

European Alliance Group

The success of the European Union is founded in its regions, cities and local communities

by Karl Vanlouwe, President of the European Alliance Group, member of the Flemish Parliament

With the re-appointment of the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and the nomination of the Commissioners-designate, to whom we wish the best, it is time to remind the Commission that Europe's success is founded in its local communities. Yes, we welcome the request via the 'mission letters' of the Commissioners-designate that they should go out to the regions, but it is not enough. Every policy should be applied with the principle of active subsidiarity in mind; it needs to have the regional aspect integrated, and there should be less centralisation via the capital cities.

As a group, we continue to focus on key themes for our members. This time, we held a really productive and focused meeting in Lithuania. Bronius Markauskas, Mayor of Klaipėda District, hosted a seminar on 'Delivering Regional Maritime Growth,' which brought together local and regional leaders from across Europe to discuss the critical role of maritime



Mr Karl Vanlouwe and Mr Bronius Markauskas

regions in driving economic growth and sustainability. Mayor Markauskas was a wonderful host, and his region is worth revisiting.

During EU Regions Week, our work will turn to "Regional Growth through Innovation," where we have a great line-up of speakers. It is worth tuning in to the 120 workshops being held during the biggest event on the EU calendar, where local and regional governments discuss, debate, and suggest ways forward for the benefit of their communities.

We have an interesting few months ahead, during which we will hopefully see the regions take centre stage during the Commissioners' hearings and in their work for the next five years.

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EU Regions Week: EA Group highlights best practices in driving regional growth through innovation

On Tuesday, 8 October, the European Alliance group will organise a workshop as part of the European Week of Regions and Cities, titled "Driving regional growth through innovation - highlighting best practices." Speakers will include Ms Catherine Wendt, Head of Unit

for Smart and Sustainable Growth at DG REGIO, Ms Ana Ollo, Minister for Citizen Relations in the Government of Navarre, and Mr Michał Podbielski, Head of Promotion at the Białystok Science and Technology Park.



SEDEC adopts McDonnell's opinion on improving access to social services



Mr Declan McDonnell, rapporteur on improving access to social services

At the SEDEC commission meeting held on 1 October, members adopted the draft opinion "Addressing territorial inequalities by improving access to social services" by Cllr Declan McDonnell (Galway City Council, Ireland).

In the opinion, Cllr McDonnell highlights the need for integrated regional development strategies, targeted investments, and digital infrastructure enhancements, par-

ticularly in underserved areas. The opinion also calls for innovative fiscal policies, improved service delivery models, and leveraging EU funds effectively to promote social inclusion and reduce disparities across the EU.

The opinion will be discussed at the November plenary of the Committee of the Regions.

CoR Plenary to adopt Gryffroy's opinion on Wind Power Action Plan

On 9 October the CoR Plenary will adopt the opinion of Andries Gryffroy, a member of the Flemish parliament and EA group coordinator in the commission.

Wind power has significant potential to contribute to EU renewable energy targets and deliver energy independence for local and regional authorities. However, the sector is facing challenges related to slow permitting, litigation procedures, and a lack of general public acceptance.

In the draft opinion, the rapporteur welcomes the European Wind Charter, signed

by 26 Member States and companies, to tackle barriers and ensure a faster uptake of this technology.

Moreover, he makes several recommendations to improve the acceptance of projects among citizens, who should receive a fair financial return. He invites the European Commission to take action to avoid litigation procedures while considering the diversity of each region.

Mr. Gryffroy also underlines that wind energy needs to be transported from the point of production to the point of con-



Mr Andries Gryffroy, EA rapporteur on the Wind Power Action Plan

sumption or stored locally. Hence, he calls for more investment in energy storage and grid development, which should be accounted for when calculating the cost of wind projects.

COTER unanimously approve Maupertuis proposals for new design and delivery mechanisms for next MFF

On 17 September, the COTER commission unanimously adopted some key opinions at its external meeting in Oulu, Finland, calling for a stronger EU Cohesion Policy in the next multiannual budget post-2027 and simplifying the management of funds at the local level.



Ms Nanette Maupertuis, EA rapporteur on EU Budget

Following the adoption of recommendations on the reform of Cohesion Policy drafted by the CoR President Vasco Alves Cordeiro and COTER chair Emil Boc, who stressed that the Cohesion Policy must remain managed bottom-up and be built on the strengths of each region, COTER members backed the opinion of EA member and President of the Assembly of Corsica, Nanette Maupertuis, on the EU budget and place-based policies for new design and delivery mechanisms in the MFF post-2027.

In her opinion, Ms Maupertuis argues for a more strategic budget that is based on and clearly linked to EU priorities and objectives, and for the need to address the current fragmentation of funding to maximise

the impact of the budget on the ground and make it easier for regions and cities to access EU funding. She also emphasised the need to operationalise the concept of the "Do no harm to Cohesion" principle.

"In order to address the multiple challenges the EU faces, while strengthening cohesion across all territories, we need a more strategic, simplified, and agile multiannual budget. Greater involvement of regions and cities in shaping and implementing development strategies is crucial in order to maximise the impact of the budget on the ground, in line with the principles of active subsidiarity, multilevel governance, and better regulation," said EA rapporteur Nanette Maupertuis.

Klaipėda - Markauskas and EA Group urge EU to prioritise maritime economy



EA Members during the external meeting and seminar in Klaipėda District, Lithuania

Bronius Markauskas, Mayor of Klaipėda District hosted a seminar on 'Delivering Regional Maritime Growth' with the European Alliance (EA) group in the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) on 11-12 September 2024. The seminar brought together local and regional leaders from across Europe to discuss the critical role of maritime regions in driving maritime economic growth and sustainability.

During the two-day event, participants focused on the challenges and opportunities facing Europe's maritime regions, with discussions centred on sustainable maritime development, the importance of marine research and innovation, and the need for strategic investments in port infrastructure. The meeting also addressed the skills required to support the future of the blue economy.

The culmination of these discussions was the adoption of the Klaipėda Declaration, which outlines key actions necessary to enhance the EU maritime economy. The declaration demands the new European Commission and Member States to prioritise maritime affairs in the next mandate and propose a reinforcement of programmes supporting maritime sectors (including fisheries) in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) while favouring an integrated and bottom-up approach. It also emphasises the need for an EU Blue Deal for water policy, increased investment in marine research, sustainable port development, and the upskilling of the maritime workforce.

The EA group's push for an EU Blue Deal for water policy is closely aligned with the European Commission's political

guidelines for 2024-2029, which also underscore the importance of water security and resilience as crucial components of Europe's sustainable prosperity and competitiveness. The guidelines highlight the need to harness the potential of the blue economy to drive innovation, create jobs, and ensure the sustainability of oceans.

This meeting represents a step towards ensuring that maritime regions are adequately supported and empowered to contribute to the EU's overall economic and environmental goals.

Bronius Markauskas, Mayor of Klaipėda District and host of the event said "Klaipėda's rich maritime heritage is a testament to the potential that lies within Europe's coastal regions. This meeting has reinforced our collective resolve to harness that potential sustainably. The Klaipėda Declaration is a crucial step towards ensuring that our seas and oceans remain a source of prosperity for future generations."

Karl Vanlouwe, President of the EA group said: "The time has come for Europe to tap into the potential of maritime regions to enhance sustainable economy and competitiveness. As EA group we reiterate the need for an EU Blue Deal for water policy in order to ensure the efficient use of this strategic resource for our economic sectors as well as farmers. This declaration is a clarion call to the European Commission and Member States to prioritise water and the blue economy in their strategies for the next mandate."

Delegates also visited the port of Klaipėda and a local aquaculture farm.



Stronger and more sustainable rural communities in the EU – says Mr Repaský, new EA coordinator for NAT

As the newly appointed EA Coordinator of the NAT Commission at the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), Mr Miloslav Repaský has outlined his key priorities aimed at strengthening rural development, environmental sustainability, and local food security. A staunch advocate for the empowerment of rural communities, his agenda will focus on ensuring that EU policies better address the specific needs of rural regions, with an emphasis on smart villages, digital transformation, and enhancing local infrastructure. Mr. Repaský is committed to

making rural areas more attractive for both living and working, promoting initiatives that boost connectivity, job creation, and quality services in underserved regions.

In addition to rural development, Mr Repaský places a high priority on sustainability. He advocates for the protection of natural resources such as water, aligning the NAT Commission's work with the proposal for European Blue Deal. His leadership will focus on promoting sustainable farming practices, the circular economy, and re-



Mr Miloslav Repaský, EA coordinator of the NAT committee

ducing carbon emissions in rural areas. Mr Repaský also emphasises the importance of local food systems and security, supporting initiatives that shorten food supply chains and ensure the resilience of local food production. By focusing on these areas, he aims to build stronger, more sustainable rural communities that are central to the EU's broader environmental and economic goals.

EA Group welcomes Mr Przybylski



Mr Cezary Przybylski

During last external meeting in Klaipėda on 11 September 2024 the EA members welcomed a new member from Poland. Mr Cezary Adam Przybylski in the years 2014–2024 held the position of the Marshal of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship. Actually, he is a councillor of the same regional assembly. At the CoR Mr Przybylski is working in two commissions: ENVE and SEDEC.

Welcome back as a full member Cosmina

After a period of absence, the EA group is pleased to welcome back Ms Cosmina Pandele, Mayor of Berceni, as a full member, and Mr Gheorghe Dămian, Mayor of Ciugud, as an alternate member. Their departure due to administrative reasons concluded with the recent reappointment of CoR members by the EU Council. They reincorporated the group and will soon restart their activity within the CoR commissions COTER and SEDEC.



Ms Cosmina Pandele



Mr Gheorghe Dămian

EA Group launches its annual CoR / EA Group primary school art competition

After many successful editions, the EA group has officially launched this year's annual primary schools art competition, titled "My Region, My Identity". Identity can reflect students' feelings, landscape, traditions, food, community, people, family, or artistic vision. The competition will see schoolchildren from across Europe submit drawings that illustrate the link between

their local area and the wider European Union.

All drawings and paintings will be exhibited in the European Committee of the Regions' building in Brussels during the November Plenary Session. The young students are also asked to include a brief description of their dreams for their regions within the wider European context, which



Last year's exhibition "My Region, Our EU Region"

will be published in a booklet highlighting the diversity of children's perceptions of the EU.