

European Alliance Group

Regions must not be excluded from the next EU budget discussions

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



As we are taking steps towards the new European Commission being ratified, MEPs have settled in and we are looking to the future, which must have regions and cities at its core. Recent draft internal discussion documents suggesting the centralisation of EU funds to national governments would move funding away from where it is most needed and where it can have the greatest impact: the regions. We will have to work hand in hand with the European Parliament and the EU Council Presidencies to ensure that regions remain central to the design, formulation, and implementation of policies and funding relevant to them.

Our hearts go out to those who have lost their lives in the recent flooding in Valencia, Barcelona and across Central and Eastern Europe. As severe flooding and droughts are becoming increasingly common in the European Union, it's time to create a genuine EU Blue Deal that invests in solutions to alleviate the impact of both. I have proposed this in my CoR opinion on creating a new EU deal, but we need to act swiftly. Time is of the essence.

As we approach the 30th anniversary of the European Committee of the Regions, we also reflect on our European Alliance Group, which became the third political group established in the CoR in 1995. We have been a real voice for those who believe in subsidiarity, greater devolved powers for regions, the right of self-determination, and, most importantly, giving a voice to independent local and regional representatives, whether from rural, mountain, village, or city areas. They have had, and will continue to have, a strong voice in the European Alliance. We look forward to the next 30 years as the CoR continues to deliver on behalf of our regions, communes and cities.

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Mr Iwaniuk has invited the EA Group Bureau Members to his commune Terespol to discuss Eastern Partnership (EaP), seen from the perspective of the EU's eastern border. The EaP, within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, is a policy of strategic partnership which aims to strengthen and deepen the political and economic relations between the EU, its Member States and the partner countries, as well as supporting sus-

tainable reform processes in countries of Eastern Partnership.

Terespol is a charming rural municipality located in the eastern part of Poland, in Biała Podlaska County, Lublin Voivodeship, near the border with Belarus. Despite being a small town, Terespol is a hidden gem that offers a unique blend of history, culture, and natural beauty. The town is situated on the banks of the Bug River. It has a rich history that dates back

to the 16th century. The municipality is part of the protected area called Podlasie Bug Gorge Landscape Park.



McCarthy and Maupertuis warn European Commission not to further centralise EU funds management



Mr Kieran McCarthy and Ms Nanette Maupertuis

Following the EU Regions Week and the presentation of the State of Regions and Cities by CoR President Vasco Cordeiro, EA Group Vice-Presidents Kieran McCarthy and Nanette Maupertuis have continued advocating for a strong cohesion policy and for a stronger role of regions in the next cycle post-2027.

At the Opening session of the EURegionsWeek, **Kieran McCarthy, Cork city councillor**, highlighted that: "Cohesion policy has worked and contributed significantly to supporting and rebuilding territories in times of crisis". However, pointing to the emerging challenges for cohesion policy, such as the creation of new instruments with new rules, the shifting of money away from cohesion or the rumours over the upcoming proposal of a new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), McCarthy made an appeal to the new European Commission and invited it to stop the rumours.

"Local and regional authorities want a strong partnership in multi-level governance. We share the importance of capacity building, the importance of flexibility for our regions and cities and the importance of reducing the red tape for our regions

and cities. Let us together shape a policy that can support our cities and regions as they need", he concluded.

A few days later, on 15 October, **Nanette Maupertuis, President of the Assembly of Corsica**, addressed the EP BUDG committee, where she underlined the need for a budget that is simple, agile, and flexible to meet the needs of local authorities. She also warned the Commission against further centralising the management of funds. The proposal for a 'One Plan per Member State', if confirmed, would recentralize powers and may reduce the role of the regions to mere passive beneficiaries, thus breaching the principle of subsidiarity. She also added that the principle of 'do no harm to cohesion' must be respected across all funding programmes. All policies, not only cohesion policy, need to be better adapted to territorial realities.

Driving Regional Growth through Innovation being promoted by the EA Group during EU regions week

On 8 October 2024, the European Alliance Group hosted a seminar at the European Week of Regions and Cities titled 'Driving Regional Growth through Innovation – Highlighting Best Practices'. Moderated by Karl Vanlouwe, President of the European Alliance Group, the event brought together regional and local policymakers, experts, and representatives from the European Commission to discuss how innovation can drive sustainable economic growth.

Mr Vanlouwe highlighted Flanders' 'Vision 2050' plan, aiming to make the region a global leader in life sciences, digital technology, and sustainable energy. The 'VLAIO' (Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship Agency) supports start-ups and SMEs to scale their innovations. Additionally, the 'Blue Deal' initiative addresses water scarcity by promoting water reuse in agriculture and industry, turning environmental challenges into opportunities for innovation.



Ms Wendt, Mr Vanlouwe, Mr Pérez and Mr Podbielski

Ms Catherine Wendt from DG REGIO discussed the European Commission's efforts to foster regional innovation, including the Regional Innovation Valleys and the Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) programme, which supports the creation of new value chains across Europe. Mr Sergio Pérez García from Navarre presented the Circular Innovation Valleys initiative, focusing on circular economy principles and cross-border collaboration for sustainable growth.

Mr Michał Podbielski from the Białystok Science and Technology Park in Poland shared how local governments can collaborate with research institutions and the private sector to drive technological innovation. The Park has incubated over 300 start-ups, making Białystok a hub for entrepreneurship and innovation. The seminar highlighted the importance of regional innovation in addressing Europe's challenges, showcasing how local solutions and interregional cooperation can lead to sustainable growth.

CoR Plenary to adopt Maupertuis' proposal for the future EU multiannual budget

On 20-21 November, the CoR Plenary will adopt the opinion of the EA member and President of the Assembly of Corsica, Nanette Maupertuis, on 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. She underlined the need to address the current fragmentation of funding in order to maximise the impact of the budget on the ground, thus ensuring easier access to fund-

ing for regions and cities. She also emphasised the need to operationalise the the 'Do no harm to Cohesion' principle across EU policies.

"In order to address the multiple challenges the EU faces, while strengthening cohesion across all the territories, we need a more strategic, simplified, and agile multi-annual 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 principle of active subsidiarity,

multilevel governance, and better regulation", said EA rapporteur Nanette Maupertuis.



Ms Nanette Maupertuis, rapporteur on the MFF

McDonnell's opinion on improving access to social services to be adopted during the CoR Plenary



Mr Declan McDonnell, rapporteur on improving access to social services

At the November Plenary Session, members are due to adopt the opinion 'Addressing territorial inequalities by improving access to social services' by Cllr Declan McDonnell (Galway City Council, Ireland).

Key recommendations in the opinion include targeted investments to improve digital infrastructure, support upskilling initiatives, and expand essential services such as healthcare, housing, and education. Cllr McDonnell emphasises the need for inclu-

sive service provision, particularly for vulnerable populations, to ensure that access to quality social services is both equitable and sustainable.

The opinion highlights the importance of reducing regional disparities, and fostering social inclusion and stability across the EU. It was adopted by an overwhelming majority at the last SEDEC commission meeting on 1 October.

Andries Gryffroy joins CoR's COP29 on Delegation in Baku to Support Local Climate Action

EA Member Andries Gryffroy will be part of the Committee of the Regions delegation to COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan. This year's COP, held from 11th to 22nd November, takes place amid geopolitical tensions in Ukraine, the Middle East, and the Nagorno-Karabakh region, with Azerbaijan introducing a 'COP29 Truce Deal' urging all involved countries to suspend hostilities during the conference period. The CoR, as part of the Local Governments and Municipal Authorities (LGMA), has supported the truce, highlighting the need for united climate action.

Gryffroy and the CoR delegation aim to advance the role of Local and Regional Author-

ities (LRAs) in climate policy, ensuring that LRAs are embedded in COP29 decisions. Known as the 'Finance COP', this year's conference is expected to establish a new global

climate finance goal. The CoR is pushing for strong financial support for cities and regions, advocating for direct funding in the EU's next multiannual financial framework.



CoR Delegation to Baku

ARLEM Plenary Highlights Mediterranean Collaboration in Amman

On 4th and 5th November, the ARLEM plenary was held in Greater Amman Municipality, the capital city of Jordan. The meeting included EA member Emil Drăghici, who was accompanied by a delegation from the Association of Communes in Romania (ACoR): Mr. Neculai Moraru, Mayor of Fălciu Commune, and Mr. Adrian Miroiu-Lamba, Executive Director of ACoR.

The meeting began with two minutes of silence for the victims of the Middle East conflict and the recent floods in Valencia, before discussions commenced on significant issues for the Mediterranean region. Topics included the proposal for

appointing a European Commissioner for the Mediterranean, the Mediterranean Capitals of Culture and Dialogue project, and the endorsement of two reports—one on sustainable energy transition and another on water resilience in the Mediterranean. These reports highlighted the need to identify good practices that could be replicated by local and regional authorities throughout the region.

During the event, decisions were made regarding next year's ARLEM activities, including the admission of North Macedonia as a full member, the appointment of next year's ARLEM rapporteur, Arianna CENSI, on 'Territorial Perspectives

on the Mediterranean Strategic Agenda', and the selection of the next plenary meeting location in Palermo (Sicily), in autumn 2025.



Mr. Drăghici and the ACoR delegation in Amman for ARLEM

Karl Vanlouwe Discusses CoR-UK Local Partnerships in Edinburgh

On 11 November 2024, Karl Vanlouwe, President of the European Alliance group and member of the Flemish Parliament, represented the group at



Tony Buchanan, Stephen Gethins MP and Gillian Ford with EA President Karl Vanlouwe

the 10th meeting of the CoR-UK Contact Group in Edinburgh, Scotland. The meeting, hosted at the COSLA Conference Centre, focused on strengthening partnerships between EU and UK local and regional authorities under the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement. Mr Vanlouwe engaged in discussions on fostering cooperation in trade, youth mobility and migration and highlighted the importance of local and regional action in addressing shared challenges.

The event also featured contributions from former European Alliance members, Gillian Ford (London Borough of Havering) and Tony Buchanan (East

Renfrewshire Council, Scotland), underlining enduring ties between EU and UK local leaders. Scotland, with its strong cultural, educational, and economic links to Europe, served as a fitting backdrop for these discussions, emphasizing the value of sustained cooperation across borders.

Established in 2020, the CoR-UK Contact Group remains the only institutional forum dedicated to fostering dialogue and exchanging best practices between EU and UK local and regional authorities. It plays a crucial role in addressing post-Brexit challenges and enhancing collaboration on regional and cross-border issues.

The European Alliance Group's Annual Primary School Art Competition Returns for its 16th Edition

The European Alliance Group is thrilled to announce the return of its annual primary school art competition, now in its 16th edition. This cherished event offers a unique platform for young pupils from across Europe to showcase their creativity and express their understanding of their regions and the broader European community.

This year's theme, **'My Region, My Identity'**, invites children to explore and illustrate the unique aspects of their local culture, traditions, and personal connections to their regions. The competition aims to foster a sense of pride and belonging among the young participants, while

also highlighting the rich diversity within the European Union.

We are excited to welcome schools from Poland, Ireland, Romania, and Slovakia to this year's competition. A total of nine schools will participate, each bringing their unique perspectives and artistic talents to the table. These young artists have already begun their projects, and we eagerly anticipate the creative and insightful works they will produce.

The culmination of the competition will be an exhibition of the drawings, which will take place during the November plenary week at the JDE cafeteria of the CoR. This exhibition will provide

an excellent opportunity for the public and EU officials to appreciate the vibrant and diverse artistic expressions of our young citizens.

Don't forget to pass by the cafeteria during the plenary and join us in celebrating the creativity and regional pride of Europe's future generations.

