

European Alliance Group

It's your right to vote, so make sure you use it

by Karl Vanlouwe, President of the EA group

While we are only a few weeks away from the European Elections, there are many local, regional, and federal elections taking place at the same time. Now, it's the people who decide, but to decide, everyone

needs to make an effort to vote. There are many places in the world where people do not have this right, or in some cases, they may have no choice to make, but across the EU, we have a choice, and it is incumbent on us to reach out and use our vote.



Karl Vanlouwe

The next European Parliament elections will be decisive, as they will guide the direction of the EP for the next five years. It will also shape the next European Commission in its choices of Commissioners, policies, and direction. We in the European Alliance group will continue our excellent working relations with the MEPs.

As we reflect on 30 years of the European Committee of the Regions, we need to reflect on the past but more so look towards the future and where we would like to go. We need to make sure that regions have a strong voice in the EU decision-making process, and we would like to ensure that the next European Commission President reflects this more in their policy approach for the future. Europe is richer with its diverse regions, cultures, and languages; let's not forget this when we use our opportunity to vote.

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Elections to the fore at the EA Group Meeting in Mons / Bergen

During the European Alliance group meeting in the margins of the European Summit of Regions and Cities, the focus was on the needs of regions and the European, local, and federal elections. Our President Karl Vanlouwe moderated the meeting, where Raül Romeva, one of the European Free Alliance Spitzenkandidaten, outlined the EFA party manifesto as well as the role of

regions in the decision-making process. The EFA President, Lorena López de Lacalle, also spoke about the changing face of elections and the need to reflect on the priorities.

Former EA Presidents, Stanislaw Szwabski and Uno Silberg, joined the discussion along with members from the EU Councillor and young elected politician's network.



Raül Romeva, Lorena López de Lacalle and Karl Vanlouwe in Mons / Bergen

Mons Summit: Maupertuis participates in high-level debate on the future of Cohesion Policy



Ms Maupertuis (centre) with the panellists

At the 10th European Summit of Regions and Cities, EA Vice President Nanette Maupertuis moderated the high-level event on the future of cohesion policy with Commissioner Ferreira, European Parliament Regional Committee chair Younous Omarjee, and CoR President Vasco Cordeiro.

At this meeting, the Cohesion partners, notably the high-level representatives of

local and regional associations, debated with the Chair of the High-Level Group of Specialists on the future of Cohesion Policy and the recently published report.

With less than three months to go before the European elections, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) together with the founding partners of the EU-wide coalition #CohesionAlliance, launched a

joint call to the European institutions and national governments to keep Cohesion Policy as the main pillar of the EU's development model in the next decade.

McCarthy: We are only scratching the surface when it comes to harnessing youth's potential

During the 10th European Summit of Regions and Cities, one of the panel discussions focused on enhancing meaningful youth participation in democratic life. The session, titled "Co-creating Cities and Regions with Young People," gathered youth work practitioners, activists, and policymakers who discussed the follow-up on the youth-related commitments made during the Conference on the Future of Europe, the role of local/regional youth councils, and the potential of lowering the voting age to 16 as

means to engage more young people in democratic decision-making.



Kieran McCarthy

One of the panellists was also our first vice president and current Lord Mayor of Cork, Cllr Kieran McCarthy. Cllr McCarthy shared his experience in engaging with young people in Cork, as well as his personal story of how different influences through his schooling led him to enter local politics.

"There is an unwarranted fear of what young people can do if they are elected," he said. "We need to believe in them; we're only scratching the surface when it comes to harnessing their potential."

Gryffroy: Green Deal must be built from the bottom up, with regions and cities

On 19 March at the Mons Summit of Regions and Cities, Andries Gryffroy participated in a session on the future of the Green Deal, in the presence of many locally elected representatives across the EU.

Based on current realities from the ground and emerging trends, the session put forward key ideas on how regions and cities can better participate in the European Green Deal to ensure it becomes a real compass for sustainability and people's well-being.

Andries Gryffroy, member of the Flemish Parliament, recalled that the Green Deal

will achieve its objectives only if regions and cities are fully involved in the policy and decision-making process. Moreover, he pointed out that regions are different from each other, and that a one-size-fits-all approach is not the solution.

“The Green Deal must be built from the bottom up,” says Andries Gryffroy. “Regions and cities cannot be just implementers; they need to be part of the decision-making process and fully involved from the outset. Moreover, we cannot treat regions in the same manner because they are all different in their asset and

challenges. The future Green Deal should be flexible enough to take into account those specificities,” he concluded.



McDonnell attends CFAA meeting with the European Court of Auditors



On 22 March, members of the European Committee of the Region's Commission for Financial and Administrative Affairs (CFAA) were hosted in Luxembourg by the members of the European Court of Auditors (ECA), led by president Tony Murphy.

Apart from Mr Murphy, ECA was represented by Ms Ivana Maletić and Ms Helga Berger, members of the Chambers IV and II respectively.

The discussion was focused on the ECA 2024+ working programme, most recent reports focusing on regional development issues, implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, and public procurement.

During the meeting, Cllr Declan McDonnell (Galway City Council, Ireland) had an exchange with ECA President Murphy sharing some of his experiences as a long-standing Cllr and twice Lord Mayor of Galway.

Vanlouwe presents his opinion on the EU Blue Deal

EA Group President, Mr. Karl Vanlouwe, presented his opinion on the Blue Deal during the Water Conference on March 12 in Leuven, “Speeding up to a water-resilient Europe – Towards an EU water resilience agenda”, the main event on water during the Belgium Presidency framework, with the presence of Mrs. Zuhair Demir, Minister of Justice & Enforcement, Environment, Energy, and Tourism, and with Mrs. Florika Fink-Hooijer, Director-General of the Environment Department of the European Commission.

It was very well received, as the opinion draws a lot from the Flemish Government's own Blue Deal strategy. Blue Deal strategies, like the Flemish one, are important in getting the environment, agriculture, and industry

on a path of collaboration to guarantee sustainable water management.

The opinion highlights the numerous water-related risks that regions face. It calls for the creation of an EU Blue Deal, which would complement the EU Green Deal and constitute a long-term strategy aimed at establishing sectoral coherence on water management, climate-change adaptation, and reducing the risk of disasters.

Rapporteur Karl Vanlouwe said: “Creating a comprehensive Blue Deal, as an addition towards the current Green Deal, is needed to restore our resilience towards droughts and floodings through nature-based solutions. This ‘blue’ shift should be made with an em-



Mr Vanlouwe speaking at the Water Conference in Leuven

phasis on innovation, supporting vulnerable sectors, engaging with local stakeholders in the implementation process, and listening to local needs. A shift through bottom-up integration is needed to reach a widely supported outcome.”

Kóbor's Defence of Democracy opinion to be debated at the CoR Plenary

At the CIVEX commission's last meeting in 2023, our CIVEX coordinator, József Kóbor (Pécs, Hungary), was appointed rapporteur-general on the European Commission's Defence of Democracy package. This opinion is due to be presented at the CoR's April plenary session.

The package includes the Commission's recommendations on strengthening electoral processes in the EU, enhancing citizen participation in public policy-making, and the representation of the interest of third countries.

It builds on previous Commission initiatives to safeguard European democracy, including the European Democracy Action Plan.

In his opinion, Mr. Kóbor emphasizes the crucial role of upholding democratic values and institutions for the EU's stability and prosperity. He highlights the importance of strong electoral systems, the proactive role of local and regional authorities in democratic processes, and the necessity for transparent representa-

tion, against the backdrop of challenges such as disinformation and foreign interference.



EFA Meeting in Brittany: Vanlouwe discusses regional languages and agriculture

On 21 and 22 February, EA President Karl Vanlouwe participated in the European Free Alliance Group visit in Brittany, upon the invitation of MEP Lydie Massard. EFA members of the European Parliament and party representa-

tives discussed Brittany's regional languages and agriculture.

During the meeting, Karl Vanlouwe, a member of the Flemish Parliament, highlighted the need for the EU to promote the use of regional

languages as part of the EU's rich cultural and language diversity. While sharing the case of Flemish, he called for more power to regions in areas such as education, school curricula, and language teaching.

Future of CAP: Strugała highlights the importance of providing better life conditions for rural areas

As the European Union (EU) prepares to chart its course beyond 2027, the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) emerges as a focal point of discussion. With the current CAP framework set to expire, policymakers are facing a pivotal moment to reshape agricultural policy in alignment with evolving socio-economic and environmental challenges. The future CAP aims to bridge the gap between urban and rural communities by fostering rural development initiatives. By investing in infrastructure, broadband connectivity, and social services, policymakers seek to revitalize rural economies, attract young talent, and combat depopulation.

During the last NAT commission meeting on 22nd March, members held a debate on the future of CAP and the CoR draft opinion with

Janusz Wojciechowski, European Commissioner for Agriculture, and major stakeholders of the agri-food value chain. As the recent farmers' demonstrations have shown, one significant

point of contention regarding the CAP is the living conditions in rural areas.

In the framework of this debate, Dariusz Strugała, the European Alliance (EA) group's coordinator at NAT and mayor of Jaraczewo (PL), highlighted the importance of ensuring decent living conditions in rural areas to make them comparable to those in cities, especially for young farmers as the new generation. This effort is strongly linked to the CAP's second pillar, which, as Strugała stressed, should be closely linked to other policies as well and cannot be solely funded by the CAP. In that sense, he indicated the need to use other funds, such as the Cohesion Funds, to ensure the necessary infrastructure that guarantees acceptable living conditions in the countryside also for young people.



Dariusz Strugała with Commissioner Wojciechowski