

Hold Firm Mandate



European Alliance



European Committee
of the Regions

European Alliance Group

2020-2022



COVID-19
EXCHANGE PLATFORM



European Alliance

Empower local and regional governments who are best placed to build a Europe from the bottom up

by Cllr Kieran McCarthy, President of the European Alliance Group 2020-2022



With the mid-mandate of the European Committee of the Regions, we reflect on the uncertainty caused by the Covid19 pandemic as well as the terrible and unprovoked war in Ukraine. We see first-hand that the regions and cities of Europe continue to be very active in the provision of

support for refugees. It is clear that regions need to be empowered and given the resources to act in a time of crisis. The Recovery and Resilience Fund needs to have a local expenditure component and not be administered from central governments.

The European Committee of the Regions has also shown its worth in solidarity with Ukraine. The info-support-hub was a good start in matching the needs in Ukraine and border regions with what the EU regions can offer. We hope that peace will come quickly to Ukraine and we need to begin the process of rebuilding Ukraine. Our first Vice President spoke at an event organised by the Association of Ukrainian Cities and the CoR has our full support in building

a “European Cities and Regions Alliance for the Reconstruction of Ukraine”.

At the beginning of June, I joined the European Parliament President Roberta Metsola, Taoiseach Micheál Martin TD and MEPs in the unveiling of a bust to the great peacemaker John Hume. A timely reminder that the European Union is the greatest peace project we have and we need to cherish peace and security more than ever.

Stay safe to all,
Kieran

European Alliance Group

EA group members appoint new president and the group bureau



Cllr Kieran McCarthy (left) and Mr Karl Vanlouwe (right)

At our extraordinary group meeting, held in Brussels on 3 February, EA group members elected the group's new leadership.

Members elected Cllr Kieran McCarthy, member of the Cork City Council (Ireland) as the new president of the group and current president, Mr Karl Vanlouwe as its first vice president.

Mr McCarthy said he was delighted to be elected and hoped to put forward an active common platform for members within the CoR respecting self-determination, calling for more decentralisation and ensuring a balanced and sustainable territorial development of cities and rural areas with a focus on island and mountain regions. The EA group will provide members with a platform to build the bridge between their regions and the EU and we look forward to contributing to the new European Commission agenda via the Green deal, Conference on the Future of Europe and the Digital agenda. We have a huge agenda to deliver on behalf of our elected citizens across the EU.

In addition, the members voted on the composition of the new Bureau for the group, which will, in addition to Mr McCarthy and Mr Vanlouwe, include Ms Nanette Maupertuis, member of the Executive Council of Corsica, Mr Dariusz Strugała, mayor of the town and municipality of Jaraczewo (Poland) and Mr Emil Drăghici, mayor of Vulcana-Băi (Romania).

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EA Members to adopt political priorities for the 2020-2025 mandate

After a detailed discussion during an Extraordinary meeting on 3 February the European Alliance will on 11 February adopt their political priorities for the 7th term of office of the European Committee of the Regions.

No different from other years, the group remains devoted to a more democratic, decentralised and inclusive European Union, closer to its citizens. In its efforts to contribute to this goal, our group has identified seven key areas of concern for the EU during the upcoming mandate. The group has committed to making

continuous efforts to improve the EU's competitiveness, sustainability and inclusiveness, support the empowerment of its citizens, and boost investment in its culture and in territorial cohesion. Equally, the political priorities stress the importance of the subsidiarity principle to guarantee that decisions are taken at the level of government closest to citizens.

In addition, particular attention will be given to the EU rural agenda and sustainable food policy, especially the need for additional efforts in developing sus-

tainable rural development strategies. Our group also believes that cooperation with, and promotion of stability, prosperity and democracy in Europe's neighbouring countries must be enhanced and that local and regional authorities in those countries need to be supported adequately. Finally, the EA group opted for a very comprehensive approach to climate neutrality, as we strongly believe that a robust green response is required to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent.

A brief overview of the activities organised by the EA group in the past half-mandate

The second half of the 2015-2020 term of office was marked by the presidency and leadership of Mr Karl Vanlouwe. Mr Vanlouwe's priorities included a strong commitment to decentralization and self-determination in the EU and he will be remembered as one of the strongest champions of respect for fundamental rights and democracy in Catalonia. As a former CoR rapporteur on the integration of migrants and refugees, he was also active in debates on migration and integration.

What follows is a brief overview of some of our main achievements with a strong commitment to intensifying our work and playing an even bigger role in the CoR and EU policy-making during the new term of office.

Events



EA members Nanette Maupertuis and Gilles Simeoni in Aiaçciu, Corsica. April 2017

During the past two and a half years, we organized a number of thematic events where stakeholders, policy-makers, representatives of the civil society and politicians exchanged views on some of our group's political priorities. They include:

Extraordinary EA group meeting and seminar **"EU policies for island, mountain and rural areas"**, Aiaçciu (Corsica), April 2017

EA Bureau study visit to the Irish Parliament on the **revitalization of small town centres**, Dublin and Nenagh (Ireland), September 2017

European Week of Regions and Cities Workshop **"Strengthening the role of Nations and Regions in Economic development"**, Brussels, October 2017

Seminar **"Promoting cultural and linguistic heritage of Europe"**, Brussels, June 2018

European Week of Regions and Cities workshop **"Local and regional authorities fostering energy transition policies"**, Brussels, October 2018

Seminar **"Investment and Cohesion in Europe's Regions and local communes: promoting innovation and Cultural Heritage"**, Bucharest (Romania), November 2018

Study visit on **passive housing and environmentally friendly and energy-efficient pilot project for social houses**, Pamplona (Navarre), January 2019

Extraordinary EA group meeting and seminar **"Helping towns and villages driving rural revival in the EU"**, Mohill (Ireland), February 2019

Workshop on the **role of women in the fight against climate change**, in cooperation with the Government of Navarre, Brussels, May 2019

European Week of Regions and Cities Seminar **"The future of European Territorial Cooperation"**, Brussels, October 2019

Primary and Secondary Schools Competitions



EA group workshop Policies, women and climate change. Brussels, May 2019

Despite being busy with turbulent political developments, we continued promoting the EU and its links with its regions among our young citizens through our annual primary and secondary schools painting and essay-writing competitions. Every year we have been more and more amazed by the amount of talent and creativity expressed and we are very much looking forward to continuing this beautiful and creative endeavor in the future.



EA Group meeting in Mohill, Ireland. February 2019

Bosch: Catalonia wants to serve as a hub for dialogue and cooperation in the Mediterranean



Mr Alfred Bosch i Pascual

On 23 January, Barcelona hosted the 11th plenary session of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM).

During the opening panel, EA member and Catalan Minister of Foreign Action, Institutional Relations and Transparency, Mr Alfred Bosch i Pascual welcomed the delegates and presented Catalonia's ambition to serve as a hub for dialogue and cooperation in the Mediterranean. Mr Bosch noted that it is more important than ever that all actors in the Mediterranean make

the effort to understand each other better and strengthen dialogue and cooperation in order to work together on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. He also singled out respect for human rights and democracy as key components of such cooperation.

The EA group was also represented by Dr Uno Silberg, member of Kose Municipality Council (Estonia) and Mr Emil Drăghici, mayor of Vulcana-Băi (Romania).

Cllr Stenson discusses rural development and smart villages

On 22 January, Cllr Enda Stenson, CoR rapporteur on Smart Villages and rural revival participated in the 10th meeting of the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) Thematic Group, which focused on Smart Villages and renewable energy communities.

After the meeting, Cllr Stenson said: "We met to discuss how renewable energy commu-

nities and Smart Villages could benefit from each other and imagine how the future CAP strategic plans and Cohesion Policy could effectively support an energy transition in rural areas. We also discussed how to obtain an understanding of the opportunities in the new policy landscape for supporting the creation and development of renewable energy communities in EU rural areas."



Cllr Enda Stenson



Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski

Truskolaski at the Sustainable Urban Mobility Conference

On 23 January 2020, Mayor of Białystok Tadeusz Truskolaski took part in the conference 'Sustainable Urban Mobility: How To Get People Out Of Their Cars?' co-organised by the CoR's Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget (COTER) and International Association of Public Transport (UITP). Transport accounts for 27% of total EU greenhouse gases emissions, 72% of which is generated by the road transport

sector. The aim of the conference was to hear from public authorities and policy-makers what can be done to encourage and facilitate sustainable mobility while ensuring that citizens' needs are met. Under Mr Truskolaski's leadership, Białystok introduced a low-carbon economy plan until 2020 and a number of sustainable transport initiatives such as the creation of a city bike network.

McCarthy on the future of the Urban Agenda at the Cities Forum

On 30 and 31 January, Cork city Councillor and CoR's rapporteur on the Implementation Assessment on the EU Urban Agenda Kieran McCarthy took part in the 4th Cities Forum "Together we shape a sustainable urban future", held in Porto, where he spoke on the panel "Shaping together the future of sustain-

able urban development and the Urban Agenda for the EU". Cities Forum is an event where local, national and European level stakeholders meet in order to discuss: cohesion policy, future of Urban Agenda for Europe, climate change, new technologies and innovation in cities, urban housing and employment.



Cllr Kieran McCarthy

Mikel Irujo organizes major event on social innovation in Pamplona

On 6 and 7 February 2020, Director-General for External Action of the Government of Navarre Mr Mikel Irujo organised a Knowledge Exchange Platform (KEP) event on social innovation. The event was organized in Pamplona, Navarre, a region that in 2020 was awarded the title of the European Entrepreneurial Region 2020 (EER), with the Social Economy Plan being one of the main contributors.

The event focused primarily on the exchange of experiences, successes and learnings about the construction of a regional comprehensive ecosystem for social innovation. Participants attended different working sessions and presented 15 concrete European experiences with the ultimate aim of gathering concrete output that can be used by local and regional authorities as a guide to design comprehensive social innovation ecosystems.



Mr Mikel Irujo Amezaga



'My region, my family' exhibition in the CoR

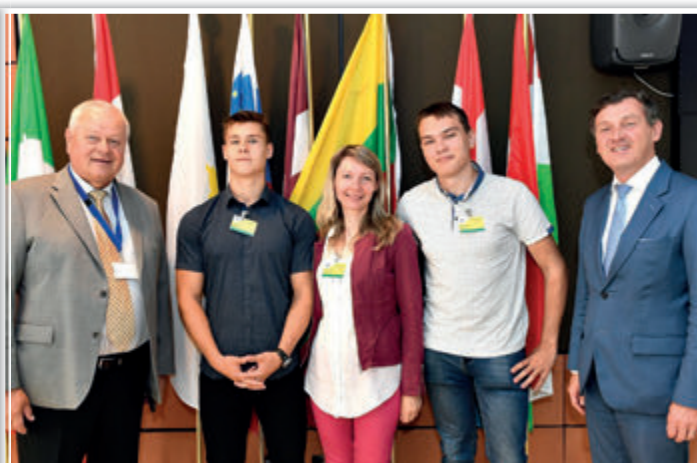
CoR/EA group primary school art competition 'My region, my family' exhibition in CoR

Each year the EA group organises a Primary Schools art competition "My Region, My...." This was no different in 2019 when it focused on "My Family". A competition which embraces what is similar but different across regions and lives by the ethos "United in diversity".

EA group annual Secondary Schools Competition



Winning participants of the EA Secondary Schools Competition in the CoR. Brussels, June 2019



EA members Povilas Žagunis and Karl Vanlouwe with students from the Mykolas Antanaitis Gymnasium in Krekenava, Lithuania

European Alliance Group

Delivery on behalf of our regions and cities is now more important than ever, says Kieran McCarthy, Cork city councillor and president of the EA Group

There are many social and economic challenges of our time. Regions and cities across the EU remain at the frontline of the response to such challenges – acting upon them, finding resolutions, whilst all the time moving forward in an ambitious and sustainable way. The recent coronavirus pandemic has also graphically illustrated how important local and regional authorities are to the lives of EU citizens.

Across Europe, presidents of regions, mayors and regional and local councillors have enormous amounts of knowledge and experience that can be shared – we must strive to feed such knowledge and experiences into present and future EU policies. I appreciate greatly the CoR's COVID-19 platform and also many of the initiatives which the EU has taken to ensure that national and regional governments have access to funding. The short term flexibility in certain programmes is welcome but we should not lose focus on the long term objectives of structural funds for our regions, cities and rural areas. We also welcome the EU recovery plan but we need to ensure that this is available to the level of governance closest to the citizens.



Mr Kieran McCarthy

Another crisis is also looming, namely the lack of progress in the EU – UK trade negotiations following Brexit. Without a serious engagement from the UK, we are very worried that regions across the European Union will suffer a second unnecessary and totally avoidable economic hit.

The role of local and regional governments has been clear throughout this crisis and it is vital they have a strong voice in the EU decision making system. The European Committee of the Regions and indeed our group are ready to work towards achieving progressive policy development on behalf of our citizens.

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EA Group members at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19 pandemic



The corona pandemic hit the European regions and cities with an unanticipated speed and reach, and within days, life, as we knew it, changed. In addition to putting an enormous strain on medical service provision, it has created unprecedented socio-economic challenges threatening not only to people's

health but also their livelihoods. Aside from being key actors in monitoring spread of diseases locally, implementing national directives on public health measures and mobilizing all available fiscal and human resources to fight the pandemic, EA members search for solutions to ensure that no one is left behind during and in the aftermath of the pandemic.

At the beginning of the pandemic, we set up a dedicated page on our website where

members shared information on what they are experiencing and doing in their constituencies to tackle the health, economic and social challenges imposed by the pandemic. The result is a rich and easily accessible body of knowledge and diverse experiences gathered from the west of Ireland to the east of Poland and from Flanders to Corsica.

As the battle for economic recovery has started, we are sure we will be able to share more experiences and best practices.

CIVEX

Kóbor: "Dialogue with citizens and better connections with the Neighbourhood among EA group's priorities"

The new mandate of the Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX) will see a number of important developments and potentially big changes in how the EU works and positions itself within its neighbourhood and the world. With the COVID-19 crisis, we could already see the new realities and challenges we hadn't thought were likely before. The pandemic has raised many questions related to the EU's decision-making, competences, finances, values, founding principles, geo-political positioning, its role in its neighbourhood, communication strategy, perception by its citizens, and many others. In some Member States, further tensions have arisen between the central government and local governments, and the principle of subsidiarity has been further violated.

It is clearer than ever that we need a comprehensive deliberative process and an all-encompassing debate on where and how we see the EU in the future.

Consequently, as a group, one of our main priorities will be the establishment of a permanent mechanism for consultations with citizens. The opinion on this topic is currently being prepared by our member Declan McDonnell, after being started with excellent work

by Ms Mireia Borrell Porta, and it is due to be adopted in October. It will propose concrete measures on how to establish and institutionalise two-way communication between citizens and EU institutions and ensure that the citizens understand and influence the ways EU affects their daily lives.

As a councillor in the city of Pécs, which is very close to the Balkan region, I will push for the CoR to promote greater cooperation with Europe's neighbourhood, in Eastern Europe, in the Mediterranean and in the enlargement candidate and potential candidate countries of the Western Balkans. Many of the connections which existed historically between the regions now in the EU and those outside of it have been severed and we must re-establish them to truly promote cooperation and European values with our counterparts from neighbouring countries. Therefore, we will strongly support and promote initiatives to forge closer ties with the EU's neighbouring regions which harbour specific national, ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic characteristics and have close historical links to those inside the EU.

On the subject of values, we will insist that the founding principles of the EU, to which our



Mr József Kóbor

countries willingly and enthusiastically subscribed, be upheld and respected and that the freedoms the EU gave us be not taken for granted or questioned for the sake of narrow political interests. Throughout this mandate, we will strongly promote the protection of democracy and the rule of law in EU's member states, as well as in partner countries.

Finally, we cannot ignore the issue of migration. We need a pan-European response to ensure that we protect our borders and safety and, at the same time, offer help and asylum to those who need it. Therefore, we will support the reform of the Dublin Regulation and look into ideas to tackle the root of the problem so that we, as Europeans, can respond adequately.

COTER

Maupertuis: "Reinforcing the EU's financial capacity and strengthening cohesion policy are key measures to combat the impact of COVID crisis and the economic recession"



Ms Nanette Maupertuis

Following the presentation of the new Multiannual Financial Framework and EU recovery plan, Ms Nanette Maupertuis, EA group coordinator in the COTER commis-

sion and member of the Executive Council of Corsica is convinced that, in the current situation, the most appropriate response to the crisis is to equip the EU with more resources.

"Reinforcing the EU's financial capacity would send a strong message to the populists and Member States must endorse a bold package that is commensurate to people's expectations. Otherwise, we could face a real catastrophe which could threaten the EU as a whole.

As part of a more ambitious EU budget, it is important we fight for a stronger Cohesion Policy as economies in many European regions, such as insular regions, are severely weakened.

Corsica itself will be hit hard by the reduction of economic activities in the field of tourism, an important source of revenue on the island, and I welcome that the new EU recovery plan is based on cohesion, which will make it possible to support tourism activities.

I also believe it is crucial to promote employment and help the job market while investing in sustainable mobility and digitalisation.

It is important to evolve and move towards a new economic model, supporting a green and digital transition, which would be more in tune with people's expectations", Ms Maupertuis added

ECON

Truskolaski: “From trade to the Single Market and COVID-19 recovery, a busy agenda lies ahead for the ECON Commission”



Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski

The Commission for Economic Policy (ECON) 's new mandate begins with an exceptionally busy agenda. Together with other political groups' representatives, EA coordinator Tadeusz Truskolaski has been promoting CoR's priorities in the areas of trade and globalisation; local and regional government and

the economic governance in the EMU; Sustainable development goals; SMEs, Entrepreneurship and Industry; the Single market and competition policy. Mr Truskolaski also supported the continuation of the innovative European Entrepreneurial Region award and the work of the Regional Hubs.

Speaking about the impact of the coronavirus on ECON's remit, Mr Truskolaski said: “The COVID-19 pandemic is having substantial repercussions on European economies. In my own area, the city of Białystok, SMEs and citizens are the most likely to suffer, due to their limited resources. An increasing number of public administration areas are digitalized in order to avoid direct contact; the city has launched toll-free remote access lines for contacting specialists including legal advisors and psychologists; and we refrain from imposing fines on residents who do not meet the deadlines related to cer-

tain public payments. As president of the Union of Polish Metropolises (UPM) and member of the Association of Polish Cities and the Association of Polish Counties, I am also actively involved in supporting swift legal changes that will help local government units to function during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

“ECON will prepare regular economic bulletins on recent research, articles and discussions on the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic in Europe and on the different economic response measures planned and implemented at EU, national, regional and local level. I find this initiative very useful and the study of the different cases can help us to proceed with the good practices better and quicker. In this light, I can say that, as a group, we welcome the new EC proposal for a €750 billion Recovery Fund”, Mr Truskolaski added.

ENVE

Gryffroy: “Innovation is key to achieving climate neutrality”

The Green Deal, the EU's growth strategy which includes sectorial initiatives aimed at achieving climate neutrality, is making headlines on a daily basis.

The European Commission, with its freshly released proposal for a Recovery Instrument and revamped long-term budget 2021-2027 is committing a great share of the total financial firepower to achieving a Just Transition. New initiatives in the areas of building renovation, sustainable mobility, renewables energy will be central to support a greener recovery.

The EA Group believes that EU's response must be strong, whilst taking into account the affordability of measures for our citizens and the competitive position of our enterprises.

“Regions and cities are at the forefront in promoting green investments in new technologies and sustainable mobility,” said EA Group's ENVE coordinator and member of the Flemish Parliament Andries Gry-

ffroy. Mr Gryffroy added that “we are committed to helping LRAs decrease their carbon footprint: Flanders itself supports the objective of a climate-neutral Europe by 2050 and has already announced in the Flemish Climate Strategy 2050 that it will be able to contribute 85 percent CO2 reduction itself”.

The EU climate law will also be an important piece of legislation as it will provide investors with a stable and predictable framework to plan investments and will confirm the EU's ambitions.

It is important we link ambition with pragmatism, base our action on an evidence-based assessment of the economic and social situation in the EU and focus on innovation without bias.

In order to achieve the objective of climate neutrality, the EU must use the force of its innovative potential and focus on new approaches that would promote small businesses and real job creation while ensuring the transition is just and fair.



Mr Andries Gryffroy

“We look forward to a wave of EU recovery initiatives and massive plans of building renovation which will make it possible to achieve higher energy efficiency in hospitals, schools and social housing and create new jobs, thus driving EU recovery from the local level”, Mr Gryffroy added.

NAT

Strugała: “We need to develop a real and deliverable Rural Strategy”

Recent developments illustrate the continuing and renewed significance of the NAT Commission's remit for European regions and cities. This is a time in which the European Union faces a growing urgency to prevent and reverse the depletion of natural resources, to adapt to rapid technological advances, and to address the consequences of the demographic change. As such, the

NAT commission has a unique window of opportunity to use the power of its cross-sector policy expertise to strengthen the CoR's position in these pressing debates.

Mr Dariusz Strugała, mayor of Jaraczewo, Poland and EA Group's NAT coordinator underlined that the NAT's priorities are key socio-political challenges. These are to support viable agricultural production, sustainable

maritime ecosystems, innovative health interventions, sustainable food policies all across the production and consumption chain, and promote low impact tourism. Such matters affect the daily lives of 500 million EU citizens in terms of food, wellbeing, and livelihood.

“Nevertheless, as a Board Member of the Main Rural Authorities Association in Poland I am very happy that



Mr Dariusz Strugała

the main priority for NAT is the Rural Agenda this year. We need to have new and valuable initiatives to develop a long-term vision for rural areas. The CoR has for a long time asked for the needs of rural areas to be recognised and addressed by a proper EU policy", he added.

"The CoR's quick first reactions to the COVID-19 crisis should be welcomed", Mr Strugała said, "From the NAT perspective, we have called for the urgent use of the European Union's budget and intervention capacity for our citizens. We will propose an opinion on the special Mechanism to assure fast health measures in the moments of crises."

Mr Strugała further highlighted that "the unprecedented shock of COVID-19 requires immediate action and a bold economic and social recovery plan for the European Union, based on solidarity, sustainability, resilience and social justice, in line with the European Green Deal programme and the digital transformation programme".

"In these difficult times, our priority as regional and local authorities is to continue to provide healthcare and public services to our communities, while making

sure that no-one is left behind. We are working hard to support the local economy, save jobs, create new employment opportunities, help all companies continue to work and provide quality education. Our work on the ground is complementary to the efforts undertaken at EU and Member State level, but more needs to be done, in particular in terms of solidarity across borders. The crisis has clearly shown our deficiencies. In Poland for example there was a lack of everything, especially in small hospitals. My municipality was obliged to provide PLN 50.000 for necessary protective equipment and other measures."

Finally, Mr Strugała concluded by saying "I am happy to see that in the new MFF proposal the European Commission presented in May, €15 billion in additional support is foreseen for rural development which is a longstanding claim of the CoR."

SEDEC

Irujo: "Sustainable work, quality education and strong support for R&I amongst the SEDEC priorities for the next mandate"

Our aim in the coming period, especially after the heavy impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had and will have on the EU's economy, must be to improve employment and social policies in order to provide decently-paid and sustainable jobs. In particular, our young people need and deserve a helping hand. But we must also support those regions that are strongly affected by demographic change. More attention needs to go to the social economy and social innovation, as they may offer a solution for many of today's societal challenges.

As accessible quality education is key to socio-economic development, identifying skill shortages, focusing on re-skilling and up-skilling and promoting mobility while, at the same time, offering solutions to brain drain will be of utmost importance.

An innovative working environment can attract people to use the skills they acquired. To achieve this, a

substantial support for research and innovation is crucial. The keys to our economic recovery, empowering of our health systems, achievement of our climate goals and transformation of our industries all lie in research and innovation. That is why we will insist that research and innovation be allocated adequate funding in the next programming period and that those funds are deployed in the best possible way. There are some positive signals coming from the European Commission, such as the proposal to increase funding for the Horizon Europe programme, but that might still not be enough given the fundamental importance of new technologies for our ambitions across all policy areas.

Finally, let us further promote our cultural heritage as it inspires creativity, ignites the concept of active citizenship, and is one of the important foundations underpinning strategies for urban and rural develop-



Mr Mikel Irujo

ment. Creative sector has been among those hit the hardest by the pandemic and it will be challenging to secure enough resources for its adequate recovery but we must not forget that our identities are rooted in our cultures.

Update on the ongoing opinions drafted by EA group members

Mr Declan McDonnell (Galway City Council, Ireland) has been appointed new rapporteur on the opinion "**Local and Regional Authorities in a permanent dialogue with citizens**" after Ms Mireia Borrell Porta's mandate expired in April. The opinion is scheduled for adoption at the CoR plenary in October.

NAT commission members will exchange views on **Mr Enda Stenson's** (Leitrim County Council, Ireland)

opinion "**EU strategy for Rural Revival**" at the NAT meeting in June, while the adoption of the opinion is foreseen for the September NAT meeting and the December plenary session.

"**Regional Innovation Scoreboard and its impact in regional place-based policies**" prepared by **Mr Mikel Irujo Amezaga** (Director-General for External Action of the Government of Navarre) is fore-

seen for the July SEDEC meeting and the October plenary session.

Mayor of Białystok, Poland, **Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski** will present his opinion "**Identifying and addressing barriers to the Single Market**" at the ECON commission meeting in June and the plenary session in October.

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.

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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 Zuhair 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"



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.



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



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 Belarussian 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

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

CONTENT

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

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

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

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

McDonnell pushing for a permanent dialogue with citizens

CoR/EA Group's Primary Schools drawing competition 2020

"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 extra-ordinary 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 EWCR. 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.

European Alliance Group

Hold Firm, with spring around the corner, the hope of recovery is not far behind

by Cllr Kieran McCarthy, President of the European Alliance group

Last year was a very challenging one for many citizens across our regions and cities and our hearts go out to those who have lost loved ones or suffered from the pandemic. Our group sincerely thanks all those frontline staff for their courage and for their continuous and tireless work to make sure we are as safe as possible and that our critical services still prevail. Our hope for this year is that the delivery of the vaccine will bring us to the road to recovery.

Despite the challenges of the day, our work at political level continues, and as a group we have put a focus on the theme of recovery in our most recent online public seminars. We held two very interesting seminars – one on tourism recovery, and the second with the head of EUROCONTROL Eamonn Brennan on regional airports and how they can drive recovery. Both seminars concluded that now more than ever there is an urgency for EU funds to reach local and regional governments so that important projects enabling recovery can be delivered quickly.

We also welcome the last minute trade deal with the UK but I am very saddened by the wish of the British Government not to continue with Erasmus or Interreg. There are so many opportunities with such EU programmes. We now need to make the best of the trade deal and build a new partnership with our friends across the water. Our members are active in this regard on the COR-UK Contact Group.

Looking forward to the Conference on the Future of Europe, the CoR needs to actively participate. I believe that we need to take forward the recent



Hold Firm, Street art mural, Cork by artist Kevin O'Brien, recently commissioned by Cllr Kieran McCarthy

CoR opinion on creating a permanent dialogue with citizens. The high-level group chaired by Herman Van Rompuy will help us formulate some ideas for the Conference.

Nevertheless, we, as a group, remain at the forefront of the debate championing local and regional government to be at the heart of the EU project.

Kieran

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Brexit: A welcome trade deal but in reality a 'lose-lose' for both parties

CIVEX: Participatory democracy and fostering old links with the neighbourhood EA priorities for 2021

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SEDEC: Research, Innovation and Social Economy are the answers to the post-pandemic crisis

Mikel Irujo appointed rapporteur on the EU Action Plan on Social Economy

CoR members adopt EA opinions on Green Deal and Rural Revival

EA group's Primary Schools Competition 2020

EFA MEPs and European Alliance Group members commit to work on key priorities

On 13 January 2021, the European Free Alliance (EFA) Party and Bureau and European Alliance Group members held a joint meeting to discuss priorities and common actions over the coming months and years.

Welcoming the meeting, Cllr Kieran McCarthy highlighted areas such as the Future of Europe, citizens' dialogues, cross border cooperation as well as continued dialogue and exchange with the devolved Nations in the UK.

President of the EFA in the European Parliament Jordi Solé welcomed the ideas for enhanced cooperation

and said that it will extend step by step but clearly the first priorities should be the Conference on the Future of Europe as well as subsidiarity.

Nanette Maupertuis from Corsica said that the pandemic had brought to the fore the economic and social crisis in Europe's regions and that this urgently needed to be addressed.

The President of the EFA, Ms Lorena Lopez de Lacalle, who initiated the meeting said that it was hugely important to work across EU institutions as this will benefit people in our regions. Dialogue and cooper-

ation is the way forward to build a Europe of all peoples, she added.

The EFA is a group of 47 political parties across Europe that promotes the right to self-determination and supports people's aspirations to choose their own political future, including independence, greater autonomy or linguistic justice and cultural recognition for minorities.

Several EA members belong to the EFA political parties such as ERC (Catalonia), Femu a Corsica (Corsica), N-VA (Flanders) and FNP (Friesland).

"We regret that the European Commission did not follow up on the wish of over 1 million citizens who signed the Minority Safety Pack. It is hugely important that we protect and promote our regional and minority languages and cultures."

József Kóbor, member of the Pécs City Council and EA group's CIVEX coordinator

Brexit: A welcome trade deal but in reality a 'lose-lose' for both parties

by Karl Vanlouwe, Member of the Flemish Parliament and EA group's representative on the CoR-UK Contact Group

The Christmas Eve deal brought a palpable sense of relief in Brussels and London and also across the most affected regions in Europe including my own Flanders. The EU and UK were facing a cliff-edge economic tumble but this was avoided for which we are all thankful. For Northern Ireland the deal is particularly welcome. It is true however to say that no trade deal is as good as EU membership and our companies will have to now complete lots of additional red tape; those involved in fisheries a drastic reduction in quotas and there will be restrictions on our citizens and even our pets.

That is why, during the meeting of the last CoR-UK Contact Group held on the 11th January I called for an increase in the Brexit Adjustment Reserve fund as I do not believe that there is enough in the €5 billion to compensate for the huge barriers they will now need to face in the new trading arrangement. Flanders is looking at a potential loss of 6,500 workers alone and it is worth noting that we have 16,000 companies who trade with the UK. I would also wish to see continued cooperation in particular with the devolved Nations in the UK and the creation of a North Sea Macro Region as well as a twinning programme for Port Cities.



Mr Karl Vanlouwe

CIVEX: Participatory democracy and fostering old links with the neighbourhood EA priorities for 2021

by József Kóbor, EA group's CIVEX coordinator



Mr József Kóbor

In the coming weeks and months, we hope to see the beginning of the long-awaited and overdue Conference on the Future of Europe. In this context, EA group will particularly focus on the pro-

motion of the concept of a permanent dialogue with citizens led by local and regional authorities which we hope will be piloted during the Conference and then used as a permanent mechanism to involve citizens in the agenda setting and decision making on EU policies.

Also, I personally and we as a group will continue insisting on closer cooperation with the EU's enlargement and neighbourhood countries and especially on renewing historical connections, cultural and economic, between regions within the EU and those currently outside of it. Coming from a border county myself, I find it inexplicable that, while Europe and the world are going towards more integration, many links with our neighbourhood which existed just decades ago now appear cut.

We very much regret that the European Commission did not support the citizens' initiative on the Minority SafePack ignoring both the will of the citizens and the support of the European Parliament. The Minority SafePack was focused on the promotion of minority rights, language rights, and the protection of their cultures which are fundamental in reflecting and respecting the richness of our diversity. We will not give up either this citizens' initiative or the other one under way, which is about "Cohesion policy for the equality of the regions and sustainability of the regional languages and cultures".

We strongly believe that these initiatives are not about identity politics, but about the well-being and European self-awareness of European citizens.

COTER: Future of cross border cooperation high on the agenda

by Nanette Maupertuis, EA group's COTER coordinator



Ms Nanette Maupertuis

Challenges to cross-border cooperation have become more visible with the COVID-19 crisis as local

and regional authorities face obstacles to cooperate across borders.

In 2021, the CoR intends to start a reflection on the long-term future of cross-border cooperation, that will entail a number of actions and that will result in the CoR's official contribution to the Conference on Future of Europe.

In the meantime, programmes under the new Interreg will continue and new ones will see the light. We welcome the fact that, thanks to our efforts, valuable programmes such as Interreg Europe and Urbact will continue in this programming period.

However, it is unfortunate that, despite their high added value, some will disappear as a result of

Brexit. It will be paramount to ensure benefits of historical collaboration are not lost and fruitful collaboration is maintained, possibly creating EGTCs with UK local authorities and a North Sea macro region.

Our members will continue advocating for balanced territorial development, which also takes due account of the challenges of insular and mountainous areas. We call for targeted policies on urban and rural areas, and for a successful implementation of the Urban Agenda.

Finally, in 2021 members will contribute to the discussions on the role of transport and smart mobility in achieving the Green Deal objectives.

ECON: Recovery will be driven by cities and regions and our SMEs

by Tadeusz Truskolaski, EA group's ECON coordinator



In the ECON commission, we will focus on the policy areas which have a high priority on the EU agenda and a direct impact on local and re-

gional authorities, especially in the aftermath of the massive socio-economic crisis engendered by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In my opinion, it is of utmost importance to ensure an effective and geographically balanced recovery, while not setting aside our ambitions for sustainable development.

As representatives of our local and regional communities, we are responsible for leading the economic recovery strategies that must address the global sustainability challenges in a coherent way across different policy fields. We are responsible for our local communities and their development and this is a part of the development of a strong and coherent indus-

trial policy so crucial for building a resilient, innovative and competitive Europe. We need to support our local entrepreneurship and SMEs. All policies at different levels should follow a place-based approach, focused on supporting SMEs and on strengthening and connecting regional ecosystems, to drive innovation and new business, and job opportunities linked to a carbon-neutral and circular economy.

We also face a new situation with Brexit and the first year will be crucial with the new trade deal and a new chapter in relations with the UK. Our group will support all work at the ECON commission related to monitor the development of the situation.

ENVE: Shaping the Green Deal from the bottom up is 2021 top priority

by Andries Gryffroy, EA group's ENVE coordinator

Following the adoption of the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework, 2021 will be marked by the adoption of legislative proposals which will put the EU on track to meet climate and energy goals.

The European Commission "Fit for 55 package" will cover several areas, from buildings to renewable energy and energy efficiency, emission trading, to name just a few.

Following up on the opinion on the regional assessment of the Green Deal, the EA group will continue advocating for a bottom up approach in the

implementation of the Green Deal, calling for systematic participation of LRAs in the design and implementation of national energy and climate plans as well as in Recovery and Resilience Plans.

The transition to a climate neutrality will happen only through engagement of subnational governments and when their actions and contributions are fully taken into account.

Ahead of 2021 COP in Glasgow, we intend to promote the essential role of local and regional authorities in "bridging" the emissions gap and meeting global climate goals.



NAT: Post-pandemic recovery is a priority and it must include our rural areas

by Dariusz Strugała, EA Group's NAT coordinator



The pandemic has changed our lives profoundly. COVID-19 has created uncertainty and stress for all of us. At the moment, in NAT commission we are dealing with several opinions due to be adopted in 2021 and linked with different health

issues. The COVID-19 crisis has put public health higher on our agenda.

The pandemic has added an additional dimension and urgency to the ambition for a rural revival in regions across the European Union. Rural areas, towns and villages have been decimated by the reduction of demand for agricultural products with the closure of bars and restaurants as well as the demise of tourism across the EU. They have also been more vulnerable as they have limited access to medical centres, hospitals and transport, as well as poor or non-existent access to internet. The digital divide has especially impacted education and business. In order to increase the attractiveness of rural, mountainous and island areas as

a place to live and work, it is necessary to boost their recovery by better coordinating Common Agricultural Policy, ESI funds the Recovery and Resilience Facility and other relevant EU financing programmes.

The CoR has for a long time asked for the needs of rural areas and areas with specific geographic conditions to be recognised and addressed by a proper EU policy. We had an opportunity to call for Rural Agenda last year and as a Representative of the biggest local Polish association of rural areas I am very happy to see the real interest now from European Commission to deliver it. The local authorities are waiting the concrete proposal from the European Commission in 2021.

SEDEC: Research, Innovation and Social Economy are the answers to the post-pandemic crisis

by Mikel Irujo Amezaga, EA group's SEDEC coordinator



Given the challenges we faced in 2020, it is obvious that this year will be all about recovery and stream-

lining various policy initiatives in order to help different sectors of our economy recover from the pandemic and build resilience for the future.

It is clear that research and innovation have a crucial role to play both in addressing the pandemic and mitigating its consequences. As a group, and for me personally, we will continue lobbying for a greater involvement of regions in the initiatives which aim to promote and support innovation in the EU. In this regard, we will continue highlighting the importance of smart specialization strategies and regional innovation ecosystems and fostering interregional cooperation.

As the rapporteur on the forthcoming EU Action Plan on Social Economy, I will work hard to ensure that this ever more important sector receives due recognition in EU policies and that people who run and work in the 2 million social economy enterprises in Europe have better access to funding and training and less regulatory obstacles.

Finally, as a group we have always been fierce supporters of cultural and especially linguistic diversity in the EU. Therefore, we will continue advocating a greater recognition and promotion of Europe's linguistic diversity, especially of its regional languages.

Mikel Irujo appointed rapporteur on the EU Action Plan on Social Economy

At the SEDEC commission meeting held on 25 November 2020, members appointed Mikel Irujo, Director-General for External Action of the Government of Navarre as CoR rapporteur on the outlook opinion on the new European Action Plan on Social Economy.

There are 2 million social economy enterprises in Europe, representing 10% of all businesses in

the EU and employing more than 11 million people – about 6% of the EU's employees. Common challenges all these enterprises face include access to finance, low degree of recognition, varying regulatory environments across the EU and a lack of entrepreneurial skills.

The Action Plan will be adopted in the fourth quarter of 2021 and is expected to serve as a far-reaching instrument that will bring the social economy into the socio-economic policies of the European Union.

The first exchange of views on Mr Irujo's opinion will take place at the SEDEC meeting on 17 February 2021.

CoR members adopt EA opinions on Green Deal and Rural Revival

During the 141st plenary session of the European Committee of the Regions, held between 8 and 10 December 2020, members adopted with an overwhelming majority the opinions of two EA group members.

The opinion on a German Presidency referral "The impact of climate change in regions: an assessment of the Green Deal", prepared by member

of the Flemish Parliament Mr Andries Gryffroy underlines the potential of the European Green Deal to achieve climate neutrality but at the same time points out that, in order to be successful, it needs to put regions and cities at its core and be flexible enough to take into account different specificities and local circumstances across the EU.

Leitrim County Councillor Enda Stenson drafted an opinion on an EU Strategy for Rural Revival which outlines a vision to create rural areas where people could live, work, raise a family and grow old with dignity and self-sufficiency.

EA group's Primary Schools Competition 2020

The 13th consecutive year of the EA group's drawing competition for children aged from 6 to 12 years presented us all with rather difficult circumstances.

In spite of all the problems and disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, a total of 17 schools from 9 member states have taken part this year. The young age of the children has not prevented them from clearly seeing the issues facing the European Union in the future.

The theme of the competition, 'My region, my Europe' has prompted the children across Europe to enthusiastically give much thought to all kinds of subjects including their cultural heritage, the preservation of the environment, their identity as Europeans and the role of the European Union, all expressed visually in the beautiful artworks.

Among the main themes across all regions we see a huge concern for the environment, ideas for recycling in Ireland and the preservation of the vast forests of Lithuania.



European Alliance Group

Resilience and solidarity are key in months ahead

Resilience and solidarity, more so than ever before, are needed across the EU in the next few months as European regions and cities continue the massive task of organising vaccination programmes. It is apt that this is happening in spring, the season of new beginnings, the season of growth and, with that, hope.

The battle with the pandemic is, of course, not over yet and there are still many challenges ahead of us. In the first place, we need to find a fine balance between, on the one hand, the measures we need to take to limit the spreading of the virus as much as possible, and on the other, the strong need of many of our businesses to go back to work and the long-awaited wish of our citizens to go back to normal life and to enjoy their social life and freedom of movement.

We also need to look towards recovery and ensure that it is felt across all sectors of society. It is our belief that regional and local government needs to be to the forefront of national recovery and resilience plans.

As a group we have organised events focusing on the challenges of recovery in the post pandemic period. Most recently we have explored the impact on tourism and on regional airports. Our members are continuing to focus on topics ranging from green recovery to rural revival, from smart specialisation to SME development, from Cohesion Policy to urban policy – to name but a few. We will continue pushing these positive priorities for the benefit of our regions.



Cllr Kieran McCarthy

As a group, we have also being a strong advocate of the importance of cross-border co-operation. The PEACE programme is vital to ensure cross-community project development in Northern Ireland and to avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland. This is the reason why in February we organised a very interesting event “Preserving ‘PEACE’ on the island of Ireland” with Gina McIntyre, which we will cover more in this newsletter.

Finally, we hope to see the launch of the Conference on the Future of Europe on 9 May. We commit to be actively involved with this process and in particular ensure that it leads to real benefits and tangible outcomes for the local and regional government and citizens. It needs to be a truly bottom up approach and our enthusiastic group are best placed to provide clear and understandable input into the discussions.

Stay safe to everyone,

Kieran

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Markauskas: EU support has strengthened Lithuanian agriculture, but one does not need to sit on the laurels

Mikel Irujo appointed Minister of Economic and Business Development of Navarre

On 4 February, our SEDEC commission coordinator Mikel Irujo Amezaga was appointed Minister of Economic and Business Development in the Government of Navarre.

Mr Irujo has rich academic and professional experience in politics and European affairs. In addition to holding a PhD in European law and doing additional postgraduate studies in Brussels, he has also served as a Member of the European Parliament,

Head of the Delegation of Navarre in Brussels and Director General for Foreign Action in the Government of Navarre.

Mr Irujo has been a member of the CoR since 2016 and during this time drafted opinions on several topics, including Smart Specialisation Strategies (RIS3) and regional innovation. He is currently doing a report on the future EU Action Plan on Social Economy.



Mr Mikel Irujo Amezaga

Moldovan local authorities call for greater cooperation with the CoR



Ms Tatiana Badan

During the EA Group meeting held on 27 January 2021, and upon the invitation by Mr Emil Drăghici, mayor of Vulcană-Băi and president of the Association of Communes of Roma-

nia (ACOR), EA members hosted president of Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova (CALM), Ms Tatiana Badan.

Ms Badan presented local authorities from the Republic of Moldova as the most faithful and stable promoters of European democratic and cultural values, explained, in her words, both by the Romanian cultural identity in this territory and, in recent years, the awareness of the beneficial impact of direct European investments in the development of the country and of local communities.

During her speech, Ms Badan called for greater cooperation with the European Committee of the Regions in promoting local democracy, decentralization and development. "We are confident that EU partner / associated coun-

tries, especially the Republic of Moldova, will benefit significantly from the Committee of the Regions' greater involvement in the complex issues of decentralized cooperation, European programs and funds for local governments, cooperation and development policies, local democracy, autonomy and decentralization," she said.

She also strongly called for the need to recognize and treat local communities from the Republic of Moldova as a complementary part of the Romanian and European value and cultural space and explained that "over 80% of the population of the Republic of Moldova speak Romanian and most have European citizenship: through Romania, Bulgaria, Portugal, the Czech Republic, Italy and others."

Green Deal: Investments must not harm climate and environmental objectives, says József Kóbor

On 15 February, during the 4th meeting of the Committee of the Regions' Green Deal Working Group, Mr József Kóbor, city councillor of Pecs, Hungary, underlined the need for EU investments to fully meet EU climate and environmental objectives.

"We have to support the decarbonisation process of our regions and cities while ensuring that EU investments and measures enable us to shift to clear sources of energy without undermining our efforts to achieve climate and environmental goals. More decentralisation is necessary to make sure

resources are targeted to the cities and regions' needs," said Mr Kóbor.

He also stressed that investments in rail should have priority, in the context of the European Year of Rail, including reinstating local and regional routes and historical links.

During the meeting, representatives of the European Commission's DG GROW and DG REGIO outlined respectively the initiatives "Intelligent Cities Challenge", that supports local and regional authorities in developing Local Green Deals, and the "Just Transition Mechanism", a flagship instrument which will provide significant financial support to



Mr József Kóbor

the territories and people most exposed by the transition towards climate neutrality.

Subsidiarity: CoR participation in High level Better Regulation body crucial to improve EU legislation, said Karl Vanlouwe



Mr Karl Vanlouwe

On 11 February, Karl Vanlouwe, member of the Flemish Parliament and first vice president of the European Alliance Group took part in the

Committee of the Regions' Subsidiarity Steering Group meeting. At the meeting members discussed the follow up of the Subsidiarity Task Force's recommendations and CoR participation in the High level Group on Better Regulation, Fit for Future Platform which advises the European Commission on efforts to simplify EU laws and reduce related unnecessary costs.

During the discussion, Mr Vanlouwe recalled the important role of regions with legislative powers in the EU decision making process.

"We have to grasp the opportunity of being included in the Fit for Future platform to channel the experience of regions, and make sure

EU legislation is fit for purpose. Many regions hold legislative powers and are autonomous in many respects. In Belgium, for instance Flemish Parliament is on equal footing with the Federal Parliament and this has to be taken into account in EU legislation.

During the meeting, members also discussed the future activities of RegHub, a network of regionally and locally based public officials that evaluates the implementation of EU policies and the 2021 European Commission work programme. The Steering Group identified the priority files that will be scrutinised in relation to their relevance for local and regional authorities from a subsidiarity and proportionality perspective.

EA group organises a webinar on the PEACE programme on the island of Ireland



"Peace cannot be taken for granted, it is something we need to work with"; "bringing communities together"; "Peace is fragile, it needs repeating, it needs encouragement and it needs the commitment which has been given by the UK and Irish government and strongly supported by the EU". These were some of the views presented by Gina McIntyre the CEO of the Special EU Programmes body in a webinar held by the European Alliance group in the European Committee of the Regions on Wednesday, 24 February. The webinar gathered representatives of local and regional authorities from across the EU, members of the European Parliament as well as representatives of the EU institutions and regional representations in Brussels.

The European Alliance Group President Cllr Kieran McCarthy introduced Ms McIntyre stressing the positive societal and economic benefits the work of healing communities after the Good Friday agreement has brought to the island of Ireland. "In these turbulent times of uncertainty due to BREXIT", he added, "it is worth paying attention to the successes of the PEACE and Interreg programs and what they have achieved in Ireland, Northern Ireland and beyond".

Ms McIntyre's presentation focused on cross-community projects including in theatre, sports, education and sharing public spaces, which all focused on building a spirit which transcends difference of religion or beliefs.

Karl Vanlouwe, a Member of the Flemish Parliament recalled CoR Conference of Presidents' visit to the town of Newry and the border where the only difference he noticed is his Gsm provider switching and the colour on the lines of the road changing. he further expressed hopes that the new deal with the UK will ensure there is never a border on the island.

Concluding the event, Ms McIntyre highlighted that the PEACE + would not only continue to help communities but will also be hugely important to ensure economic and social recovery post COVID19.

The Special EU Programmes Body is a cross-border body in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland which co-ordinates projects funded by the European Union and implemented in Northern Ireland and adjacent regions: the Border region of the Republic of Ireland, and Western Scotland.

The PEACE Programme in Northern Ireland is an EU structural funds programme which aims at reinforcing progress towards a peaceful and stable society, and promoting reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland. The Programme falls under the European Territorial Cooperation goal. In its proposals on the post-2020 cohesion regulations, the Commission has put forward the idea of continuing the PEACE ('PEACE Plus') programme which should be managed in an integrated manner with the UK's contribution being integrated into it as external assigned revenue.

Maupertuis: Innovative models for sustainable tourism and agriculture on islands are key to counter devastating effects of climate change and preserve economic activities

On 22 February, the Euro Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) plenary took place virtually in the presence of Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean Mr Nasser Kamel.

During the meeting, Ms Marie-Antoinette Maupertuis, EA Group vice president and member of the Executive Council of Corsica stressed that negative effects of climate

change are greater on islands like Corsica, where tourism, agriculture and small-scale fisheries sectors, which play a crucial role in the local economy, are under serious threat. "We need to build up on the islands' potential as laboratories for circular economy to devise new innovative models for sustainable tourism and agriculture in order to protect environment and local businesses while ensuring social cohesion", she said.



Ms Nanette Maupertuis

Karl Vanlouwe appointed rapporteur on the EU Counter-Terrorism Agenda

During the 6th meeting of the CIVEX commission, held on 16 February, our first vice president and member of the Flemish Parliament, Karl Vanlouwe was appointed rapporteur on the EU Counter-Terrorism Agenda 2020 – 2025.

The Agenda is part of the EU Security Union Strategy for 2020 to 2025 and builds on the

existing measures to deny terrorists the means to carry out attacks and to strengthen resilience against the terrorist threat.

It is shaped around four aims: identifying vulnerabilities and building capacity to anticipate threats; preventing attacks by addressing radicalisation; promoting security by design and reducing vulner-

abilities to protect cities and people; and stepping up operational support, prosecution and victims' rights to better respond to attacks.

Mr Vanlouwe's opinion will be discussed at the CIVEX meeting on 11 May and during the Committee of the Regions' October plenary session.

Markauskas: EU support has strengthened Lithuanian agriculture, but one does not need to sit on the laurels



Klaipėda District Municipality

Almost 17 years ago, in 2004, Lithuanians supported EU membership in a referendum. It is quite clear today that the decision was right and needed. Positive developments are visible in all areas and regions of the country, as well as in agriculture. The Klaipėda district, of which I am the mayor, alone received almost EUR 300 million from the budget of the European Union and Lithuania during the years.

It has enabled our farmers to modernise their farms, increase their capacity, become competitive and modern. Some dairy farms could robotise the milking process, some were subsidised to purchase new tractors, many others to buy machinery needed to work on the ground. The cultivation of cereals has more than doubled, with some farms reaching as much as 10 tonnes per hectare.

EU support has also contributed significantly to the development of villages. The LEADER programme funded around 40 different projects from rural communities and non-governmental organisations. Public spaces, parks, community houses in Priekulė, Weiviržėnai, Dvilai and many other towns in our district have been constructed and new, non-agricultural jobs have been created in the villages of Broži, Dighai, Dreverna and others.

As a farmer and a former Lithuanian Minister for Agriculture and I am fully aware of this. I must recognise that agriculture, and rural areas in general are still facing many challenges, both in Lithuania and in our neighbourhood. The depopulation due to migration out of rural areas has led to a situ-

ation where more than one third of farmers are over the age of 65 and the average size of farms in the district is just 7, 63 hectares.

I believe that the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy for the period 2020-2027 should contribute to addressing these problems. Farmers in our neighbourhood are well aware of the importance of the Green Deal and biodiversity for the future of Europe and the world. But to do that, it is necessary to put in place financial instruments and ensure proper consultation of farmers and rural populations.

We cannot run the risk of Europe becoming dependent on food imports from third countries, the EU must remain an exporter of agricultural products. I also do not agree with the cuts in the Cohesion Fund as the lack of development of civil engineering infrastructure in rural areas makes these areas unattractive to investors.



Mr Bronius Markauskas

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

Green deal working group in delivering global sustainable development agenda

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.



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



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

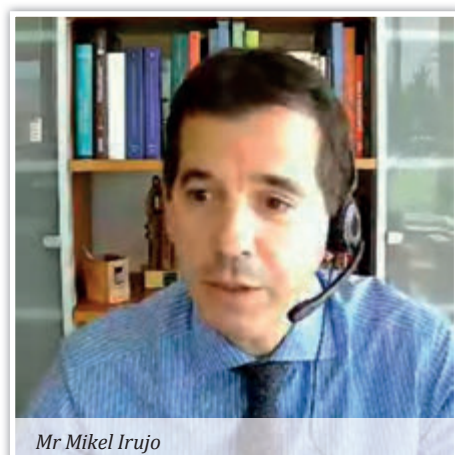
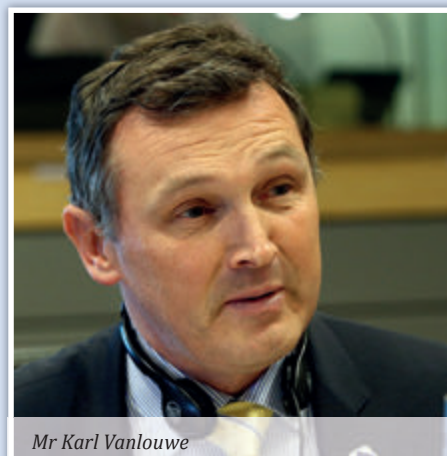
initiative in their own Member State, while enhancing role of regions, town and cities, in cooperation with the European Commission, the Covenant of Mayors Office and the National Associations, when relevant.

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.



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

European Alliance Group

Let's grasp the opportunity of the Conference on the Future of Europe to create a real bridge to our regions and citizens

As one of the privileged eighteen members appointed by the European Committee of the Regions to the plenary session of the Conference on the Future of Europe, I feel that this is our once in a generation opportunity to really open up and map the course of the EU which is reflective and reactive to those we represent in our regions and cities. Whether we live in an island or a city, a mountain or near a river we all have a view and this view needs to shape our Europe of diverse cultures, languages and regions. Over the next year, our group commit to reaching out, listening and bringing this message to the Conference and hopefully we can see the results as we reach its conclusion next Europe Day.

We also welcome the Recovery and Resilience Facility as a start to the recovery



Kieran McCarthy

post-Covid-19, but we repeat once again that this must be implemented at a regional and local level. If we want true bottom-up recovery it can never be achieved with a top down process. I call on all the national governments to keep this in mind when putting the national plans into regional action.

Can we also step back and thank all the front-line workers, the researchers and everyone involved in the vaccination campaign. I truly believe that we are seeing light at the end of the tunnel and I hope that our recovery will be sustainable, fair and that we see a summer of health and happiness to all our readers.

Keep the faith, hold firm,

Kieran

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*Building renovation is the
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European Week of Regions and Cities*

Nanette Maupertuis: There can be no cohesion without cooperation across borders

During the July plenary session, the European Committee of the Regions will adopt a resolution on the future of cross-border cooperation. The resolution, which also aims to contribute to the discussions in the Conference on the Future of Europe

builds on the results of a recent public consultation organised by the CoR in cooperation with the European Cross Border Citizens Alliance.

In the run-up to the plenary session, Ms Nanette Maupertuis, the European



Nanette Maupertuis

"Conference on the Future of Europe, I feel that this is our once in a generation opportunity to really open up and map the course of the EU which is reflective and reactive to those we represent in our regions and cities."

Cllr Kieran McCarthy, president of the EA Group

Alliance group Vice President and coordinator in the COTER commission, who was also rapporteur on the opinion on the European Territorial Cooperation programme 2021-2027 underlined the high added value of cross-border cooperation as an essential element of the European project.

"Territorial cooperation and particularly cross-border cooperation has a very strong symbolic value for Europe. There can be no cohesion if there is no chance to cooperate across borders, if

companies, researchers, students and young people are unable to exchange, strengthen links, share knowledge and expertise. The EU needs a long term vision to support cooperation along land and maritime borders in order to strengthen economic social and territorial cohesion", she added.

In light of border closures which severely impacted cross-border regions during the Covid-19 pandemic, the CoR is calling on the European Commission to present a proposal for maintaining land and maritime cross-border coop-

eration even in case of major EU crisis to ensure the delivery of cross-border public services and guarantee the smooth functioning of the single market and the Schengen area. Moreover, the CoR calls on the European Union to cooperate with its Member States and local and regional authorities in promoting the development of functional living areas in land and maritime cross-border areas of the European Union and focus its future funding opportunities and policies on those areas.

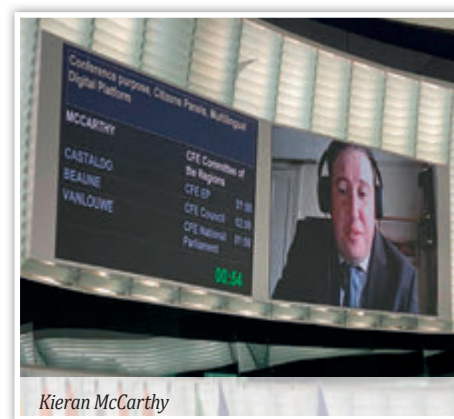
EA members at the Conference on the Future of Europe plenary

Local and regional authorities are part of the foundations of the European Union and to ensure that we build and deliver on behalf of the citizens in every village, mountain, island and city we have to have strong voices in the Conference on the Future of Europe.

EA Group president and Cork City councillor Kieran McCarthy, as well as our two vice presidents, Karl Vanlouwe, member of the Flemish Parliament, and Nanette Maupertuis,

member of the Executive Council of Corsica will be among the delegates at the Conference's plenaries. They have all committed to work with other participants in the Conference across regions and the EU institutions to ensure results are delivered.

We would also like to congratulate our friends from the European Parliament: Jordi Solé, President of the European Free Alliance, and Ms Assita Kanko MEP on their nominations. We will be



in contact to work with our colleagues in the European Parliament delivering for the regions and nations of Europe.

EA members discuss post-pandemic recovery in Western Balkans and Turkey

After a year of disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, European Committee of the Regions is again intensifying dialogue and cooperation with local and regional authorities in the Western Balkans and Turkey. In a series of online meetings during the month of June, EA members have discussed the role of local and regional authorities in the EU accession process and post-pandemic recovery with their peers from the region. In

addition, members have agreed the work programmes and priorities of the joint consultative committees and working groups for cooperation with the Western Balkan countries during the forthcoming 5-year period.

This round of dialogues will culminate in the annual Enlargement Day, which will this year be organised on 13 July and gather a number of high level guests from EU institutions and the region.

EA members active in cooperation with the Western Balkans and Turkey are Andries Gryffroy (Joint Consultative Committee CoR - North Macedonia), Declan McDonnell (Joint Consultative Committee CoR - Serbia), József Kóbor (Working Group on Turkey), Bronius Markauskas (Joint Consultative Committee CoR - Montenegro) and Miloslav Repaský (Working Group on the Western Balkans).

Bronius Markauskas appointed CoR rapporteur on Sustainable Blue Economy and Aquaculture

During the NAT meeting which took place online on 20 May 2021, members agreed to appoint Mr Bronius Markauskas, EA member and Mayor of Klaipėda (Lithuania) as the rapporteur on the opinion on sustainable blue economy and aquaculture.

The opinion will react to the European Commission's recently proposed new approach to a sustainable blue economy in the EU under which all blue economy sectors, including fisheries, aquaculture, coastal tourism, maritime transport, port activities and shipbuilding will have to reduce their environmental and climate impact. Tackling the climate and biodiversity crises requires healthy seas and a sustainable use of their resources to create alternatives to fossil fuels and traditional food production.

On the same day, the Commission also adopted new guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture. These guidelines provide a common vision for the further development of aquaculture in a way that contributes to the European Green Deal and especially the "Farm to Fork" strategy.

Mr Markauskas said that this is very important subject for port municipalities such as Klaipėda on the Lithuanian Baltic Sea coast. "As the Mayor of Klaipėda I am happy that the NAT members trusted me by giving me the opportunity to draft this important opinion. A sustainable blue economy is essential to achieving the objectives of the European Green Deal and ensuring a green and inclusive recovery from the pandemic. And promoting EU



Bronius Markauskas

sustainable aquaculture as an example of local production linked to short food circuits also plays an important role in diversifying and adding value to EU aquaculture production".

Mikel Irujo's opinion on the future EU Action Plan for Social Economy to be adopted at the CoR plenary

During the 145th plenary session of the European Committee of the Regions, which will be held from 30 June to 2 July, members are due to adopt Mikel Irujo's opinion on the future EU Action Plan for Social Economy.

The European Commission has committed to present a Social Economy Action Plan in the fourth quarter of 2021 as a far-reaching instrument that will create an environment for the social economy to thrive in the European Union. In this outlook opinion, Mr Irujo, Minister of Economic and Business Development of Navarre and EA coordinator for the SEDEC commission, outlines the main suggestions and expectations of local and regional



Mikel Irujo

authorities which should feed into the plan.

In his opinion, Mr Irujo argues that harnessing the full potential of social economy enterprises and organisations is a way to ensure economic recovery, promote collective entrepreneurship and create high-quality jobs. He outlines a number of concrete proposals for the future Action Plan in the domains of training and education, incorporation of social economy into other policy areas, promotion of financing and other support measures, and others.

The draft opinion was adopted at the SEDEC commission meeting on 22 April.

Building renovation is the key to ensure a sustainable recovery and create new jobs in our regions and cities says Andries Gryffroy

On 27 May 2021, Andries Gryffroy, European Alliance group coordinator in the ENVE commission and member of the Flemish Parliament took part in a multilevel energy and climate dialogue on the Renovation Wave which also saw the participation of representatives of Member States, the European Commission and the European Parliament.

Participants had a chance to discuss the role of local and regional authorities in the Renovation Wave, the EU flagship initiative aiming to double the renovation rate by 2030 by renovating 35 million buildings in the coming

decade, as well as include building renovation investments in National Recovery and Resilience Plans.

"The cheapest energy is the energy you don't consume. The best thing we can do regarding energy is to for example insulate our homes as best we can so that as little energy as possible is lost. Therefore, renovating residential and non-residential buildings is a strong tool to achieve short- and long-term climate goals," Mr Gryffroy said.

"Investing in building renovation is also the key to ensure a sustainable recovery and create new jobs in our re-



gions and cities. I am certainly pleased that my own region, Flanders, has made renovation a spearhead initiative. With the long-term renovation strategy, Flanders is committed to renovate almost 3 million homes (96,5 housing stock) by 2050 and thus reduce energy consumption while making sure the transition to a climate neutral Europe is affordable for business and citizens".

EA Group to organise seminar on Revival of Town Centres at the 2021 Edition of the European Week of Regions and Cities

On 12 October, in the context of the 2021 edition of the European Week of Regions and Cities, the European Alliance Group will organise a seminar "Best practices of revitalizing town centres across EU regions".

Towns are undergoing a process of deep transformation as a result of globalisation and the Covid-19 crisis.

Speakers and participants across different EU regions will discuss ways to revive town centres through

tailored policies and investments, enabling small business to thrive while ensuring high quality of life for citizens. The seminar will also provide the occasion to discuss the place of town and city regeneration within the national recovery plans.



19th EUROPEAN WEEK of REGIONS and CITIES
Together for Recovery #EURRegionsWeek

European Alliance Group

Stepping stones towards sustainable recovery must include local and regional authorities

by Cllr Kieran McCarthy, President of the European Alliance Group.

Members of Committee of the Regions have been at the front of fighting the pandemic and are now on the frontline of local recovery plans. At any given CoR plenary meetings, EA colleagues continue to raise why EU funding must reach our local municipalities.

The recent State of the Union address by the European Commission President was a tour de force speech on the EU's place in the world but I felt it was a missed opportunity not to touch upon the role of LRAs and ultimately the role of EU citizens. Results will only be achieved by involving cities and regions. We need more local involvement and projects directed from the bottom up.

The same applies for achieving climate change targets. With the advent of CoP in Glasgow on the horizon we now need to ensure that locally and regionally determined contributions are included in achieving targets.

Finally, the Conference on the Future of Europe must really listen and act upon



Cllr Kieran McCarthy

citizens' concerns. Our group will continue to organise local dialogues with local and regional government as well as other institutions. So far we have held events in Ireland and in Bastia, Corsica. It is only by co-operating together and laying 'stepping stones' for progress that we can make a real difference.

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Nanette Maupertuis elected President of the Assembly of Corsica

Kóbor appointed Green Commissioner of Pécs city

EA members and EFA parliamentary group debate future of Europe at EFA study days in Corsica

Revitalising town centres: EA Group to promote best practices across EU regions in EWRC seminar

On 12 October in the context of the European Week of Regions and Cities (EWRC) the European Alliance Group will organise a seminar on best practices to revitalise town and city centres across EU regions.

Many of these centres have lost their 'focus of activity' and the pandemic has accelerated the shift to e-commerce and digital economy.

The green and digital transitions supported by the EU's recovery plan and cohesion policy provide an opportunity for the regeneration and transformation of city and town centres.

Local and regional policy makers, experts and practitioners will share examples of good practices and discuss innovative proposals that could further develop into an EU policy for regenerating town and city centres. Speakers include Minister of Economic Development of Navarra Mikel Irujo Amezaga, Marc Hendrickx, Mechelen city councillor, Adrienne Rodgers, Cork City Director of Services,

Community and culture, and Anna Rzosinińska, Director of the Town Planning Department in Białystok.



"Regions must have a stronger voice in the EU. Their role and competences must be respected, including their identity, cultural and linguistic diversity. And the Conference on the Future of Europe is an opportunity to do that."

Karl Vanlouwe, member of the Flemish Parliament



European Alliance

EA Group holds extraordinary meeting to discuss Conference on the Future of Europe

On 16 September, EA group held an extraordinary meeting focused on the Conference on the Future of Europe. The meeting gathered representatives of the European Parliament, European political parties, civil society, local authorities' associations and a number of local and regional politicians from the EU and the United Kingdom.

Due to the diverse nature and background of the speakers, the debate showcased how the Conference is seen from different perspectives and corners of Europe, and presented the position of the European Parliament, civil society, pan-European political parties, as well small rural communities and local government associations.

The participants also discussed concrete

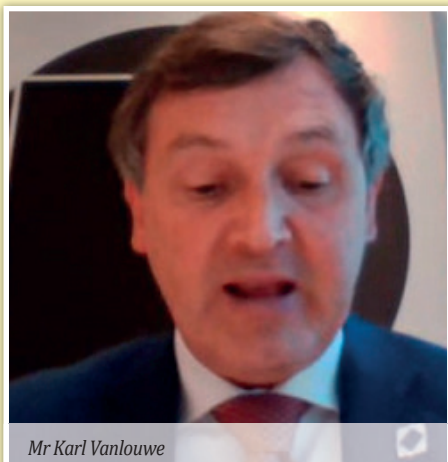


Some of the speakers at the EA group meeting on the Conference on the Future of Europe

channels and ways in which EA group and like-minded entities can make our voices heard in this crucial phase of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

The debate proved to be very pertinent as

Citizens Panels have just started discussing concrete proposals and the second plenary (first to discuss thematic proposals) is due at the end of October. European Alliance Group has 2 delegates to the Conference's plenary session.



Mr Karl Vanlouwe

Vanlouwe's opinion on EU Counter-Terrorism Agenda due for plenary adoption

During the October CoR plenary, members are due to adopt the opinion on the EU Counter-Terrorism Agenda, drafted by our first vice president and member of the Flemish Parliament Karl Vanlouwe.

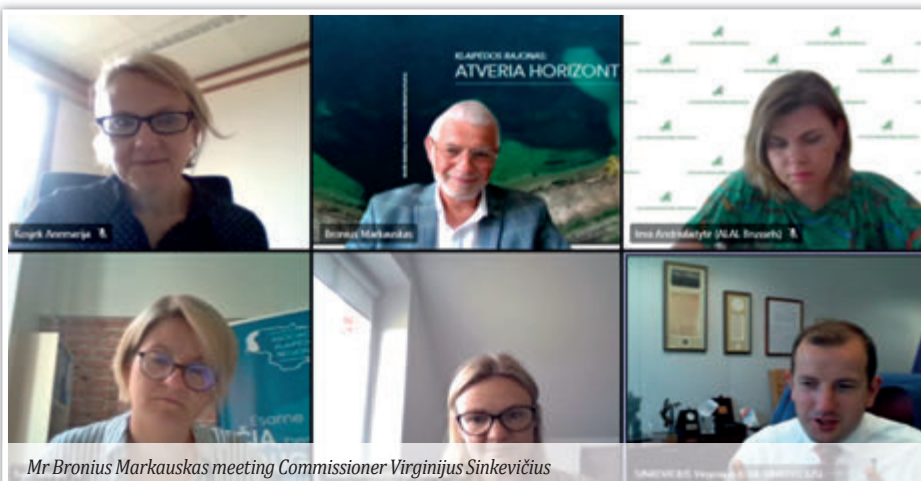
The opinion, adopted unanimously by CIVEX members in May this year, stresses the importance of cross-border and cross-sectoral cooperation in combating radicalization and terrorism. That includes stronger coordination, cooperation and information exchange between local

and regional authorities, Member States, police forces, justice systems, social workers, prevention organisations, formal and non-formal education services, religious counsellors, and security and intelligence agencies.

At the same time, the opinion argues, it is important to seek a balance between the right to security and physical integrity and other fundamental rights and freedoms, especially in the context of new technologies and the new challenges they bring.

Markauskas' opinion on sustainable blue economy and aquaculture adopted by NAT

On 17 September, the NAT commission adopted the opinion on strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture and blue economy by



Mr Bronius Markauskas meeting Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius

Mr Bronius Markauskas, mayor of Klaipėda district municipality in Lithuania.

Speaking on the opinion, Mr Markauskas said “I wanted to stress that the blue economy has a significant social and economic impact, not only on coastal and maritime regions, but also on the European Union as a whole, and can ensure a green and inclu-

sive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the most affected sectors, such as tourism and fisheries. In many countries, the blue economy has a huge positive impact on GDP. Also, aquaculture should be recognised as a specific policy area, with sufficient funding so that it provides an alternative to traditional fisheries. In my opinion, greater involvement

of local authorities would ensure better development of a sustainable blue economy by developing dynamic and sustainable blue economy ecosystems, promoting innovation, applying smart solutions and creating jobs.”

The adoption of the opinion is foreseen at the December Plenary Session.

Truskolaski's opinion on EU Competition Policy adopted by ECON



On 29 September 2021 the ECON members discussed and adopted the opinion on EU Competition Policy drafted by our ECON coordinator Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski. This is the first account of competition policy developments under the Commission led by President von der Leyen, covering developments that took place during 2020.

EU competition policy has been crucial in preserving and fostering European values such as fairness, rule of law and trust within the European economy.

The draft opinion highlights a number of issues arising from the uneven and inefficient distribution of public aid and stresses the importance of a level playing field for businesses in the Single Market, especially SMEs. Mr Truskolaski also called on the European Commission and the Member States to step up their efforts to promote technology transfers, especially to less developed, peripheral and island regions.

Gryffroy appointed rapporteur on Renewable Energy Directive Revision

On 9th September, Andries Gryffroy, European Alliance Group coordinator in the ENVE commission, was appointed CoR rapporteur on the Renewable Energy Directive revision.

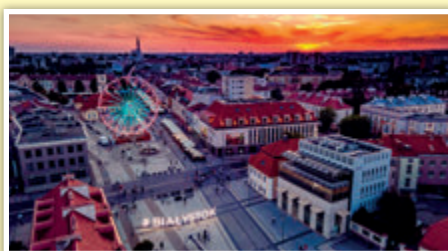
This directive is part of the comprehensive legislative package adopted by the European Commission in July, called FIT for 55, that aims at overhauling major policies on climate, energy, transport, environment in order to meet the 55% CO2 reduction climate target.

In the course of a preliminary debate in the ENVE commission, Mr Gryffroy who is also member of the Flemish Parliament and energy spokesperson for the New Flemish Alliance Party (N-VA), said that “new legislation should be flexible enough to take into account the different starting points and conditions in urban as well as rural and peripheral areas”.

The opinion will be discussed and voted at the next ENVE commission meeting on 23-24 November.



EA Group to hold an extraordinary meeting in Białystok



EA Group will hold an extraordinary meeting on 5-6 December in Białystok, on the invitation of the city's mayor Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski. Located in northeastern Poland, on the banks of the Biała River and in the green lungs of Poland, the capital city of the Podlaskie Voivode-

ship is – with a population of around 730000 people - the tenth-largest city in Poland and the largest city in northeastern Poland. The meeting will be followed by a seminar on the role of innovation and small and medium-sized enterprises in regional development.

Nanette Maupertuis elected President of the Assembly of Corsica

Following the last Corsican elections that took place in June, Nanette Maupertuis, Vice-president of the EA Group was elected 7th President of the Corsican Assembly.

Professor of Economy at University of Corsica and former member of the Executive Council responsible for on European affairs

and tourism, she has become the first woman in Corsica to hold this function.

She ran in the list of Gilles Simeoni, President of the Executive and leader of the party Femu a Corsica who obtained an unprecedented win and the absolute majority of seats.



Ms Nanette Maupertuis



Mr József Kóbor

Kóbor appointed Green Commissioner of Pecs city

The European Alliance group member, Dr József Kóbor, has been appointed "Green Commissioner" of the Hungarian city of Pecs, in which he sits as elected city councillor.

The City of Pécs has recently carried major investments to electrify public transport and aims to continue improving its green creden-

tials through environmentally friendly projects with help of EU funds.

Mr Kóbor, who is also one of the EU Climate Pact ambassador and member of the Committee of the Regions Green Deal Working Group has been playing an active role in promoting EU policies and instruments at local level to make the EU greener and climate neutral.

EA members and EFA parliamentary group debate future of Europe at EFA study days in Corsica

On 20-23 September a delegation of the European Alliance Group took part in the European Free Alliance (EFA) study days in Corsica, which gathered Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), EFA pan European Party Bureau members.

The main topics for discussion were the Corsican perspective and role of Corsican Nationalism following the outstanding results of nationalist parties at the most recent elections and the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Members were received by Gilles Simeoni, President of the Executive Council of Corsica, and Nanette Maupertuis, President of the Corsican Assembly who are also members of

the EA group.

A joint EA/EFA public event on the role of stateless nations in the future of Europe took place in Bastia with the participation of high level speakers, including Oriol Junqueras, former MEP and Catalan political prisoner, Jordi Sole, President of the EFA group in the European Parliament, Gilles Simeoni as well as the European Alliance members Karl Vanlouwe and Nanette Maupertuis.

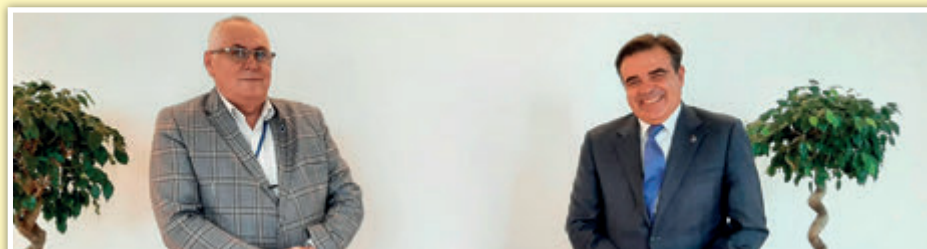
"The EU is too much focussed on Member States, we call for a stronger role of regions within the EU and the respect of their identity as well as their cultural and linguistic diversity, stressed Karl Vanlouwe, 1st Vice President of the EA group, recalling EU's



EA Group delegation in Bastia

motto "In varietate Concordia."

Nanette Maupertuis, said that conference on the future of Europe risks becoming merely a communication exercise and we have to make sure that it brings tangible results for citizens, and that multilevel governance mechanism enhancing involvement of local and regional authorities in decision making should be strengthened.

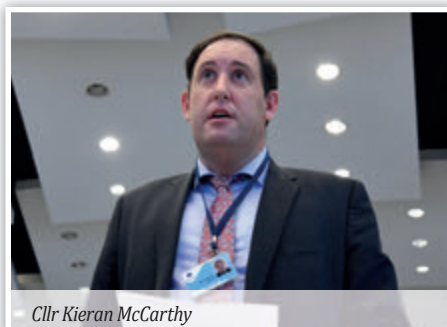


During the July CoR plenary session, Emil Drăghici, EA Group Bureau member and mayor of Vulcana-Băi (Romania) met Margaritis Schinas, Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for Promoting our European Way of Life and stressed the importance of educating young people about the European Union, its values, history and diverse cultural heritage.

European Alliance Group

Imagination and Curiosity are the bedrock of our cities and regions

by Cllr Kieran McCarthy, President of the EA group



Cllr Kieran McCarthy

The autumn CoR/EA group primary school art competition “My region, my window to the world” is attracting many entries. We have some very talented young people in our regions and cities. It has always been an important aim of our group to not only give a voice to the next generation but to champion on their behalf as well. The drawings provide an insight into what young people see in their region - the challenges and the opportunities. At the heart of the drawings are creativity, colour, imagination, curiosity and a genuine care for our neighbourhoods and our regions. These traits are so important in the world we live in

today as we tackle a relentless pandemic. They are also at the soul of our local and regional authorities across the EU.

The Next Generation EU fund is an important creative toolkit to bring Cities and Regions to sustainable recovery and growth. As a group we continue to call for more involvement for local and regional governments in the design and implementation in the new operational programmes or the partnership agreements.

In addition, we welcome that the final COP26 declaration, which recognises locally and regionally determined contributions through the inclusion of “multi-level action”. I would like to sincerely thank our member Andries Gryffroy for putting this case forward during the COP26 plenary on behalf of the local government and municipal authorities (LGMA). Now the real work begins to ensure we achieve the targets agreed.

As this newsletter shows our members are very active across a wide range of topics. Bravo to all.

Climate COP26: Gryffroy decisive push gets regions a place in final text

Our member Andries Gryffroy was part of the Committee of the Regions (CoR) delegation to the UNFCCC COP 26 on climate change that took place from 31 October to 12 November in Glasgow, Scotland.

The CoR delegation advocated a strong

regional and local dimension in global climate governance and greater involvement in the UN decision making process.

Despite being at the forefront of the fight against climate change, local and regional authorities are not fully in-

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Lastly, as we approach the festive season may I wish all our readers a very happy Christmas and a happy, peaceful and healthy New Year.

Stay safe
Kieran



Mr Andries Gryffroy and US Special
Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry

"Bottom up approach is the key to achieving climate goals and fair transition. Any initiatives in this regard must include multi-level international cooperation and local and regional authorities."

Andries Gryffroy, member of the Flemish Parliament

involved in the policymaking processes and frequently encounter difficulties in accessing direct funds necessary to carry out the plans and receive technical assistance.

Mr. Gryffroy, who is also Member of the Flemish Parliament had the occasion to represent the Committee of the Regions as well as the Local Governments and

Municipal Authorities (LGMA) constituency in several high-level meetings and ministerial consultations.

Following Mr. Gryffroy's intervention in the COP Plenary, where he called for local decision making and multilevel collaboration to be formally recognized, and thanks to the collective lobbying efforts with other organizations,

local and regional authorities have been referenced in the final text as key actors for achieving climate goals. Mr. Gryffroy and the EA group as a whole remain committed to strengthening the bottom up approach to climate governance and work to enhance role of regions at next year's COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt.

EU Week of Regions and Cities: EA holds seminar on town centre revitalisation

On the 12th October 2021, the European Alliance group held a workshop for sharing best practices for revitalising town centres across EU regions, which was attended by over 80 guests.

Introducing the event, EA Group President Kieran McCarthy outlined how "towns and regions have gone through profound changes over recent years, in many cases leading to urban decay". The pandemic, he outlined, has "further reconfigured urban dynamics with the shift to e-commerce, among other things". The four invited guests

included Minister of Development of Navarra Mikel Irujo Amezaga, Marc Hendrickx, Mechelen city councillor, Adrienne Rodgers, Cork City Director of Services, Community and culture, and Anna Rzosnińska, Director of the Town Planning Department in Białystok.

Over the seminar they showcased the innovative ways in which their cities and municipalities have dealt with urban renewal and the pandemic. From creating a "warm and welcoming" square for public events in the

heart of Białystok, Poland, to the introduction of a free cultural festival and the pedestrianisation of 17 streets in Cork City, Ireland. Following the four presentations, guests had the opportunity to ask the speakers questions, further delving into some of the topics discussed, such as the cultural aspect of revitalisation and the role of public consultation.

You can watch the entire workshop in the EA group website's Past Events section.

Maupertuis: Islands' constraints must be fully taken into account in EU policies

On 4th of November, in the context of the European Week of Regions and Cities, the Region of Sicily organized a side event on island territories and territorial cohesion with Gaetano Armao, Vice-President of the Sicilian Region and President of the CoR Insularity group, Nanette Maupertuis, EA group member and president of the Assembly of Corsica as well as Antonio Tajani, former European Parliament President among the main speakers. They underlined the particularity of island territories and the need for "island mainstreaming" across EU legislation so as to achieve cohesion policy objectives. Attention was given to a recent study on the economic impacts and cost of insularity and Sicily, which has provided both facts and figures. Many

attendees voiced their opinion that it is essential that such tangible figures and facts are brought to any debate on social and territorial cohesion policy.

During the seminar, Ms Maupertuis underlined that geography matters and can be decisive in determining socio economic development path of a region. "If we want island territories to be resilient, innovative and fully integrated in the EU market, their structural constraints must be taken into account and art 174 of the treaties be fully applied to achieve cohesion policy objectives," she said in her intervention.

Ms Maupertuis also placed great importance on the scope for islands to



cooperate in the future, on an array of shared challenges, from recovery and climate change to blue economy and sustainable tourism.



Mr Bronius Markauskas

Markauskas' opinion on Sustainable Blue Economy and Aquaculture to be adopted by the CoR Plenary session

Markauskas, Mayor of Klaipėda district municipality in Lithuania. In the opinion, Mr Markauskas highlights that aquaculture is an established and integral industry in many regions across the EU, but a more sustainable and competitive industry can offer benefits across the entire Union as Member States recover from the pandemic. Particularly, sustainable aquaculture will be vital in the green transition.

"I am happy to discuss this important subject for my region with the Committee of the Region's members. During

the preparation of the opinion I had an occasion to discuss the topic with the Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius. Aquaculture should be recognised as a specific policy area, with sufficient funding so that it provides an alternative to traditional fisheries. In my opinion greater involvement of local authorities would ensure better development of a sustainable blue economy by developing dynamic and sustainable blue economy ecosystems, promoting innovation, applying smart solutions and creating jobs," Mr Markauskas said.

The Committee of the Regions Assembly is due to adopt, in December 2021, the opinion on sustainable blue economy and aquaculture by Mr Bronius

Truskolaski: EU competition policy must take account of the SMEs' needs

During the Committee of the Regions Plenary Session in December 2021, members are set to adopt Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski, Mayor of Białystok's opinion on the Competition Report 2020. In his view the report is welcome, however what is really needed is that the EU competition policy take account of the needs of SMEs to create a fair and level-playing field for the benefit of all EU citizens. In terms of the future of EU competition policy, Mr Truskolaski opposes the exclusion of products and ser-

vices from certain geographical areas of the EU, considering it an infringement of competition rules. He also calls for boldness when implementing new solutions, particularly those that concern climate neutrality or strengthening the uniformity of the Single Market.

"The EU Competition Policy is essential for the smooth and effective functioning of the European Single Market. Its existence is a test for the unity of the EU, a test of negotiating capacity and the ability to understand the situation and



Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski

expectations of all EU citizens from its remotest parts," said Mr Truskolaski.

Strugała: Prevention and education crucial in facing natural disasters

During the 146th CoR plenary session debate with Janez Lenarčič, European Commissioner for Crisis Management



Mr Dariusz Strugała

Mr Dariusz Strugała, EA NAT coordinator and Mayor of Jaraczewo (Poland) said that increasingly common, extreme and complex natural disasters clearly demonstrate the need to develop prevention, preparedness and response, coupled with efforts to adapt to climate change and ecological transformation.

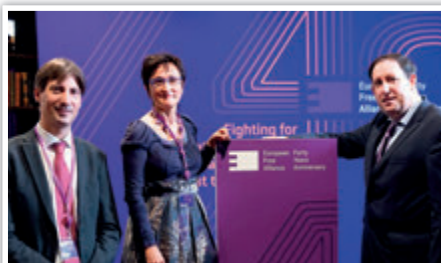
Giving example of a devastating storm that passed through his commune in August 2017, Mr Strugała stressed how important it is to create efficient and effective procedures in a crisis situation. "This situation also made me

realize how much we underestimate the role of prevention. We do not think ahead enough, focusing on current, often apparent activities and savings. Also, a huge problem is the insufficient percentage of insured property."

"The resilience of cities and regions to natural hazards can be increased if disaster risk management is also part of adaptation to climate change, public health, land use, urban planning and infrastructure, or adapting building standards to threats and strengthening the role of building supervision," Mr Strugała added.

European Alliance group and EFA Party collaborate on creating a real “Europe of the People”

At a recent European Free Alliance (EFA) General Assembly the EA Group President Cllr Kieran McCarthy, President of the EFA party Lorena Lopez de Lacalle as well as President of the EFA Group in the EP Jordi Solé agreed to enhance collaboration on the Conference on the Future of Europe, thereby ensuring that we create an impact and build a two-way communication between regions and cities of the EU



Jordi Solé, President of EFA in the EP; Lorena Lopez de Lacalle, President of EFA and Kieran McCarthy President of the EA group in the CoR

with the institutions in Brussels and Strasbourg. This creates a real “Europe of the People’s”.

Cllr McCarthy said that we cannot miss this opportunity to make our voices heard on a range of issues of concern to local and regional authorities. The EA President congratulated the EFA party on the 40 year anniversary and hopes the party will continue to go from strength to strength.

McCarthy appointed rapporteur on the New European Bauhaus

During the SEDEC commission meeting held on 1 October, our president and member of the Cork City Council Kieran McCarthy was appointed Committee of the Regions’ rapporteur on the New European Bauhaus initiative.

The New European Bauhaus initiative will aim to bring a cultural and creative dimension to the European Green

Deal, putting together creative design and sustainable innovation to offer tangible, positive experiences in our daily life. It aims at accelerating the transformation of various economic sectors such as construction and textiles in order to provide access to circular and less carbon-intensive goods to all citizens.

The opinion will be discussed at SEDEC meetings on 13 December and 17 February and the adoption in the plenary session is planned for April 2022.



My region, my window to the world: EA launches annual primary school art competition

The EA group is pleased to announce that, during November, it has launched its annual primary school art competi-

tion, with the theme “My region, my window to the world”. The competition sees schoolchildren from across the EU’s regions and cities submit drawings and paintings which illustrate the link between their local area and the wider European Union.

The best submissions will be chosen later this year and the children awarded prizes. The winning submissions will be converted into postcards, while all submission will be exhibited within the Committee of the Regions’

offices in Brussels. The children are also asked to include a brief description of their dreams for their regions within the wider European context, which will be published in a booklet highlighting the diversity of children’s perceptions of the EU.

The EA has already begun to receive artworks from schools across Europe, and is looking forward to further examples of the wonderful creativity schoolchildren submit each year.



The logo of the 2021 edition

European Alliance Group

Inclusivity will define the actions of the European Union in 2022

by Cllr Kieran McCarthy, president of the EA group



As the EA and CoR begins its work programme for the year, there is much anticipation of what the results of the Conference on the Future of Europe will bring. The COR Marseille Summit in early March offers an enormous opportunity to come together to make sense of, and comment on, the early

results of the Conference.

There is also much to do as the COVID19 virus continues to surprise us all with another variant. Many regions and cities face varying crises with overburdened health sectors and with parts of their respective economies closed. The best way for us to return our economies to normality is with the aid of NextGenerationEU, with local and regional governments guiding how best to use it in our cities and regions.

Europe also has a huge crisis in its eastern border with Belarus and also a very unstable situation on the Ukrainian border. The European Union must stand firmly together to resolve this worrying crisis.

Our EA group continues to champion concepts of inclusivity and will once

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EA group enhancing the Members' visual profile

again take to the floor of COR plenaries and commissions to make its case. I wish our members well in their work in this new year and I look forward to meeting everyone again soon.

Kieran

Join the debate on the Future of Europe in the CoR Summit "Citizens at the heart of Europe" in Marseille on 3-4 March 2022

The European Summit of regions and cities will bring together elected local representatives to discuss issues of major concern to sub-national government. The European Committee of the Regions and the Region Sud in France will organise the 9th edition in Marseille on the 03-04th March 2022.

On the agenda are European territories and societal challenges, cohesion and recovery, building the House of European Democracy, amongst other vital topics. Our members will actively promote open discussion in the summit and we also encourage many

of the young elected politicians get involved and put their ideas front and central to the discussions.

More information and registration is possible by visiting www.cor.europa.eu



"The Emissions Trading System should support a bottom-up approach, making sure that local and regional authorities could directly compensate citizens and business for higher energy costs and that auction revenues go where they are really needed."

Andries Gryffroy, member of the Flemish Parliament

Strugała: Together for stronger, more connected, more resilient and more prosperous rural areas in the EU

We are faced with serious threats and challenges to economic recovery,



Mr Dariusz Strugała

specifically at the level of rural areas. The CoR 2021 Barometer addressed the rural dimension of the COVID – 19 and economic recovery with a view to health and urban-rural digital gap. The European Commission work programme for 2022 acknowledges rural proofing as an instrument for better regulation alongside territorial impact assessments. The EA Group prioritises a renewed Territorial Agenda, which should envisage closer relationships and cooperation between cities and surrounding areas, both urban and rural, and reinforce linkages between them.

Our Members believe that the sustainable future of Europe depends on the implementation of a strong Rural Agenda to ensure the key role of rural areas, achieve a smart and fair energy transition, guarantee basic resources and biomaterials

and to provide food security and to ensure health and welfare among all citizens. It is crucial to fight against the depopulation of rural areas to ensure these global goals. Rural, island and mountain areas offer a showcase of the diversity of Europe's regions and have unique cultural and natural assets which positively affect the wellbeing of people living in these areas.

The EA group has had both of its own initiative opinions, from our Group Member Cllr Enda Stenson, on Smart villages and the Rural Agenda adopted by the CoR.

Our Group member, Mr Drăghici, also presented an idea to create a "Rural Capital Award". We hope it will be taken on board by the European Commission, with the support of the Committee of the Regions.

Gryffroy to present opinion on Renewable Energy Directive

In March, Andries Gryffroy will present to the ENVE commission his opinion on the Renewable Energy Directive Revision.

The draft opinion highlights the pivotal role of local and regional authorities and regional SMEs in the production of renewable energy sources and achieving the 55% CO2 emission reduction targets set by European Climate Law.

The amendments to the Directive, that have also been discussed with key players in the European Parliament, aim at making it easier to integrate renewables in the grid and to set up local renewable energy communities while enabling local innovation and promoting circularity models.

Gryffroy, who is also a member of the Flemish Parliament, strongly supports the Commission proposal to enhance cross border cooperation and joint projects between bordering regions and across sea basins while highlighting the leading role of regions.

In the presentation of the working document, Mr Gryffroy stressed that it is paramount to ensure coherence among the legislation proposed under the "Fit for 55" package, and that a technologically neutral approach, taking into account environmental concerns, is safeguarded in order to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050 in the most cost-effective manner.



Mr Andries Gryffroy



Mr Karl Vanlouwe

McCarthy and Vanlouwe active in the works of the Conference on the Future of Europe

On 21 and 22 January, our president and first vice president, Kieran McCarthy and Karl Vanlouwe took part in the third plenary session of the Conference on the Future of Europe which took place as a hybrid meeting remotely and in Strasbourg.

Cllr McCarthy is a member of the Working Group on Education, culture, youth and sport where he particularly champions synergies between different EU

programmes and initiatives, such as the European Green Deal, Creative Europe and the New European Bauhaus, on which he is currently preparing an opinion due to be adopted at the February SEDEC meeting.

Mr Vanlouwe, who has been delegated to the Conference plenary by the Flemish Parliament, is a member of the Working Group on Values and rights, rule of law and security.

EA Primary Schools Art Competition



Oliwia Kowalska, age 12, Poland

In November 2021, the EA group launched its annual Primary Schools Art Competition, with the theme of "My Region, My Window to the World". With this theme, children were tasked with illustrating how their region relates to the EU, and the wider World, alongside a brief description of their artworks. From Romania to Ireland, and Lithuania to Corsica, the group has received wonderful and creative artworks from children who are clearly passionate about their localities. The competition is now closed, and the entries will soon be available on display.

The EA group would like to thank and congratulate all of the children who submitted artworks for their wonderful contributions. Each year, children across our regions continue to impress with their knowledge of, and interest in, their local regions and cities. One child, in Slovakia, describes how the EU has helped local agriculture, which has in turn increased job prospects in their region. In Lithuania, another child outlined innovative ways that their region could become more environmentally friendly. What is common across all artworks is the creativity of the children, alongside their interests in their localities.

The winners of the competition will now receive their prizes, and their



Luca-Sebastian Dobrescu, age 10, Romania



Rimailė Striskaite, age 6, Lithuania

artworks and descriptions will be collected and displayed in a booklet. The physical art will be displayed in the CoR building once permitted by COVID regulations. Included below are a selection of some of the winning entries.



Eva Hlupíková, age 12, Slovakia

Kóbor to organize a student debate competition on sustainability



Dr József Kóbor

As part of the Committee of the Regions' series of local dialogues organized within the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe, our CIVEX coordinator Dr József Kóbor will organize a student debate competition where high school pupils will discuss green sustainability topics.

The competition will take place in the city of Pécs (Baranya county, Hungary) and will be organized in cooperation with the Green Baranya Association. It is expected to gather more

than 100 pupils and students who will hold debates on topics such as waste management, energy policy, environment and climate change. Before the competition, the participants will receive a thorough briefing on the topics of sustainability, European Union's functioning, as well as current social problems. The competition's jury will be composed of university students, practicing lawyers and professors.

The event will take place in late winter or early spring (final date tbc).

EA group enhancing the Members' visual profile

Towards the end of last year and the beginning 2022 we have stepped up our efforts to help our members enhance their digital presence and improve our visual communication as a group.

Over the course of the autumn, we produced a number of roll-up banners for our members which aim to showcase the beauty of their cities, towns and regions and, at the same time, link them with their work in the Committee of the Regions and EU policies.

In December, we launched a revamped version of our website (www.ea.cor.europa.eu) with a modernized design and improved site architecture which would enable visitors to get a better overview of our members' numerous activities. Although there are still some final tweaks to be made, we hope that you will find it useful and we look forward to any comments you may have.



Finally, after a very successful training on video production and editing held last spring, this January we organised a training on social media which provided some valuable insights to members on how to build and promote their profiles on different social net-

works, as well as how to communicate in specific situations and contexts.

We will continue developing new ideas on how to help members promote their work in Brussels and link it to their local roles in 2022.

European Alliance Group



#SolidarityWithUkraine

Regions join together in Solidarity with Ukraine

by Cllr Kieran McCarthy, president of the EA group



Cllr Kieran McCarthy

As we watch with tears of horror and pain the slaughter and indiscriminate murder in Ukraine caused by the authorities of the Russian federation, the regions of Europe are unanimous in their call for a ceasefire and in their strongest condemnation of the war.

This war must stop and the people of Ukraine will build their nation once again. In the meantime, the Cities and Regions of Europe are here to help. We can help with provisions in Ukraine and in the border regions. We can also help with hosting refugees until it is safe to go home. We welcome the setting up

of the CoR's info-support-hub to help regions connect needs and those who can help. This is a concept our group was actively calling for.

Ultimately though, we need to do more. Regions and cities are willing to help the European commission deliver on the €17 billion aid package to have real impact on the ground where it is needed. We are willing to mobilise our resources to ensure impact to help this terrible situation.

The Conference of Presidents of the European Committee of the Regions

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Iwaniuk: More support needed for Ukraine and border regions as well as no return ever to a Berlin wall scenario

*Ukraine dominates EA group meeting in Marseille
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Cohesion: EU policies must be "island-proofed" in order to take into account their natural, geographic and demographic constraints.

Kieran McCarthy's opinion on the New European Bauhaus to be adopted by the CoR plenary

The European Free Alliance and the EA group outline more common actions for 2022

József Kóbor organised debate competition for students on the future of Europe

met in Rzeszów, Poland on a fact-finding mission to assess the needs of local communities and help shape measures to address the Ukrainian refugee crisis. This was a necessary visit and Krzysztof Iwaniuk represented us for the visit.

The EU also need to take radical and quick action to ensure energy and food security for the future and the CoR will play its part in delivering the changes needed.

Today more than ever we need to be united in this crisis.

Kieran

"To connect the EU with its citizens, we propose a network of EU liaison offices across the EU's regions (such as VLEVA in Flanders), as well as more respect for subsidiarity, including the possibility for regional parliaments to block EU legislation, linguistic diversity and self-determination."

Karl Vanlouwe, first president of the EA group and member of the Flemish Parliament

Iwaniuk: More support needed for Ukraine and border regions as well as no return ever to a Berlin wall scenario



An emergency meeting of the Conference of Presidents from the Committee of the Regions took place near Poland's border with Ukraine on 6 April attended. The EA Group was represented on behalf of the President by Mr Krzysztof Iwaniuk,

Mayor of Terespol and the Member of the CoR's Working Group on Ukraine. The meeting concentrated focused on the impact of the Ukrainian war on EU's regional and local authorities. The main and strong call for support to the regional and local authorities via the European Union budget was highlighted in the presence of Ms Elisa Ferreira, European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms and Mr Younous Omarjee, chairman of the European Parliament's committee on regional development, and Tetiana Yehorova-Lutsenko, chairwoman of the Kharkiv District Council.

During the meeting, Mr Iwaniuk said that the Conference on the Future of Europe must take this critical situation into account. He

also highlighted a huge role to be played by the European Commission in geopolitical terms with the hope that the conflict will not spread. After the speech of both Commissioner and MEP, he thanked them for their declarations that Polish local and regional authorities won't be left alone. Mayor of Terespol, a border city with Belorussia said: "This border will never again be the same but we wouldn't like it to become a new Berlin Wall and we don't want to be cut off from our neighbours".

The meeting was hosted by the president of the Podkarpackie Region, Władysław Ortyl, and the mayor of Rzeszów, Konrad Fijołek. Many of LRAs were invited and participated in the meeting.

Ukraine dominates EA group meeting in Marseille

On 2 March, on the margins of the 9th European Summit of Regions and Cities in Marseille, EA group held a meeting with its former and current members and alternates as well as a number of young elected politicians and local councilors who came as part of CoR's respective programmes.

The meeting was dominated by a debate on the war in Ukraine, with members outlining what their communities have done to help Ukrainian refugees and launching passionate pleas for more assistance to the Ukrainian people. The members were unequivocal in condemning Russia's actions as unacceptable.



EA extraordinary meeting 2022 in Białystok

An EA extraordinary meeting in 2022 will be held on 6 May in Białystok, on the invitation of the President of the city Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski. Located in northeastern Poland, on the banks of the Biała River and in the green lungs of Poland, the capital city of the Podlaskie Voivodeship is – with a

population of around 730000 people - the tenth-largest city in Poland and the largest city in northeastern Poland. The meeting will be followed by a seminar on Cities and Regions working together in Europe with the focus on solidarity with Ukraine.

CoR Plenary to adopt Gryffroy opinion on Renewable Energy Directive revision

On 28 April, the CoR Plenary will adopt the draft opinion of EA Group member Andries Gryffroy on the Renewable Energy Directive Revision.

The draft opinion highlights the pivotal role of local and regional authorities and regional SMEs in the production of renewable energy sources in order to achieve the 55% CO2 emission reduction targets set by European Climate Law as well as the need to ramp up investments in renewables in order to ensure greater diversification of EU energy supply.

The amendments to the Directive, aim at making it easier to integrate renewables in the grid and to set up local renewable energy communities

while enabling local innovation and promoting circularity models.

Gryffroy, who is also a member of the Flemish Parliament, calls for enhanced cross border cooperation and more joint projects on renewables around between bordering regions and across sea basins to ensure better integration and decarbonisation of energy systems,

In the presentation of the opinion, Mr. Gryffroy stressed that EU territories are different so is their potential to produce energy from renewables. Hence legislation should take into account specificities of each Member States and regions, their different starting points, favoring a bottom up approach rather than a top down.



Mr Andries Gryffroy

He also underlines that it is necessary to be open and inclusive towards all technologies and safeguard the principle of technological neutrality in order to achieve climate neutrality and decarbonize our economy in a cost efficient manner, and at the lowest social and economic costs.

Cohesion: EU policies must be “island-proofed” in order to take into account their natural, geographic and demographic constraints



Ms Nanette Maupertuis

On 5 April the European Committee of the Regions and the Islands Commission of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) have co-organised a high-level conference to discuss the island

perspective in the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Local and regional leaders of European islands, including Corsica, Sicily and Sardinia, stressed the need of more particular consideration in the debates of the Conference on the Future of Europe (COFE) and called for long-term strategy for EU islands to reduce regional disparities.

Presidency of the Assembly of Corsica and EA Group member, Nanette Maupertuis, while recalling the objective of the Union to promote economic, social and territorial cohesion and the need to pay particular attention to regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps such as islands, cross-border and mountain regions, pointed out that

the application of the relevant article is far from satisfactory.

“Despite numerous initiatives and actions, art 174 of the Treaty has not been fully implemented. It is crucial EU policies take into account insularity with the introduction of new indicators and compensatory measures that take into account the additional cost impacting on citizens living in islands.

Ms Maupertuis has proposed to draft an opinion in order to look at ways as to how cohesion policy can cater for the specific needs of these territories, though more tailored approaches, in order to achieve a balanced development and a fair recovery across the EU regions.

Kieran McCarthy's opinion on the New European Bauhaus to be adopted by the CoR plenary

On Wednesday, 27 April Committee of the Regions' plenary session is due to debate and adopt an opinion by EA president and Cork City Cllr, Mr Kieran McCarthy, which addressed the local and regional aspects of the New European Bauhaus (NEB).

In the opinion, Cllr McCarthy outlines how the NEB is a key opportunity to harness the creative potential of regions and municipalities, and thus create sustainable solutions that will make the Green Deal a success. That being said, he raised a number of issues with the Commission's communication for example on the question of how local and regional authority's engagement will be ensured

Moving forward, Mr McCarthy calls on the NEB to become a real movement that involves LRAs and not just another top-down project. "It must be a project for everyone, not just the few. To be successful, this exercise must be socially, culturally and territorially inclusive."

The opinion was adopted unanimously at the SEDEC meeting in February.

The European Free Alliance and the EA group outline more common actions for 2022

During a meeting of the European Free Alliance Party including MEP's, youth branch and Coppieters foundation held on the 9th February it was agreed to cooperate further with the CoR European Alliance group on areas of mutual benefit. The first of these was for the Conference on the Future of Europe where a joint letter was agreed to encourage more citizens participate. Members also agree to

reinforce key messages during the CoFoE.

Secondly on a variety of thematic issues including cross border cooperation, energy, transport, youth to name but a few it was also agreed reinforce common actions.

Log in to www.ea.cor.europa.eu for more information.

József Kóbor organised debate competition for students on the future of Europe

On 9 and 10 April, our CIVEX coordinator and Green Commissioner of the city of Pécs József Kóbor organised a debate competition for students on the topics of sustainability and the future of Europe. The competition gathered more than 120 participants, divided into 28 teams coming from Hungary and Romania who debated how to ensure economic growth while protecting the environment.



The debate competition in Pécs

The event was part of the Committee of the Regions' series of local dialogues organised in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

EA Group external meeting and seminar

**Cities and Regions
working together in Europe**

#StandWithUkraine

6 May 2022
Białystok, Poland

European Alliance Group

Empower local and regional governments who are best placed to help in a crisis

by Cllr Kieran McCarthy, president of the EA group



Cllr Kieran McCarthy with Taoiseach Micheál Martin

As we approach the mid-mandate of the European Committee of the Regions, we reflect on the uncertainty caused by the Covid19 pandemic as well as the terrible and unprovoked war in Ukraine. We see first-hand that the regions and cities of Europe continue to be very active in the provision of support for refugees. It is clear that regions need to be empowered and given the resources to act in a time of crisis. The Recovery and Resilience Fund needs to have a local expenditure component and not be administered from central governments.

The European Committee of the Regions has also shown its worth in solidarity with Ukraine. The info-support-hub was a good start in matching the needs in Ukraine and border regions with what the EU regions can offer. We hope that peace will come quickly to Ukraine and we need to begin the process of rebuilding Ukraine. Our first Vice President spoke at an event organised by the Association of Ukrainian Cities and the CoR has our full support in building a "European Cities and Regions Alliance for the Reconstruction of Ukraine".

Vanlouwe meets the Mayor of Irpin, Alexander Markushin to express EU regions' solidarity towards Ukraine

On the 2nd June the European Alliance Vice President Karl Vanlouwe met with the Mayor of Irpin, Alexander Markushin to express EU regions solidarity and the mayor also called for help in the re-construction of Ukraine. The Mayor gave first hand description of the terrible loss of life and destruction caused by the unprovoked

war in Ukraine. Karl Vanlouwe gave an overview of the work of the CoR in coordinating efforts in solidarity of Ukraine and said more needs to be done to help the people of Ukraine. The Mayor has been invited to the CoR's June plenary session to make a direct plea to regions and cities to help in rebuilding of Ukraine.

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European Week of Regions and Cities: EA Group to hold high level event on Delivering the EU Green Deal at local level

EA Members adopt Białystok Declaration on "Cities and Regions in solidarity with Ukraine"

The EA President highlights the legacy of John Hume as a reminder of the EU's foundations of peace

7th edition of the CoR's Enlargement Day

EA members welcome European Parliament's adoption of the Islands Pact

Corsica celebrates 40th anniversary of the Corsican Assembly

Time to start acting on the recommendations of the Conference on the Future of Europe

EA group welcomes a new generation of YEPs

At the beginning of June, I joined the European Parliament President Roberta Metsola, Taoiseach Micheál Martin TD and MEPs in the unveiling of a bust to the great peacemaker John Hume. A timely reminder that the European Union is the greatest peace project we have and we need to cherish peace and security more than ever.



Karl Vanlouwe with the Mayor of Irpin Alexander Markushin



"Islands face structural constraints due to geographic discontinuity, higher transport costs and connectivity gaps. It is there crucial that special instruments and policies are devised for them in order to put them on equal footing with continental territories and to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth"

Ms Nanette Maupertuis, president of the Corsican Assembly

European Week of Regions and Cities: EA Group to hold high-level event on delivering the EU Green Deal at local level

On 11th October 2022, the European Alliance Group will hold a seminar on "Delivering the Green Deal at a regional and local level" in presence of high level politicians and experts.

Following the launch of EU Green Deal and legislative packages such as Fit for 55 that aim at delivering EU climate goals, participants will discuss how will this ambitious policy

agenda is being delivered at local level and the role of regions, municipalities and rural areas in achieving a just transition.

EA Members adopt Białystok Declaration "Cities and regions in solidarity with Ukraine"



EA members in Białystok

The European Alliance (EA) group in the European Committee of the Regions, at its extraordinary meeting in Białystok, Poland, held on 6 May 2022, confirmed its solidarity with Ukraine and unanimously agreed on the Białystok Declaration: Cities and Regions in solidarity with Ukraine.

The EA Group strongly condemns the unprovoked and unjustified military aggression of Russia against free Ukraine as well as the involvement of Belarus which goes against all international agreements and norms and undermines the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and deplores the loss of life of many civilians through this attack and act of war.

Speakers included Mr Tomasz Frankowski, Member of the European Parliament, Ms Aleksandra Dulkiewicz, Mayor of Gdańsk, President of the CoR's Working Group on Ukraine, Mr Constantin Cojocari, Vice-President of CALM (Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova), Mayor of Edineț municipality, Mr Paweł Kowal, Member of Polish Parliament and Political scientist from Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Science, Mr Bronius Markauskas, Mayor of the Klaipėda District and Mr András Szabó, Representative of the Mayor's Office in City Pécs.

"The focus of the meeting was ensuring solidarity and further support to our Ukrainians

friends in all difficulties caused by the terrible and unjustified war on the Ukrainian territory. We discussed a very important subject, which touches not only Poland's regions, cities and communes and its citizens but also the many regions and local and regional authorities of the European Union. This situation concerns all of us. During the discussions we have called for more support from the regions and cities of Europe to each other during this unprecedented migration crisis and we also welcomed the info-support-hub created by the European Committee of the Regions to help those in the EU and in Ukraine." said Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski, President of Białystok



Białystok Declaration with Mr McCarthy, Ms Dulkiewicz, Mr Truskolaski and Mr Frankowski

The EA President highlights the legacy of John Hume as a reminder of the EU's foundations of peace



Cllr Kieran McCarthy with John Hume JR at the unveiling of the bust of John Hume

The European Union as we know now was founded from the ashes of wars and we need to remind ourselves now, more than ever, that peace not war is the way forward. These sentiments were echoed by the European Alliance Group President at the inauguration of a bust to the great peacemaker John Hume in the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The bust was unveiled by the Taoiseach Micheal Martin and President of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola as a reminder of the great work of Hume and furthermore that we need to ensure peace on our continent, a message more important now with the tragic and unprovoked war in Ukraine.

7th edition of the CoR's Enlargement Day

After a two-years' break, on 6 and 7 July, the CoR will again host its 7th annual Enlargement Day in its own premises, preceded by a round of meetings with local and regional authorities from the Western Balkans and Turkey.

In addition to an assessment of the Western Balkan countries' progress in the EU accession, and the role of local and regional

authorities in it, CoR members and their peers from the region will focus on the role of youth in the EU accession process as well as youth engagement and participation at the local and regional level.

During the plenary session of the Enlargement Day, due to be held on 7 July, a particular session will be dedicated to

the European perspective of Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova.

EA group members who will participate at the events are Andries Gryffroy (JCC North Macedonia), József Kóbor (Working Group on Turkey), Declan McDonnell (JCC Serbia), Cosmina-Ramona Pandele (JCC Montenegro) and Miloslav Repaský (Working Group on the Western Balkans).

EA members welcome European Parliament's adoption of the Islands Pact



Ms Maupertuis with Mr Younous Omarjee, Mr Gilles Simeoni and Mr François Alfonsi

On 7 June, the European Parliament adopted the report of the REGI committee Chair Younous Omarjee on Islands and Cohesion Policy.

The report, which takes on board many of the recommendations included in a former CoR opinion drafted by Ms. Nanette Maupertuis, President of the

Assembly of Corsica, calls for an Islands Pact and targeted policies for insular regions in order to tackle the particular issues that they face.

EA President Kieran McCarthy and Vice President Nanette Maupertuis, who were both in Strasbourg welcomed the adoption of the pact.

"Islands face structural constraints due to geographic discontinuity, higher transport costs and connectivity gaps. It is there crucial that targeted instruments and policies are devised in order to put them on equal footing with continental territories and to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth, said Ms Maupertuis.

Corsica celebrates 40th anniversary of the Corsican Assembly

40 years ago, on 2 March 1982, the Assembly of Corsica was created with the first law on Corsica's special status. Elected on 8 August by proportional ballot, it was set up on 20 August by Minister Gaston Defferre.

On the occasion of the 40th year anniversary, a series of commemorations, conferences, exhibitions and many other events are being organised. They will go through the history of the Assembly with the aim to bring the Corsican institution closer to the people, but also to highlight the achievements of the special status, its limitations, its developments since 1982 and work on

the prospects for future autonomy. Under the chairmanship of Marie-Antoinette MAUPERTUIS, the 40th anniversary of the

Assembly of Corsica is a major event in the current political debate and contemporary history of Corsica.



40 years of the Corsican Assembly

Time to start acting on the recommendations of the Conference on the Future of Europe



Cllr Declan McDonnell, CoR rapporteur on a permanent dialogue with citizens

On 30 April 2022, after a year of deliberations with citizens, European, national, regional and local institutions, civil society and social partners, the Conference on the

Future of Europe plenary agreed to its final 49 proposals. Each EU institution committed to follow-up on the proposals, according to its respective remit. For the CoR, it means a particular focus on the territorial perspective of the proposals and its own future role as an institution.

During the Conference, our members promoted active subsidiarity, multilevel governance and an enhanced role for the CoR in the EU's future institutional architecture. Another important result for our house are the proposals for a strengthened participative democracy in the EU, which are in line with the opinion on a permanent dialogue with citizens drafted by Cllr Declan McDonnell.

EA group's representatives at the Conference's plenaries were our president Kieran McCarthy (Cork City Council, Ireland) and our first vice president Karl Vanlouwe

(Flemish Parliament), who were both very active in their respective working groups.

During its May plenary session, the European Parliament already called for a change of EU Treaties and for a convention for the revision of the Treaties to be established. The European Council of 23/24 June presented a first set of guidelines for the implementation of the proposals. Also worth noting is the European Commission's communication on the follow up to the Conference published on 17 June.

Finally, the European Commission president will present relevant initiatives in his/her State of the Union speech in September.

The CoR is due to adopt a resolution on the follow up to the Conference at its forthcoming plenary session.

EA group welcomes a new generation of YEPs

Marks the beginning of the 2022 edition of the CoR's Young Elected Politicians (YEP) programme, which enables politicians from across the EU younger than 40 and elected at the local and regional level to take active part in the work of the European Committee of the Regions and the European Union.

Our YEPs in the 2022 programme will be Thomas Wellens, city councillor in Berlaar (Flanders), Máirín McGrath, city councillor in Cahir (Ireland), Alessandro Giovenzi, mayor of Verrès (Italy), Sijbe Knol, member of the Frisian Parliament, Núria Carné Navarro, deputy Mayor of Caldes de Montbui (Catalonia), Goizeder Juango Lizarbe, city councillor in Tafalla (Navarra) and Carlos Ukar Arana, city councillor in Caparrosa (Navarra).



Mr Karl Vanlouwe with some of our previous YEPs

During 2022, they will have an opportunity to take part in a number of events and consultations, such as different thematic workshops, conferences, meetings

and training sessions organised by the CoR, as well as one of the CoR's plenary sessions and the European Week of Regions and Cities.

