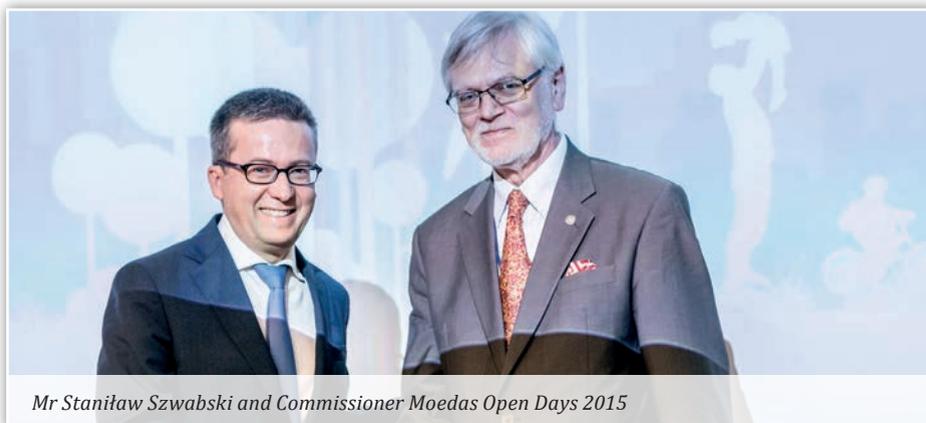


### European Alliance Group

## At a time of heart-breaking crisis we need to stand together, says Stanisław Szwabski, President of the European Alliance Group



Mr Stanisław Szwabski and Commissioner Moedas Open Days 2015

December is meant to be a month of joy and celebration, but also a time of reflection. 2015 has seen a number of positive changes and progress, but it also reminded us, the people of Europe, of the need to stand united in the face of crisis.

Let me begin by saying that our group strongly condemns the brutal attacks in Paris, the Lebanon and Mali, and we stand in solidarity with their people. As President of the European Alliance group, my heart goes out to the victims and families of these atrocities. These are attacks on the European values that we must fight to preserve.

It was in a tragic manner that we were reminded that cooperation on EU security is important and has to be addressed with great seriousness. It opened our

eyes on the need to address and combat extremism and radicalization. Local authorities can play an important role in addressing this very serious problem and it is clear that we need to share experiences across local and regional authorities, as a manner of learning and preventing similar outcomes.

An important event coming up in December is the COP21 scheduled to take place in Paris, which looks to achieve a legally binding and universal agreement on climate, with the aim of keeping global warming under control. The role for local and regional governments is fundamental, but it is important to remember that the leaders need to have realistic and, more importantly, achievable goals in mind. The Committee of the Regions has to show an active

## EA Group's Primary School Art Competition 2015 "My Region, our school"

The European Alliance Group continues its tradition of encouraging young people to express themselves through artwork and

has launched the 2015 Primary Schools Art Competition.

The topic for this year - My Region, our school - is designed to capture visions of school life, environment, language, sport, history, regions through the works of children aged between 6 and 12 years.

This year's competition will see the participation of 19 primary schools from 10 Member States across the European Union.

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involvement as the climate change affects each and every one of us.

Lastly, we are getting close to the final stage of our CoR/EA group Primary Schools Art competition. This year's competition is focussed on the theme 'My region, our school' and I must admit that I am impressed with the fantastic art produced by the young students. I believe that our future will be bright if we continue to embrace the potential of young people.

Winning entries will be exhibited in the Committee of the Regions at the beginning of December, after which the artworks will be transformed into postcards for the students and schools to send to their friends and families.

The aim of the drawing competition is to engage children in a creative exercise to identify the role of their region, traditions in their regions and support their creativity and innovative ideas expressed through art.

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*"We have to understand our citizens' message and ensure that we evolve towards a European Union which is confederal and democratic, and which works from the grassroots up, taking into account the diversity of different Member States and regions" said Karl Vanlouwe, member of the Flemish Parliament*

## Seminar on 'EU policy for regenerating town and city centres' - held by the EA Group during the Open Days 2015

The seminar on 'EU policy for regenerating town and city centres' was a great opportunity for a lively debate on issues of high importance to local and regional authorities. The seminar examined the issues that these authorities face in the process of regenerating their town and city centres.

The president of the European Alliance group, Mr. Stanisław Szwabski, a member of the Gdynia City Council and also the moderator of this seminar, pointed out that many town centres have lost the vibrant spirit that characterized them just a few decades ago due to the relocation of shopping and business centres at the

outskirts of towns. Issues concerning planning and a lack of investment in urban centres were also addressed.

Mrs Linda Gillham (CEMR) called for the EU Urban Agenda to recognize local needs and provide fit for purpose instruments to address those needs. Mr Marek Dutkowski, professor at the Szczecin University in Poland argued that towns and cities differ greatly from each other, in terms of history and development and thus no one-size-fits-all solution can be put forward. Ms Gillian McNamara, Principal projects and programmes officer from East Renfrewshire, Scotland, focussed on community led and business led regeneration programmes. Cllr. Hughie McGrath addressed the issue of previous planning and the need for a traffic management plan, while calling for the preservation of the towns' character and the need for specific tax incentives for towns and city centres.

By bringing together policy-makers and practitioners, the discussion followed a focussed approach. Policy proposals that could further develop into an 'EU policy for regenerating town and city centres' have been put forward.



## Cllr Tony Buchanan new interim chair of the CoR Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries Committee

Cllr Tony Buchanan from East Renfrewshire Council, Scotland is the current chair of the Commission for Natural Resources (NAT) of the EU Committee of the Regions, a body that brings together councillors and members of devolved parliaments from across the EU to work together on EU Agriculture Rural, Fisheries issues.

At the NAT meeting he stressed the focussed and important role of the NAT commission in ensuring the sustainability of rural areas, jobs and growth in the



agriculture, maritime and fisheries sector as well as tourism and development of natural resources. Consumer affairs and health are also a priority for 2016.

Cllr Buchanan's opinion recently adopted by the CoR on the simplification of the CAP

has received widespread support from interested parties. The Commissioner for agriculture was also very supportive in the CoR plenary in saying that every effort will be put into cutting red tape as this will lead to sustainable job growth in the rural areas.



*Cllr Hughie McGrath with Mayor of Cetinje Mr Aleksandr Bogdanović chairing the meeting of CoR-Montenegro JCC in Cetinje*

## **Cllr Hughie McGrath elected co-President of the European Committee of the Regions – Montenegro joint committee**

On the 3 November in the historical capital of Montenegro, Cetinje, Cllr McGrath was elected as co-President of the CoR – Montenegro Joint Consultative Committee

which is a 16 member working group with the aim of helping local governments in Montenegro prepare to join the European Union.

The Mayor of Cetinje Mr Aleksandr Bogdanović was elected to co-President of this important working group with Cllr McGrath. Whilst the group will meet only twice a year it will deal with a range of practical issues to help the local authorities in Montenegro and to exchange experience with their EU counterparts, the meeting focussed on the areas of administrative capacity and strong human resources policy at local government level as well as cross-border cooperation. The meeting was attended by a range of experts and Montenegro's Chief negotiator for accession to the EU, secretary of State Mr Aleksandar Pejovic.

Cllr McGrath said that he was delighted to be appointed to such an important position and felt that it was important that local authorities in Montenegro had the opportunity to learn from the experience of how the EU has worked for local authorities.

Participants also had the opportunity to visit a large scale project of water and waste water management funded by the EU as well as a solar powered street lighting project.

## **Climate change: Local governments' contribution key to hit 2 degrees target - said ~~EA member~~ Cllr Andrew Cooper**

Climate change is not only the biggest threat the planet has ever faced, it is also the biggest opportunity for local and regional governments.

By improving the energy efficiency of buildings, insulating walls and roofs and installing solar panels, local and regional authorities will not only reduce citizens' bills but also cut carbon emissions.

It is positive that there will be agreed targets on climate change after Paris but at present this is not a plan to keep below the dangerous 2 degrees C temperature rise threshold.

The targets submitted by national governments ahead of Paris COP21 indicate that temperature will rise up to 2.7 degrees.

"We need a plan that will deliver a safer world and we are falling short of that at present. We need to think global and act local but that requires the close

involvement of local governments in finding low carbon solutions that fit with their circumstances", said the Kirklees Councillor Andrew Cooper.

"If we are to go an extra mile in order to get down to 2 degrees (or less) temperature increase, we will have to involve local

authorities, that are "on the ground" as they are best placed to deliver energy and climate change programmes. It is a pity many of them have not been consulted on their expected contribution."

Cllr Cooper continued: "I hope COP 21 will result in an ambitious and realizable agreement enabling local communities to reap the social, economic and environmental benefit of combatting climate change and enhancing energy efficiency."



*Cllr Andrew Cooper*

## 7<sup>th</sup> subsidiarity conference: regional and subnational Parliaments should have greater role in subsidiarity monitoring, said Karl Vanlouwe



Mr Karl Vanlouwe

On 17 November the 7th Subsidiarity Conference took place in the Flemish Parliament. In the presence of European Commission Vice President Timmermans, the Luxembourg Minister of Labour Schmit as well as several MEP. Karl Vanlouwe, the EA Group and member

of the Flemish Parliament called upon Member States to grant regional and subnational parliaments the possibility to participate in the subsidiarity monitoring procedure on equal footing of national parliaments like in Belgium.

The role of local and regional governments needs to be strengthened in European decision-making. In Europe we see a move towards more autonomy and to more decentralisation.

We have to understand the citizens' message and ensure that we evolve towards a European Union which is confederal and democratic, and which works from the grassroots up, taking into account the diversity of different member states and regions.

“Our Constitution, added Mr Vanlouwe, clearly states that there is no hierarchy or subordination between the federal and the regional level. This idea is also incorporated into the Lisbon Treaty by means of Declaration 51 of the federal state of Belgium. National and regional parliaments are seen as equivalent, being part of the national parliamentary system.”

Moreover, the EA member underlined the necessity to revise the current Early Warning System and the yellow card procedure. “There are structural problems with the current EWS, he continued, it looks like the deadlines were set not to be made, the yellow and orange card systems are hardly workable, and therefore it could be interesting to explore systems like green or red cards to enable subnational parliaments to actively take part in the EU decision making process”.

## EA group to organise a study visit to the Scottish Parliament

The European Alliance group bureau will organise a study visit to the Scottish Parliament on the 14th December. The visit will examine Scotland's priorities in the European Union. Confirmed speakers include Christina McKelvie, MSP, Convener European and External Affairs Committee. The meeting is being organised by EA Vice President Stewart Maxwell, MSP.

This meeting follows from a recently hosted a meeting in Brussels on the 12th November entitled 'Scotland's Role in the UK Government's EU Renegotiations' where

Westminster SNP shadow spokesperson on Europe Stephen Gethins MP said the

SNP would organise a vigorous campaign to stay in Europe in the forthcoming referendum. The meeting attracted huge interest in Brussels with a full house for the discussions.



Mr Micheal O Conchuir and Stephen Gethins MP