

## European Alliance Group

# Making regions, cities and local communities central in EU policies and legislation for 30 years,

says Karl Vanlouwe, President of the European Alliance Group

As we celebrate the 30 years of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) we need to not look only at the past or current achievements, but really set a roadmap for the future. A future where our regions are automatically included in the future agenda setting of the



Mr Karl Vanlouwe

European Commission and European Parliament, a future where subsidiarity is really applied and not just to member state level, a future where we build Europe from the bottom up, making a real difference.

We have this opportunity with some key events including the Green Deal Mayors event on the 15th of March, followed by the much anticipated CoR summit in Mons / Bergen, and the Stronger Regions summit being organised by the Flemish government in April. Key events in an EU presidency of the Council being led by the regions.

The European Parliament elections are also ahead of us, along with many other elections the same day. We need to engage our citizens to go and vote. It is a democratic right that we should all exercise.

Our European Alliance group was the third political group established in the European Committee of the Regions when it was created. We are still delivering for our members, we respect the role of regions and those who wish to have more power or have a say in their future. Let's use this CoR summit on the 18-19th of March to build our Europe, our real EU of regions.

## European Free Alliance and EA Group highlight the value of cooperation across EU institutions and beyond

At a recent EFA party meeting members of the broader family including the EA group in the CoR met to highlight priorities and see how the benefits of cooperation can make and real impact. Some of the areas mentioned are the issue of the application of the subsidiarity principle, not only in having EU policies implemented at the regional level but also the work with the self-determination caucus.

Other practical areas of success from the European Alliance perspective has been the very clear policies on Islands and cross border cooperation which have filtered through to the EP opinions. We really appreciate the ongoing cooperation between the EFA party, group and our group in the CoR

We wish the very best of luck to the EFA Party spitzenkandidaten Raül Romeva and Maylis

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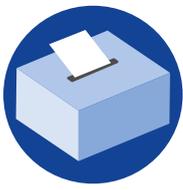
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Roßberg for the forthcoming European Parliament elections.



*"We need to ensure everyone uses their right to vote in order to shape their future, whether this is at local, regional federal or European Parliament elections."*

*Karl Vanlouwe, president of the EA group*



## Stronger rural areas are needed at the heart of the European Union—says Mr Dariusz Strugała, EA NAT Coordinator

The NAT Commission of the Committee of the Regions plays a pivotal role in charting the course for sustainable development within the European Union (EU). As we confront pressing challenges such as climate change, resource depletion, and socio-economic disparities, the Commission's priorities for the future are more crucial than ever.

Rural development and territorial cohesion remain high on our NAT Commission's agenda. By investing in rural infrastructure, supporting agricultural diversification, and enhancing digital connectivity, the Commission seeks to empower rural communities and bridge economic disparities between urban and rural

areas. Rural areas are not merely patches of land on the outskirts of urban centres; they are vibrant communities with rich histories, diverse cultures, and untapped potential. They are the stewards of our natural resources, the producers of our food, and the guardians of our traditional ways of life. However, despite their invaluable contributions, rural areas face numerous challenges that threaten their sustainability and prosperity.

The NAT Commission's priorities for the future reflect our commitment to advancing sustainable development, combating climate change, promoting circular economy principles, fostering rural development, and driving innovation

within the EU. Through concerted efforts and collaboration, this Commission aims to pave the way for a more prosperous, equitable, and resilient future for all EU regions.



*Mr Dariusz Strugała, EA NAT Coordinator*

## A strong cohesion policy with more focus on remote and island regions is needed says Nanette Maupertuis, EA coordinator in the COTER commission

The COTER commission is concentrating its efforts on the implementation of current cohesion policy and in contributing to the ongoing debate on the Future of Cohesion, after the

adoption of the High-Level Group Specialists report.

"Cohesion policy is the main EU investment policy for regions and cities, which makes the EU visible to its citizens. Its architecture, the partnership principle and shared management must be safeguarded. Proliferation of funding instruments and centralised management must be absolutely avoided" said Nanette Maupertuis, EA coordinator in the COTER commission and President of the Assembly of Corsica.

"We have to ensure the economic convergence and a just transition for all territories, regardless of their specificities, being them islands, rural or urban areas. Easier budget access and targeted support to regions and

cities is pivotal in order for them to address their main challenges", added Ms Maupertuis.

COTER will place attention on a continued place-based approach, economic competitiveness, as well as on employment, education, training, upskilling, and reskilling.

Moreover, territorial cooperation in land and maritime regions will remain a priority. An opinion on the future of ETC will be drawn up and the commission will also follow up on the topic of emergency cross-border services and on the new regulation on "Facilitating Cross-Border Solutions" (ECBM 2.0) which has the potential to be ground-breaking for cross-border cooperation in the European Union.



*Ms Nanette Maupertuis, EA coordinator in the COTER*

## Skills for a Circular and Innovative Society are a priority says Sergio Perez Garcia, EA coordinator in SEDEC

2023 was declared the European Year of Skills by the European Commission, aiming to boost the acquisition of the talents needed for our future economy. The year is now over, but many challenges persist and much work remains to be done.

The SEDEC commission of the CoR is the one responsible for providing a regional perspective on social policy, education, employment, research, and culture. These topics are crucial for the future of our economy, as it faces

challenges such as demographic change, labour market changes, and the lack of skills in innovative industries needed for green reindustrialisation of Europe.

This year, the SEDEC commission will focus on the next framework programme for research and innovation, ensuring skills and talent mobility, addressing demographic change, and protecting children in the EU, with many opinions already on the way. As the coordinator for the European Alliance



*Sergio Perez Garcia, EA Coordinator on the SEDEC*

Group, I firmly believe that these are key priorities not only for the CoR, but also for our regions, and that is why I believe we have our word to say.

In the Navarra region, I had the pleasure to collaborate with the educational institutions and the industrial sector to better integrate

the needs of the sector in the educational programmes, in order to have a better prepared labour force to face not only the needs of today, but also the innovations that will arrive tomorrow. Automotive, as one of our most important sectors, will face the electrification of transport, and we have been working to keep

our industry alive, circular, and to have a just transition for everybody.

As the coordinator for SEDEC, I tried to export these values, and exchange with other regions, because only if all the EU is united under these needs we will be prepared for the future.

## Advancing economic governance for a fair and sustainable Europe and promote a resilient and sustainable economic model that leaves no territories behind - our main priorities in ECON Commission – says Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski, EA coordinator in ECON



Tadeusz Truskolaski, ECON Coordinator

The ECON commission is gearing up its efforts in several key policy areas critical to the European Union's strategic agenda and its impact on local and regional authorities. Foremost among these priorities is enhancing competitiveness, bolstering industry, supporting SMEs, providing regulatory relief, and addressing business taxation. Recognizing the need for a cohesive industrial policy, the commission stresses the importance of

a green and digital dimension in industrial strategies, while also considering the territorial implications of transitions in energy-intensive sectors such as automotive, chemical, and steel production.

The work of the ECON commission will be focused on boosting the resilience of local and regional communities through digital transformation. Acknowledging the intrinsic link between digital inequalities and socio-economic disparities, the ECON commission emphasizes the need for digital cohesion and transformation, particularly in urban and rural areas. This effort encompasses improving connectivity, digitalizing public services, and facilitating digitalization for businesses and SMEs.

Another critical area of focus for the ECON commission is ensuring the resilience of the Single Market and safeguarding competition and trade. The commission aims to amplify

the voices of local and regional stakeholders in discussions surrounding the future of the Single Market, advocating for initiatives to strengthen and deepen its foundations. Additionally, the commission is committed to promoting agile competition policies and ensuring the proper consideration of territorial dimensions in trade policies amidst a complex geopolitical landscape.

Lastly, the commission is dedicated to advancing economic governance for a fair and sustainable Europe. In response to challenges posed by crises such as conflicts like the war in Ukraine, the commission seeks to promote a resilient and sustainable economic model that leaves no territories behind. This includes advocating for a strong territorial dimension in EU economic governance reforms, fostering dialogue on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) implementation, and ensuring synergies with initiatives such as the European Green Deal.

## ENVE: Climate neutrality only possible with greater subnational governments empowerment says Andries Gryffroy

This is a crucial period for EU climate and energy, and environmental policies in light of new elections and the formation of the new European Commission and European Parliament. The core of the Green Deal legislation has been agreed upon and a reflection process is ongoing on the future initiatives to reach EU and global climate goals.

The ENVE commission will concentrate efforts on developing a position of the Green Deal 2.0 while monitoring the implementation of current legislation, advocating for effective multilevel governance.

There will be no transition to climate neutrality if local and regional governments are not empowered. We are the ones taking action to boost renewable energy projects, improve energy efficiency to shape sustainable urban

planning, and we are the ones who can really drive change in citizens' behaviours.

We are not just implementers; we want and we deserve to be part of decision-making process. We need more bottom-up governance arrangements to ensure all level of governments can fully contribute to the climate objectives, says Andries Gryffroy, EA coordinator in the ENVE commission.

This year I will also present the opinion on the European Wind Package, focussing in particular on the potential of offshore wind projects, a key sector contributing to enhancing renewable energy production.

Finally, the ENVE commission will continue prioritising work on circular economy, zero pollution, and environmental protection. In

particular the EA group welcomes the water resilience initiative to tackle drought and floods in Europe and calls on the EU to take inspiration from Flanders' Blue Deal launched by Minister Demir to improve water reuse and management.



Andries Gryffroy, EA coordinator in ENVE

## A key year for Democracy says Jozsef Kóbor, EA coordinator in CIVEX

The CIVEX commission of the CoR has a busy and challenging agenda for 2024. With the enlargement policy restarting and the European elections approaching, the commission will focus on several priorities that are crucial for the future of the EU and its citizens.

One of these priorities is to give a response to the Enlargement package and the commission will work on strengthening the cooperation with the candidate countries that do not have any with the CoR yet, such as Georgia and Moldova. Enlargement is not only important for trade and the economy, but also for the quality of life of the citizens living in the border regions of the Union, who currently face many difficulties and limitations. The commission will also

focus on the active subsidiarity, fight of drug trafficking and organised crime, and relations with Africa.

Another priority is to tackle the rising threats to the European democracy and values, especially in the context of the upcoming European, but also national, regional, and local elections. As the rapporteur for this topic, I will issue an opinion on the Defence of Democracy package of the European Commission in the next months. The package aims to enhance the security and transparency of the electoral processes in the different member states, and to prevent and combat disinformation among the public opinion.

As the coordinator of the EA Group, I want to stress the importance of these topics for the fu-



Jozsef Kóbor, EA Coordinator on CIVEX

ture of Europe. The CIVEX commission is about the values and rights of our citizens, and the global strategies of our Union. The decisions on those topics will have a significant impact for our citizens, and we need to ensure that they are well-informed, engaged, and protected.

## EA Members participate in the General Assembly of the Association of Communes of Romania (ACoR)



EA members in Romania

On 12 February 2024, EA Group Members participated in the General Assembly of the Association of Communes of Romania which took place

in Bucharest on the invitation of the President of ACoR, Mr Emil Drăghici, EA Bureau Member and Mayor of Vulcana-Băi, (Dâmbovița County). The EA Group was represented by Vice-President of the European Alliance Group, Mr Dariusz-Antoni Strugała, Mayor of Jaraczewo. Other EA Group Members were also present: Mr Krzysztof Iwaniuk, President of the Union of Rural Communities of the Republic of Poland (URPC) and Mayor of Terespol (Lublin Province), as well as Ms Cosmina Pandele, Mayor of Berceni (Prahova County), and Mr Gheorghe Dămian, Mayor of Ciugud (Alba County),

both Members of the Association of Communes of Romania.

The meeting was attended by the Romanian Prime Minister, Mr Marcel Ciolacu. Romania faces a very tense period where territorial reorganisation is asked from many levels of administration.

During the meeting, the Manifesto on “The fate of the Romanian village: against the abusive dissolution or merger of communes” was presented by Mr. Drăghici and adopted unanimously. He declared: “Romania urgently needs a reform of public finances, instead of an administrative-territorial reform”.

## Annabel Tavernier hosts the CIVEX commission visit to the Dutch Language House and the Flemish Parliament

On February 7th, the CIVEX Commission visited two important institutions for the Dutch-speaking community in Brussels: the Dutch Language House and the Flemish Parliament. The visit was organised by Annabel Tavernier, a member of the EA Group in the CoR, and from the Flemish Parliament.

The Dutch Language House, founded in 2004, is one of several Dutch Language Houses in Flanders. It supports the learning and use of Dutch in Brussels by providing language courses, cultural promotion, certificates, and advice to individuals, organisations, and companies on Dutch matters.

The CIVEX Commission members discussed the challenges faced by the Dutch-speaking minority in the Brussels-Capital region with the Director of the house, and the path newcomers follow in order to be integrated into Flemish society.

The members also enjoyed a tour of the Flemish Parliament, where they learned about the history and functioning of the parliament and its building, which represents the Flemish community and region. Discussed about the complex political system of Belgium and the challenges it causes for matters like education or transport. And finally, they also admired the artworks that adorn the

building, that reflect on the societal issues that matter to the Flemish citizens.



Annabel Tavernier and CIVEX members in Dutch language house