

European Alliance Group

Bucharest Summit clearly highlights the benefits of engaging with young elected leaders, says Karl Vanlouwe, president of the European Alliance Group



EA Group members with young elected representatives from across the EU

Apart from the very impressive Palace of the Parliament in Bucharest, one of the most striking impacts of the European Committee of the Regions' "8th Summit of Regions and Cities", held in Bucharest on 14 and 15 March, was the positive engagement of young elected leaders in the different debates. They demonstrated vision, intensity and a renewed belief in Europe which we, as CoR need to embrace and take forward, making sure that their voice is heard in the EU decision-making process. The summit was an opportunity to reach out beyond the CoR membership and this was done very effectively with over eight hundred locally elected leaders present. We need these leaders to reengage with people and create a better understanding of the EU among its citizens, which has sadly been lacking over the past few years.

Many of us will now have the opportunity to put our names on the ballot papers in the European, regional or local elections, in my case the Flemish

Parliament elections. This is our chance to discuss, debate our political views with those living in our neighbourhood. It is a great privilege to have this opportunity and then, if elected, represent those people in the relevant parliaments or local authorities. This is why this year we have launched our Secondary Schools Competition with an essay theme of how to increase the number of young people voting. We look forward to meeting the winning students during the June plenary.

The uncertainty of BREXIT is still all around us and all I can say is that I hope we can continue working with our friends across the UK: in Scotland, Wales, England and in Northern Ireland. Great colleagues to work with in the CoR.

Finally, I can only reiterate my wish and hope for dialogue in Catalonia. We cannot sit back and accept that we have political prisoners in the European Union. The time is now for dialogue and the respect for democratic principles.

Tadeusz Truskolaski elected president of the Board of the Union of Polish Metropolises

On 25 March, Vice President of the EA group and mayor of Białystok, Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski was elected president of the Board of the Union of Polish Metropolises (UMP). Mr Truskolaski was elected for a five-year term, until 2024.

The UMP was created in 1990 as a forum for authorities of Poland's biggest cities with a

goal to connect the post-communist cities with democratic cities of Europe and the World. Today, it is a forum for the co-operation of mayors, vice-mayors, treasurers, directors of departments, councillors and experts from its twelve member cities: Białystok, Bydgoszcz, Gdańsk, Katowice, Kraków, Lublin, Łódź, Poznań, Rzeszów, Szczecin, Warsaw and Wrocław.



Mr Tadeusz Truskolaski

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Dr Uno Silberg

Opinion on the EU-wide Framework for endocrine disruptors, drafted by Dr Uno Silberg, member of Kose Municipality Council (Estonia) was adopted unanimously at the 23rd meeting of the European Committee of the Regions' Commission for Natural Resources (NAT) held in Gozo, Malta on 28 March 2019.

In his opinion, Dr Silberg among other things underlines the need to update EU's approach regarding endocrine disruptors as fast as possible, emphasizing the link between exposure

to such substances and ailments in humans (male reproductive health, IQ loss...) and adverse effects they have on the environment.

Endocrine disruptors are chemical substances that alter the functioning of the endocrine system and negatively affect the health of humans and animals. The European Commission's Communication "Towards a comprehensive European Union framework on endocrine disruptors", published on 7 November last year, provides a comprehensive EU framework on endocrine disruptors, describing key issues, taking stock of what has been achieved so far and outlining concrete steps to be taken in the future.

Dr Silberg's opinion is due to be adopted at the 134th CoR plenary session, which will take place on 26 and 27 June 2019 in Brussels.

During the meeting, CoR members were also addressed by the President of Malta, Ms Ma-

rie-Louise Coleiro Preca and the European Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Mr Karmenu Vella.



Mr Marc Hendrickx, member of the EA group and the Flemish Parliament with the President of Malta, Ms Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca



Cllr Gillian Ford speaking at the panel debate with young elected leaders

We must open a dialogue with local and regional leaders in defining the future of the European Union

During the 8th European Summit of Regions and Cities held in Bucharest on 14 and 15 March 2019, the European Alliance group President Karl Vanlouwe told young elected leaders, who were special guests at the meeting, that we needed a new method of open communication with citizens about the future of the European Union, changing the way we communicate and ensuring that cities and regions get more involved. "At the same time, the EU also needs to be

aware of the needs of regions and take this into consideration," Mr Vanlouwe added.

Cllr Gillian Ford, from the London Borough of Havering, welcomed the 100 young leaders, encouraged them to be active, visit schools and get the youth involved. She also said that, if they needed to see how not to do politics then they should look at Westminster and BREXIT. "We need to be proactive, we need to engage and we need to provide a platform for the youth of today", Ms Ford concluded.

The EA Group welcomes new members

In March, the EA group welcomed two new members: Mr. József Kóbor and Mr. Pierluigi Marquis.

Mr Kóbor is a professor at the University of Pécs, Hungary and a political advisor at the Lehet Más a Politika Party (Politics can be different party). At the European

Committee of the Regions, he will be representing the local government of Pécs with county rights and he will be a member of the NAT and ECON commissions.

Mr Marquis, who had been a member of the CoR in the past, will be representing the Autonomous Region of Valle D'Aosta,

Italy. Mr. Marquis was the president of the Aosta Valley in 2017 and is a member of the political party Stella Alpina. During his new mandate, he will be a member of the NAT and COTER commissions.

Mohill hosts EU meeting on towns and villages driving rural revival

On 11 February 2019, the European Alliance Group held a meeting in Mohill, County Leitrim (Ireland) which focussed on how towns and villages could be helped to drive rural revival in the European Union.

Cllr Enda Stenson, Member of Leitrim County council initiated the meeting to show delegates from across the European Union (EU) the difficulties faced by local, in particular rural and border communities and send a clear message that EU programmes need to be adapted to let those communities invest in broadband, energy and other projects which will help them prosper.

Along with the representatives of Europe's local and regional authorities, keynote speakers included:

- Sean Canney TD, Irish Minister of State for Rural Affairs and Natural Resources;
- Mairi Gougeon MSP, Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment of Scotland;
- Marian Harkin, Member of the European Parliament;
- Gerry Kiely, Head of the European Commission representation in Ireland.

The meeting also examined the importance of cross-border cooperation at a pivotal time coming up to the BREXIT deadline as well as the forthcoming European Parliament elections. The special role of the European Union and cross border cooperation was outlined by Gina McIntyre, Special EU funding body. Delegates also adopted the Leitrim declaration "Helping towns and villages drive



From left to right: Cllr Enda Stenson, Sean Canney TD, Mairi Gougeon MSP, Marian Harkin MEP, Mr Karl Vanlouwe



rural revival in the European Union" which, among other things, calls the EU to provide a framework and concrete guidelines for the development of rural territories, stresses the

importance of greater cooperation between urban and rural areas and calls for a greater focus on and funding for cross-border cooperation and territorial cooperation projects.



Stephen Gethins MP with Mr Mikel Irujo, Delegate of the Government of Navarre to discuss BREXIT and its impact on Scotland and Navarra

Scotland's Place is in Europe, says Stephen Gethins MP, SNP's Foreign Affairs spokesperson

On the 21st February, Stephen Gethins MP, spokesperson for the Scottish National Party in Westminster updated representatives of Europe's regions and permanent representations on the BREXIT negotiations. He outlined the severe consequences of BREXIT on the Scottish economy, for Scottish jobs and growth and added that he saw zero positives in the different propositions of the British government.

Mr Gethins added that he believed that Scotland's place is in the European Union and that every effort should be made to ensure that Scotland remains a strong European nation. He also had bilateral meetings with regional representatives from Flanders, Navarra and the EU institutions.

Nanette Maupertuis calls for decentralisation of employment policies to stimulate youth entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean



Ms Nanette Maupertuis with Arlem Award laureate Ms Najwa Shukri

On 26 and 27 February, Seville hosted the 10th plenary session of the Euro-Mediterranean

Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) where representatives of local and regional authorities from all across the Mediterranean basin discussed governance, transparency, and youth entrepreneurship in the region.

During the debate, Ms Marie-Antoinette Maupertuis, executive member of the Corsican regional authority stressed that, to stimulate youth entrepreneurship it is necessary to decentralize policies and decision-making in the field of employment and private enterprise.

Ms Maupertuis also met Najwa and Ali Shukri, winners of the first edition of the Arlem Award for the best young local entrepreneur in the Mediterranean. Najwa and Ali, who are sister and brother,

launched Zimni JDEED, a collection of exclusive Libyan fashion, which combines authenticity and modernity.

The Arlem Award is given to successful young (up to 35 years old) entrepreneurs from South or East Mediterranean countries for the best project built in cooperation with the local and regional community.

The initiative aims to showcase successful examples of young entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean region as an inspiration to others, demonstrate the positive impact local and regional authorities can have on the entrepreneurial ecosystem, as well as establish a positive narrative on the ability of young entrepreneurs in the Mediterranean to actively take the future in their hands and create jobs and local economic development.

CoR/EA Group launches 2019 edition of Secondary Schools Essay Writing Competition

Secondary schools from up to 8 Member States will be participating in the 14th edition of the CoR/EA Group Secondary Schools Essay Writing Competition. We find this is a great way to engage young people in the EU and to help them connect with and learn from their peers from different countries and regions.

Students from nominated schools will be asked to complete a quiz on European issues and write an essay on the topic "how to increase young people participation in the upcoming European Elections".

We are looking forward to welcoming two winning pupils from each school to Brussels

this June when they will have the opportunity to observe a European Committee of the Regions plenary session as well as to get to know the working of the European Union. They will also be able to present their schools and regions to EA Group members.



Participants of last year's edition at the CoR plenary session in July 2018