

European Alliance Group

Inclusivity will define the actions of the European Union in 2022

by Cllr Kieran McCarthy, president of the EA group



As the EA and CoR begins its work programme for the year, there is much anticipation of what the results of the Conference on the Future of Europe will bring. The COR Marseille Summit in early March offers an enormous opportunity to come together to make sense of, and comment on, the early

results of the Conference.

There is also much to do as the COVID19 virus continues to surprise us all with another variant. Many regions and cities face varying crises with overburdened health sectors and with parts of their respective economies closed. The best way for us to return our economies to normality is with the aid of NextGenerationEU, with local and regional governments guiding how best to use it in our cities and regions.

Europe also has a huge crisis in its eastern border with Belarus and also a very unstable situation on the Ukrainian border. The European Union must stand firmly together to resolve this worrying crisis.

Our EA group continues to champion concepts of inclusivity and will once

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again take to the floor of COR plenaries and commissions to make its case. I wish our members well in their work in this new year and I look forward to meeting everyone again soon.

Kieran

Join the debate on the Future of Europe in the CoR Summit "Citizens at the heart of Europe" in Marseille on 3-4 March 2022

The European Summit of regions and cities will bring together elected local representatives to discuss issues of major concern to sub-national government. The European Committee of the Regions and the Region Sud in France will organise the 9th edition in Marseille on the 03-04th March 2022.

On the agenda are European territories and societal challenges, cohesion and recovery, building the House of European Democracy, amongst other vital topics. Our members will actively promote open discussion in the summit and we also encourage many

of the young elected politicians get involved and put their ideas front and central to the discussions.

More information and registration is possible by visiting www.cor.europa.eu



"The Emissions Trading System should support a bottom-up approach, making sure that local and regional authorities could directly compensate citizens and business for higher energy costs and that auction revenues go where they are really needed."

Andries Gryffroy, member of the Flemish Parliament

Strugała: Together for stronger, more connected, more resilient and more prosperous rural areas in the EU

We are faced with serious threats and challenges to economic recovery,



Mr Dariusz Strugała

specifically at the level of rural areas. The CoR 2021 Barometer addressed the rural dimension of the COVID – 19 and economic recovery with a view to health and urban-rural digital gap. The European Commission work programme for 2022 acknowledges rural proofing as an instrument for better regulation alongside territorial impact assessments. The EA Group prioritises a renewed Territorial Agenda, which should envisage closer relationships and cooperation between cities and surrounding areas, both urban and rural, and reinforce linkages between them.

Our Members believe that the sustainable future of Europe depends on the implementation of a strong Rural Agenda to ensure the key role of rural areas, achieve a smart and fair energy transition, guarantee basic resources and biomaterials

and to provide food security and to ensure health and welfare among all citizens. It is crucial to fight against the depopulation of rural areas to ensure these global goals. Rural, island and mountain areas offer a showcase of the diversity of Europe's regions and have unique cultural and natural assets which positively affect the wellbeing of people living in these areas.

The EA group has had both of its own initiative opinions, from our Group Member Cllr Enda Stenson, on Smart villages and the Rural Agenda adopted by the CoR.

Our Group member, Mr Drăghici, also presented an idea to create a "Rural Capital Award". We hope it will be taken on board by the European Commission, with the support of the Committee of the Regions.

Gryffroy to present opinion on Renewable Energy Directive

In March, Andries Gryffroy will present to the ENVE commission his opinion on the Renewable Energy Directive Revision.

The draft opinion highlights the pivotal role of local and regional authorities and regional SMEs in the production of renewable energy sources and achieving the 55% CO2 emission reduction targets set by European Climate Law.

The amendments to the Directive, that have also been discussed with key players in the European Parliament, aim at making it easier to integrate renewables in the grid and to set up local renewable energy communities while enabling local innovation and promoting circularity models.

Gryffroy, who is also a member of the Flemish Parliament, strongly supports the Commission proposal to enhance cross border cooperation and joint projects between bordering regions and across sea basins while highlighting the leading role of regions.

In the presentation of the working document, Mr Gryffroy stressed that it is paramount to ensure coherence among the legislation proposed under the "Fit for 55" package, and that a technologically neutral approach, taking into account environmental concerns, is safeguarded in order to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050 in the most cost-effective manner.



Mr Andries Gryffroy



Mr Karl Vanlouwe

McCarthy and Vanlouwe active in the works of the Conference on the Future of Europe

On 21 and 22 January, our president and first vice president, Kieran McCarthy and Karl Vanlouwe took part in the third plenary session of the Conference on the Future of Europe which took place as a hybrid meeting remotely and in Strasbourg.

Cllr McCarthy is a member of the Working Group on Education, culture, youth and sport where he particularly champions synergies between different EU

programmes and initiatives, such as the European Green Deal, Creative Europe and the New European Bauhaus, on which he is currently preparing an opinion due to be adopted at the February SEDEC meeting.

Mr Vanlouwe, who is has been delegated to the Conference plenary by the Flemish Parliament, is a member of the Working Group on Values and rights, rule of law and security.

EA Primary Schools Art Competition



Olivia Kowalska, age 12, Poland

In November 2021, the EA group launched its annual Primary Schools Art Competition, with the theme of “My Region, My Window to the World”. With this theme, children were tasked with illustrating how their region relates to the EU, and the wider World, alongside a brief description of their artworks. From Romania to Ireland, and Lithuania to Corsica, the group has received wonderful and creative artworks from children who are clearly passionate about their localities. The competition is now closed, and the entries will soon be available on display.

The EA group would like to thank and congratulate all of the children who submitted artworks for their wonderful contributions. Each year, children across our regions continue to impress with their knowledge of, and interest in, their local regions and cities. One child, in Slovakia, describes how the EU has helped local agriculture, which has in turn increased job prospects in their region. In Lithuania, another child outlined innovative ways that their region could become more environmentally friendly. What is common across all artworks is the creativity of the children, alongside their interests in their localities.

The winners of the competition will now receive their prizes, and their



Luca-Sebastian Dobrescu, age 10, Romania



Rimaile Striskaite, age 6, Lithuania

artworks and descriptions will be collected and displayed in a booklet. The physical art will be displayed in the CoR building once permitted by COVID regulations. Included below are a selection of some of the winning entries.



Eva Hlupíková, age 12, Slovakia

Kóbor to organize a student debate competition on sustainability



Dr József Kóbor

As part of the Committee of the Regions' series of local dialogues organized within the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe, our CIVEX coordinator Dr József Kóbor will organize a student debate competition where high school pupils will discuss green sustainability topics.

The competition will take place in the city of Pécs (Baranya county, Hungary) and will be organized in cooperation with the Green Baranya Association. It is expected to gather more

than 100 pupils and students who will hold debates on topics such as waste management, energy policy, environment and climate change. Before the competition, the participants will receive a thorough briefing on the topics of sustainability, European Union's functioning, as well as current social problems. The competition's jury will be composed of university students, practicing lawyers and professors.

The event will take place in late winter or early spring (final date tbc).

EA group enhancing the Members' visual profile

Towards the end of last year and the beginning 2022 we have stepped up our efforts to help our members enhance their digital presence and improve our visual communication as a group.

Over the course of the autumn, we produced a number of roll-up banners for our members which aim to showcase the beauty of their cities, towns and regions and, at the same time, link them with their work in the Committee of the Regions and EU policies.

In December, we launched a revamped version of our website (www.ea.cor.europa.eu) with a modernized design and improved site architecture which would enable visitors to get a better overview of our members' numerous activities. Although there are still some final tweaks to be made, we hope that you will find it useful and we look forward to any comments you may have.



Finally, after a very successful training on video production and editing held last spring, this January we organised a training on social media which provided some valuable insights to members on how to build and promote their profiles on different social net-

works, as well as how to communicate in specific situations and contexts.

We will continue developing new ideas on how to help members promote their work in Brussels and link it to their local roles in 2022.