughie McGrath from Tipperary County Council says his town of Nenagh has been decimated by the lack of town centre development and believes that a package of EU focus funding and positive tax incentives for inner town areas would bring life into towns and cities once more. More information on the seminar is available on: www.ea.cor.europa.eu

"We are satisfied that the European Commission has started working on CMU. We consider it to be an important instrument to enlarge the possibilities of capital acquisition especially for SMEs on the capital market", says CoR rapporteur Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski, Mayor of Białystok

CoR Plenary to adopt Uno Silberg opinion on the Draft EU budget for 2016

The CoR Plenary session will adopt on 13-14 October the opinion of Uno Silberg on the Draft EU budget for 2016.

The annual EU budget has direct impact and implications on local and regional authorities, since they are beneficiaries and, at the same time, managing authorities of some programmes, in particular of the Investment and Structural Funds. Let alone the fact that the EU budget has a strong leverage effect, complementing national and sub-national, private and public finances is crucial in achieving economic, social and territorial cohesion.

The rapporteur welcomes the main proposals made by the Commission: ensuring resources for jobs and growth, including for the European Fund for Strategic Investment whilst increasing the EU's means to deal with emerging priorities such as migration and safety. At the same time he expresses wholehearted support for the plan aimed at addressing the current 24,7bn EUR backlog of payments, mainly related to Cohesion policy. The planned elimination of the backlog in 2016 was welcomed as the fulfilment of the basic duty for the EU, to honour its commitments towards LRAs and pay outstanding bills. However, the CoR will have to be vigilant

that similar disbursement patterns do not occur again in the current programming period 2014-2020, if the increase on payments' speed is not accompanied by enough payment appropriations budgeted.



Cllr Tony Buchanan stresses the need to simplify the Common Agricultural policy



In the presence of Commissioner for Agriculture Phil Hogan, European Alliance group member Cllr Tony Buchanan, 1st Vice President of NAT commission will present his opinion on the CAP simplification. This opinion not only sets out the short term proposals that can improve the current regime while ensuring the delivery of the CAP objectives and ensuring legal certainty for beneficiaries but it can also be used as a springboard to launch the discussions at the CoR on the future of the CAP post 2020.

The aim of a simpler framework for the CAP would increase competitiveness in the agricultural sector, save time and reduce costs for all the actors in the CAP, including farmers, economic operators and public authorities.

Cllr Buchanan warns that simplification of CAP rules cannot be now used in a way that dismantles a wide range of public goods, particularly environmental ones, that the CAP is meant to deliver. He considers that the simplification of the CAP would provide

the most added value in the targeted reduction of administrative burden on farmers and beneficiaries such as rural communities, improve the clarity of the legal framework, ensure more consistency between the two pillars of the CAP while ensuring the sound management of CAP finances. The Rapporteur insists on the need for more consistency and complementarity between CAP and other EU policies.

"Simplification of the CAP does have a territorial dimension. Rural areas are exposed to demographic, economic and social development problems, including depopulation and relocation of businesses. The CAP also supports areas with natural constraints. Indeed the Common Agricultural Policy is not just about agriculture, farming and food production but can also be a key driver for territorial cohesion by balancing the economic development between urban and rural areas as well as providing economic diversification to areas mainly if not solely depending on agricultural revenue." said Cllr Buchanan. He added: "In so doing, the CAP as renewed for the 2014-2020 period has a stronger dimension on innovation, support for young farmers, community-led local development, producer cooperation and sustainable development. This requires a simpler framework than the one currently available, so that direct payments are improved and more equitably distributed as well as work on specific sectors such as geographical indications."

Ocean Energy a key development for Europe's energy needs says Rhodri Glyn Thomas

Ocean energy is one of the priorities of the Blue Growth Strategy, and could greatly contribute in achieving sustainable growth, climate change and renewable energy goals.

With the own-initiative "Developing the potential of ocean energy", to be adopted during the October Plenary session, the CoR rapporteur Mr. Rhodri Glyn Thomas, member of the EA Group and the Welsh Assembly draws attention to the huge potential of exploiting the energy from tides and waves which could satisfy 10-15% of EU power demand by 2050 and generate up to half a million jobs.

However, despite the EU being a world leader, the EU needs to secure investments to maintain its leadership and barriers must be tackled to enable this potential to be realised, notably financing, technology, red-tape, environmental and grid related issues.

The CoR highlights that in many cases the drive towards developing ocean and

marine energy is coming from sub-Member State level and regions but given the scale of investments required coordinated actions between the different layers of governance in the EU are essential. Moreover the rapporteur emphasises the key role of the European Investment Bank and insists that

ocean energy should be a priority of the 315 billion EFSI.

As well as attracting investors and including stakeholders in the process, the CoR considers public support to be an important factor in the success of this young industry and is willing to play a central role in raising awareness of the economic, social and environmental benefits for local communities of exploiting and investing in ocean energy.



Mr Rhodri Glyn Thomas

Students of the 10th edition of the EA Secondary Schools competition participate in July CoR plenary



Winners of the 10th edition of the EA/CoR Secondary Schools competition participated in the CoR plenary session in 8-9th July. The competition took place in eight member states, Estonia, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania,

Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Scotland in the UK, and involved pupils aged between 14-18 years. The competition's first stage was a multiple choice test that assessed the pupils' knowledge on the European

Union and the EU institutions, whilst the second one was to write an essay either on one of the topics reflecting the European Year of Development 2015 or bottom-up communication in the European Union.

Two pupils from each school, each with the best results in both stages, participated in a three day study trip to Brussels on the 7-9th June 2015. A total of 37 students and teachers. Pupils acted as ambassadors for their schools and regions with impressive presentations in a meeting with the EA members. The presentations included videos and photos of local places of interest and beauty as well as art and music. The young people enjoyed the opportunity to get to know each other and to discover the differences between each other's regions, cultures and education as well as their shared experience as young Europeans. During the CoR Plenary meeting on 8 July they met the Vice President of the European Commission Maroš Šefčovič, responsible for Energy Union, and Markku Markkula, the President of the CoR. As part of their trip they also visited the European Parliament's Parliamentarium to learn about the functioning of the European Union. More information is available on: www.ea.cor.europa.eu

Dariusz Wróbel calls for more cooperation with Eastern Partnership's local and regional authorities

Mr Dariusz Wróbel, Mayor of Opole Lubelskie and member of the European Alliance group participated in a high level meeting of the CORLEAP Bureau (Conference for Regional and Local authorities for Eastern Partnership) in Yerevan, Armenia on Friday 18 September 2015.

During the debate Mr Dariusz Wróbel highlighted the need for local authorities to cooperate more on areas of mutual interest, this included actions regarding decentralisation, capacity building and funding opportunities for local and regional authorities in the Eastern



Mr Dariusz Wróbel with Mr Piotr Antoni Świtalski, the newly appointed Head of the EU mission in Yerevan

Partnership countries. He also met with Mr Piotr Antonii Świtalski, the newly appointed Head of the EU mission in Yerevan and Mr Jerzy Marek Nowakowski,

the Ambassador of Republic of Poland to discuss the Eastern Partnership in the context of the EU Neighbourhood Policy.

Peace Process in Nagorno-Karabach must go on says Karim Van Overmeire



Karim Van Overmeire with the Armenian president Serzh Sargsyan

As the author of a recently adopted resolution in the Flemish Parliament commemorating the Armenian genocide of 1915, EA Vice-President Karim Van Overmeire paid a visit to the Republic of Armenia and the neighbouring Republic of Nagorno-Karabach (NKR). The

Armenian populated NKR proclaimed its independence from Azerbaijan when Azerbaijan itself seceded from the Soviet Union in 1991. War broke out, but since 1994 a cease-fire is in place resulting in the de facto independence of the NKR. The mediation process by the Minsk-Group

(Russia, France and USA) had not yet led to a breakthrough in finding a peaceful solution. In the meantime, both Azerbaijan and Turkey maintain an economic blockade against Armenia.

Karim Van Overmeire had the opportunity to meet both presidents and several high-ranking officials. He had also meetings with NGO's, students and representatives of different political parties. "Although the Armenians – because of security reasons - decided in 2013 to join the Eurasian Customs Union rather than advancing on the path towards the EU, the huge majority of the people that I've met are clearly oriented towards Europe, embracing European values and a market based economy," mentions Karim Van Overmeire, "Undeniably a lot has still to be done, but human rights records in Armenia and the NKR are better than in most former Soviet republics."

Karim Van Overmeire stresses the need for disarmament in the region – especially the military buildup of Azerbaijan is worrying – and he calls on the continuation of the process of peace and reconciliation, stability and regional economic cooperation. A first step could be the opening of the borders between landlocked Armenia with Turkey and with Azerbaijan.