

European Alliance Group

Let's hope this Spring will bring more optimism in the EU, says EA President



EA Group President Mr Stanisław Szwabski meeting EU Council President Donald Tusk

The springtime is a time when new green leaves or green shoots begin to grow and in the context of the EU having continuously moved from one crisis to another from the financial to migration and refugee crisis, it is now hopefully time to see what EU Member States can achieve working together in a spirit of solidarity.

Over the coming weeks and months it will become clear whether the new agreement reached with Turkey will stem the flow of migrants. Local and Regional authorities must also be given the resources to be able to deal with the influx of migrants

that have reached their communities. The EU needs to look closely at the causes behind this dramatic course of events and needs to play a stronger role in addressing these causes. Some of them are well known, such as the dreadful war in Syria, but other causes of economic migration are the lack of opportunity for people in developing countries. There needs to be a focus on helping find solutions in those Countries affected.

The financial crisis is far from over and indeed while we see a welcome turnaround in some of our Regions, it is also clear that the recovery if it is happening is not evenly spread across regions and cities within Member States. The so-called Juncker plan should have a geographical balance for EIB investment and I have called for this in my meetings with the EIB President.

When I met with Commissioner Cretu I insisted that Cohesion policy must continue into the future and that I would not support it being integrated into the Investment Plan. The EU Structural and Cohesion policy is a very important and focused approach for our poorer regions and I wish to see a continuation in reducing disparities across Europe.

European Alliance group's external meeting to discuss an EU policy for the Regeneration of Port Cities

On 6th of June 2016, members of the European Alliance group will meet in Gdynia, Poland, upon the invitation of the EA President and councillor of the City Council of Gdynia, Mr Stanisław Szwabski. The city of Gdynia, which is also an important

seaport on the Baltic Sea, is a young and vibrant city, considered a Polish symbol of modernity. The development processes of the city make it an ideal place for discussing urban transformations and celebrating urbanity.

The theme of the meeting will be the regeneration of port cities which have a particular development potential and they may take on a key role in launching a smart sustainable development model, starting from local cultural resources, combining the port's economic, logistic and industrial activities and regeneration. Port cities are laboratories of cre-

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Lastly, speaking of a focused approach we will hold a meeting on *EU policy towards regenerating Port Cities* in my home town of Gdynia on the 6th June and we believe that it is important that we look and learn from the experience of other cities in regenerating port cities. Let's hope that from this 'Spring' we can 'sail' into a brighter future for the EU.



Gdynia, Poland

ativity, stimulated by their specific historic landscapes. Speakers will include Members of the European Parliament, European Commission and experts from Port cities. More information will shortly be available on www.ea.cor.europa.eu

"We are delighted that European Parliament has adopted the aid scheme for the supply of fruit and vegetables, bananas and milk in educational establishments which ensures the programme's financial and long term stability" said Povilas Žagunis, member of the Municipal Council of the Lithuanian city of Panevėžys and CoR Rapporteur on the scheme.

President of the Romanian Association of Communes Emil Drăghici supports closer integration with local authorities from Moldova

EA Member Mr. Emil Drăghici welcomed CoR President Markku Markkula, Romanian Prime Minister Dacian Cioloș and President of the Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova (CALM), Tatiana Badan, at the general meeting of the Romanian Association of Communes (ACoR), over which Mr Drăghici presides.

During his speech, Mr Emil Drăghici stressed that rural areas have an important role for growth and increasing the quality of life in Romania. President Markkula shared the same views, noting that: "It is positive to see the work being done in Romania to tackle the rural-urban divide by promoting regionalisation and making the most of EU funding. We need to speed-up investment by simplifying the EU's cohesion policy, improve local administrations' capacity building and adjust public procurement rules".

During the General meeting of the ACoR that took place between 21-24 February 2016 in Bucharest, a trilateral meeting was held between the president of the



Mr Emil Drăghici with the PM of Romania Dacian Cioloș

CoR, Mr Markkula, representatives of ACoR and the president of the Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova, Ms Badan. On this occasion, the Romanian Association of Communes, through its designated representatives, offered its full support to the endeavours made by CALM towards the integration of the Republic of Moldova in the European structures, including steps made by the local authorities. The drafting of a new report on the current situation of local authorities and local autonomy was agreed upon during the meeting.

The parties agreed to support CALM in promoting local autonomy in Moldova,

especially as in 2013 the Association of Communes of Romania and the Congress of Local Authorities in Moldova have laid the foundations of the Council of Local Authorities in Romania and Moldova, the joint body aimed at promoting local autonomy and alignment of local authorities in Moldova with EU standards.

During this visit, the President of the European Committee of the Regions, Markku Markkula, has hailed a €300m EU-funded laser project in Romania arguing that it demonstrates how EU investment and working in partnership can stir innovation and regional development.

CoR's call for more and healthier milk, fruits and vegetables for our children backed by the European Parliament welcomed by rapporteur Mr Povilas Žagunis

The European Committee of the Regions and its rapporteur welcomed the approval by the European Parliament of a new draft law to ensure better-funded school milk, fruit and vegetable schemes, along with better education on healthy eating.

CoR rapporteur Povilas Žagunis said "We are delighted that European Parliament has adopted the aid scheme for the supply of fruit and vegetables, bananas and milk in educational establishments

which ensures the programme's financial and long term stability" said Povilas Žagunis, member of the Municipal Council of the Lithuanian city of Panevėžys. He also said that he strongly supported the prioritization of local production and short marketing chain, organic and locally grown food products which is great news for farmers.

"I am happy to see that CoR proposals have been included in the new scheme.



Mr Povilas Žagunis

We welcome not to limit milk distribution to drinking milk, but to enlarge to minimally-processed milk products without harmful additives. Natural (unsweetened) milk products such as yoghurt or fresh cheeses are now also eligible for aid. This scheme is fundamentally important to ensure that our children get

a diverse range of locally produced fruit, vegetables, bananas, milk and a healthier diet.” Mr Žagunis added.

The school milk scheme was set up in 1977 while the fruit one was introduced in 2009. Both promote the consumption of fruit, vegetables and milk. The new

scheme foresees they operate under the same legal and financial basis

The provisionally agreed regulation, endorsed in Parliament by a large majority still needs to be formally approved by the Council. The new rules should apply from 1 August 2017

In mid-March members of the Flemish Parliament Karim Van Overmeire, Karl Vanlouwe and Marc Hendrickx (N-VA), visit Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic.

In Yerevan they had a meeting with the speaker and several members of the National Assembly of the Armenian Republic, and in Stepanakert they had the opportunity to address the National Assembly of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic (also known as the Artsakh Republic) and to attend a reception held by the president.

Their programme also included a visit to the archbishop, primate of the Diocese of Artsakh in the Armenian Apostolic



Mr Karl Vanlouwe, Mr Marc Hendrickx and Mr Karim Van Overmeire

Church, and a discussion with a number of NGOs.

A few hours after they returned to Brussels, the EA members learned that they had been placed on Azerbaijan’s “blacklist”, and were now banned from entering the country. The three N-VA members described this as “incomprehensible”.

“What is wrong with members of parliament looking into a controversial subject in person, having discussions with a few eminent people and learning about the ‘frozen conflict’ that has led to a whole region living in isolation for a quarter of a century now?”.

Cllr Enda Stenson calls for more efficient broadband in rural areas and more urban-rural balance during the debate with Chair of the European Parliament’s AGRI Committee on The future of EU Rural policy

During the last meeting of NAT commission the discussion took place with Mr Czesław Adam Siekierski, Chair of the European Parliament’s AGRI Committee on The future of EU Rural policy. The debate was chaired by 1st Vice-Chair of Nat Commission Cllr Tony Buchanan.

On behalf of EA Group, Cllr Enda Stenson, EA coordinator for Nat commission, called for more efficient broadband in rural areas. He also addressed some prac-

tical issues which need to be ensured across the EU to keep the young farmers on the farm: “There is a need to provide practical courses to young farmers which will increase their knowledge base and enhance their businesses. There is a need for encouragement by governments of schemes which will allow farmers to stay on their family farms.”

At the end he highlighted the need for urban-rural balance: “I have focused on



Cllr Enda Stenson with Mr Czesław Adam Siekierski, Chair of the European Parliament’s AGRI Committee

farmers as I believe that they are to the core of building a vibrant rural economy. For this we should develop a Rural-Urban balance in EU policies – and not just urban -urban which stands as a priority on many EU meetings. It is time for the rural areas to be treated equally” – he said.

1st Vice-Chair of NAT commission, Cllr Tony Buchanan calls to set more specific objectives for reducing food waste by 30% by 2025

On 1 March 2016 Commission NAT of the CoR organized the debate with Mr Vytenis Andriukaitis, Commissioner responsible for Health & Food Safety on food waste, chaired by Cllr Tony Buchanan, 1st Vice-Chair of NAT. In his introductory remarks to the debate he said that food security is one of the biggest challenges of the 21st century within the context of a growing population and climate change which will both considerably affect the way we produce and eat food.

He underlined that “The prevention of food waste is seen as an important starting point for achieving global food security, as it frees up finite resources for other



Cllr Tony Buchanan and Commissioner Andriukaitis

uses, diminishes environmental risks and avoids financial losses. Put in a wider context, food waste may be considered as one of the symptoms of the unsustainability of the current food system.

Wasting food is not only an ethical and economic issue but it also depletes the environment of limited natural resources.” He also highlighted that in its works the CoR reminds the EC to set more specific objectives for reducing food waste by 30% by 2025 and to set specific reduction tar-

gets for every phase of the food production chain.”

The LRAs can be at the heart of this process. They are in a strategic position to work with citizens, schools, restaurants and food businesses so as to promote and support food waste reduction through awareness-raising, communication, education, training and collection of food waste for donation, energy recovery and composting.” – he added.

Profile of a Member: Marek Olszewski, Mayor of Lubicz Municipality, President of The Union of Rural Communes of the Republic of Poland

Marek Olszewski is the mayor of a rural municipality and rural development issues are very important to him. Since 2015, he has been President of The Union of Rural Communes of the Republic of Poland.

The union, which currently brings together almost 600 Polish rural communes, is one of the largest municipal associations in Poland and the biggest municipal lobby in the country.

Every year the union organises The Congress of Rural Communities, attended by more than 1000 representatives of rural municipalities, farmers’ unions, rural associations and leading Polish politicians, including the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister and members of parliament.

The Union deals with various aspects of rural development: infrastructure development, education in rural areas, regional planning and landscape protection, as well as environmental protection and creating the conditions

to financially support authorities in rural areas, the third sector and rural businesses.

For more than 15 years now, the union has been working to ensure that rural policy is not being overshadowed by urban policy, both in Poland and in the European Union. The Union points out that rural affairs are not just about agriculture, but also the problems of the people living in these areas, whose livelihoods depend on activities other than farming. It raises the importance of citizens’ initiatives in rural areas and strengthens their bottom-up dimension. The Union sees in local communities many different possibilities and sources of inspiration for the development of the country as a whole. It supports local authorities at different levels and citizens’ initiatives, aimed at demonstrating the full range of rural and agricultural values to the global community.

The Union contributes to evaluations of draft national legislation concerning rural areas, often successfully. It also initiates



Mr Marek Olszewski

legislative processes, such as the recent plan to allocate environmental subsidies to municipalities where there are national parks and protected landscapes. It carries out research to deepen understanding of the problems facing rural areas. The Union takes part in various research programmes and exchanges of knowledge and experience at international and national level.