

## European Alliance Group

### Let's promote Port cities as 'hubs for entrepreneurial enterprises', says Stanisław Szwabski, President of the European Alliance Group



Mr Stanisław Szwabski

As a political group we welcome the priorities of the Dutch presidency of the EU. There is a clear focus on migration which has become one of the main issues that the European Union has to deal with and all regions and cities across Europe need to take action in this area. We hope that the Presidency can come to a solution to this crisis.

The Dutch Presidency priority for the EU to be an 'innovator and job creator' is particularly needed for sustainable job creation in our regions, cities and local authorities and for us 'delivery' is a priority. We also welcome a 'forward looking climate and energy policy' after the Paris COP agreement. Europe can make positive changes through new technologies in energy provision.

The European Alliance group will this year also focus on a specific area which gets less press which is the 'sustainable development of Port cities'. We will hold a meeting in Gdynia, my home city, where we will look at how we have adapted to losing our shipyard and are now transforming our city into an innovative hub of entrepreneurship. We will also examine examples across Europe and convince the EU that port cities need to be supported into the future.

Lastly we will shortly launch our Secondary Schools Competition where we will challenge students to undertake a multiple choice and essay competition on the EU. Winners will be invited to Brussels

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during the June Plenary. I always look forward to this competition where we allow young people an insight into how the EU works. Remember always that the youth of today are our leaders of the future so let's engage them actively in the EU. Let's make 2016 a positive year for the European Union.

### CoR/EA group Primary Schools Competition exhibition in the Committee of the Regions

The December CoR Plenary saw the latest edition of the European Alliance group art exhibition 'my region, our schools'. This magnificent depiction of the activities



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surrounding schools was held in primary schools across nine EU Member States.

The EA President Mr Szwabski said that it was a joy to see through the children's vision and artistic skill how they see their own schools in different regions across the EU. The aim of the competition is to promote recognition of the different and indeed similar aspects of the European Union's regions. Every year the theme is adapted "My Region, My /Our ?". These

results are publicised in a booklet where the children add a 100 word description to the drawing.

It's a fantastic way to promote the true 'united in diversity' theme of the European Union through the young children and art. More information is available on [www.ea.cor.europa.eu](http://www.ea.cor.europa.eu)

## EA Members welcome the Libyan representatives to ARLEM assembly

Mr Stewart Maxwell, MSP (Scotland) and Mr Emil Drăghici Mayor of Vulcana-Băi (RO) participated in the 7th Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) Plenary Session organised in Nicosia (Cyprus) on 17-18 January 2016.

Both European Alliance Members welcomed Libyan representatives from local communities to ARLEM. They said that this is great progress in cooperation through this Assembly. A wide ranging discussion on managing migration in the Mediterranean took place during the Plenary Session as a follow-up on ARLEM's report on this issue.

Mr Stewart Maxwell, the EA Member at the ARLEM Bureau underlined the crucial role of local and regional authorities in managing migration crises. He said that "part of solution to this problem is the



reconstruction of stability and security in North Africa. It is crucial now to help the local authorities to develop the tools for smart urban management, helping build capacity in order to offer good levels of

services to citizens". "It could encourage the people who don't want to leave their homes to stay and to have a secure future and also provide opportunities for returning migrants."- he added.



## The European Alliance bureau discusses Scotland's proactive role in the European Union

Members of the European Alliance bureau visited the Scottish Parliament on Monday 14 December 2015 in a meeting hosted by Stewart Maxwell MSP. As part of the study visit they met with Keith Brown, MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities and Christina McKelvie MSP, Convener European and Exter-

nal relations committee who discussed the forthcoming EU-UK referendum as well as priority actions for Scotland in the European Union. Scottish National Party members promised a vigorous pro-European campaign to ensure that the UK stays within the European Union.

The delegation also met with the head of the European Commission Representation in Scotland Graham Blythe and the European Parliament head of office Per Johansson who outlined the role of their

respective offices in Scotland and where their main priorities are for the forthcoming years.

Stewart Maxwell MSP said he was delighted to welcome members of the EA bureau to Scotland to see first-hand how the Scottish Parliament works and to also learn more about Scotland proactive and positive role in a European Union context.

Stanisław Szwabski President of the EA group said that he was very impressed with the work of the Parliament and said

that it was important that the active engagement of the Country with the EU would be communicated both in Scotland but also in the EU.

The MSP's highlighted the leading role of the Scottish Parliament in European and international affairs, listing a number of examples where Scotland has been able to make its voice heard. A high degree of engagement of the Scottish Parliament with the EU is particularly important and this was reinforced during the visit.

## Aalst, European City of East Flanders

Every two years, the county council of East-Flanders awards the city or municipality in East Flanders with the most ambitious intentions towards Europe the title of "European City of East Flanders" to which a cash prize of 5000 euro is attached. Since December last year, the city of Aalst – hometown of EA member Karim Van Overmeire - has the honor to call itself "European City of East-Flanders" for the next two years. As Alderman of European and International Cooperation in Aalst, Karim Van Overmeire has initiated the administration of Aalst to pay more attention to the European institutions, defend the interests of Aalst at the European level, look systematical-



Mr Karim Van Overmeire, Alderman of the city Aalst

ly for European funds for local policy initiatives and organize a variety of events

in order to introduce Aalst to European decision makers.

## Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski, Mayor of Białystok calls for local authorities' investment to be prioritized in the European Semester as it stimulates growth

Addressing Commissioner Moscovici, Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski, EA coordinator for ECON and President of the Intergroup for Less Developed Regions, touched on the topic of financing at local and region-

al level. He underlined the need to distinguish financing of public sector from long-term investments for the future well-being of the regions, such as investments in infrastructure.

On the issue of taxation, the Mayor of Białystok, considered that local and regional authorities should have the upper hand and have more to say on the taxes collected in order to direct the money towards investments according to the specific needs of their areas.

As President of the Intergroup for Less Developed Regions, he also pleaded for more attention for the less developed regions that need help in developing their own competitiveness.



Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski

## Shetland Leader calls for Europe to recognise Islands and Remote areas

The Leader of the Shetland Islands Council and European Alliance Group member Gary Robinson, who represents Scotland at the European Committee of the Regions, COTER commission, tabled a range of proposals that aimed at ensuring that EU policies better reflect the problems of the Islands, remote areas, and more widely, local communities. Currently this is done by “EU statistical regions” also known as “NUTS”. In most countries, including Scotland and the rest of the UK, these do not reflect local communities or even regions, not even clearly recognised areas such as Shetland Island Councils. Instead they are designed by national and EU statisticians by grouping together council areas to meet a given population threshold.

This has implications for successful application of EU law and indeed EU funds into local communities that need it. Cllr Robinson said:

“Often poorer, inaccessible, demographically or environmentally challenged communities are not recognised properly in EU statistics because a statistician decided to randomly add it into a larger region just to fit the demographic requirement of the current so-called, and aptly named, “NUTS” areas. This is unfair and has negative consequences over EU policymaking that goes well beyond mere funding. The bottom-line is that two communities having identical challenges anywhere in Europe should be recognised in EU statistics”.

In his view this has implications that go well beyond EU funds, as the same artificial statistical areas are used for other EU legislation be that environmental, public services or transport. Cllr Robinson added:

“I believe comparable statistical data on local and sub-local areas must be developed as a matter of urgency, we need the OECD, Eurostat and the European Commission to translate the urban-rural dimension to new Eurostat areas, drawing from reliable information from the ground to ensure that EU policies make real sense for our communities”

In that respect Scotland has real and tested models to target EU and national funds using new indicators. He added:



*Cllr Gary Robinson, Leader of Shetland Islands Council*

“In Scotland we already use a number of quite sophisticated territorial (indeed, sub-regional) indicators for domestic and EU policy decision making; on Multiple Deprivation, Rurality and Socio Economic Performance against Europe2020 targets. Surprisingly no EU official survey has even been made on these national experiences that could be used to develop EU-wide comparable local indicators.”

## Mr Stanisław Szwabski, EA President calls for stronger political cooperation towards the EU Urban Agenda

On 25 January, Mr Stanisław Szwabski, EA President and the Councilor of Gdynia participated joint Public Hearing of COTER Commission of the CoR and



*Mr Stanisław Szwabski with Mr Pawel Adamowicz and Mr Jan Olbrycht*

the REGI committee of the European Parliament on the Implementation of the EU Urban Agenda: “Towards the Pact of Amsterdam”.

European Alliance President underlined the need to closely cooperate with all actors towards the development of the EU Urban Agenda. Mr Stanisław Szwabski said that “the discussion with the European Parliament at this stage is crucial to provide a political basis to strengthen the cooperation between both institutions towards the EU Urban Agenda and the envisaged Pact of Amsterdam”.

“The Urban agenda should establish a more integrated approach to EU policy and legislation which has an effect in all our cities. There is a need to reinforce the role of local and regional authorities in the EU legislative process in this matter. This approach however should be done in good urban-rural balance” - he added.