

European Alliance Group

Solidarity with Ukraine is strong and needs to continue

by Karl Vanlouwe, President of the European Alliance Group



Just over a year ago we saw the shocking invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation and Europe's local and regional governments were available to support Ukrainians, be it through hosting, providing support or twinning arrangements where necessary goods are sent to areas in need. We need this war to stop but this can only happen once Russia leaves Ukraine.

Europe's regions and cities have also been available to assist those who lost their lives and their homes in the terrible earthquake

in Turkey and Syria and we believe that the European Civil Protection mechanism is hugely valuable in providing assistance on the ground. The unfortunate increase in natural disasters is something we need to be prepared for in the future.

The CoR is at the forefront of building alliances of regions to make sure financing is targeted at those who can respond best. One of the areas is the recovery plan "Next-GenerationEU," which we believe would be far more effective if it was planned and implemented by regions rather than by Member States.

Port policy is an area where we believe we can deliver more benefits to the port cities and the overall communities and therefore it was a huge pleasure for me to organise a very interesting study visit to the port of Antwerp-Bruges where we received presentation from Ms Annick De Ridder, Vice Mayor of Antwerp, and her team in relation to port development, sustainability and their use of EU funding.

We have some really interesting meetings and topics to address in 2023 so keep following us for regular updates.

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CoR Ukraine working group in Gdańsk: Strugała and Repaský commemorate one year since the Russian military invasion of Ukraine

On 24 February 2023 Ukraine marks one year since Russia launched a full-scale military invasion of the country. The EA group's Vice President Dariusz Strugała and member Miloslav Repaský travelled with the CoR Working Group on Ukraine to Gdańsk, Poland, to commemorate this sombre anniversary and discuss current emergency needs, Ukraine's EU accession process, and good governance at local level in times of war.

On the invitation of the Working Group's Chair and Mayor of Gdańsk, Ms Aleksandra Dulcievicz, members also took part in a study visit of the city and other events related to European solidarity with Ukraine. Mr Strugała spoke on behalf of the EA group and declared its full support to Ukraine, its efforts to reform and its accession to the EU. "Nobody can better understand Ukraine as our local and regional authorities helping the citizens directly," he said.



"Cohesion Policy cannot be the solution to all challenges. What we need is stronger coordination of all policies to achieve cohesion and convergence, as well as ex-ante territorial impact assessments with reliable local indicators."

Nanette Maupertuis, President of the Corsican Assembly and Vice President of the EA Group

EA members visit Port of Antwerp-Bruges



Upon invitation of EA President Karl Vanlouwe, the EA Group Bureau members visited on 13 February the Port of Antwerp-Bruges to discuss its role within Flanders, Europe and beyond.

After taking part in a briefing session and discussion with policy experts, they met Ms Annick De Ridder, Vice Mayor of

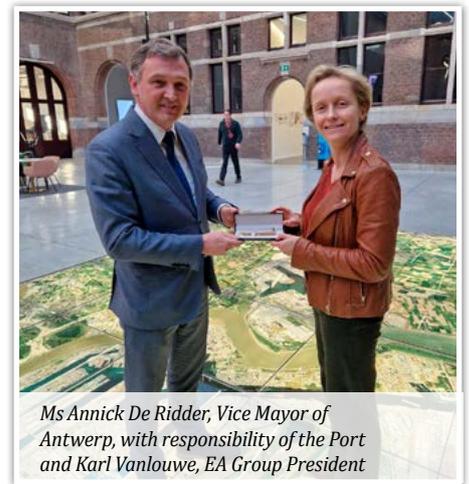
Antwerp, with responsibility of the Port who outlined its strategic importance as well as the link with the city.

The Port of Antwerp which merged in 2021 with the port of Bruges, is Europe's second-largest port and its largest port of export, connecting Europe to over 800 destinations in the world. It is home to 1400 companies and a major cluster of chemical industry.

Its central position in North-West Europe and its excellent connections to globally reputed industrial centers have led to Antwerp becoming a very important link in the chain of international trade.

The port serves as hub for sustainable growth innovation, notably in the field of energy transition, digitalisation and mobility, thus making it a strategically important port for Flemish economy and Europe's gateway.

With around 231 million tons of international maritime freight being handled annually, 164 000 direct and indirect jobs provided and more than €20 billion added value, the Flemish Antwerp-Bruges port is the engine of Belgium's economy.



European Alliance Group welcomes Windsor Framework as a step towards better EU and UK relations



The European Alliance President Karl Vanlouwe and Cllr Enda Stenson who lives in the border area with Northern Ireland

have welcomed the Windsor Framework which if approved will resolve some issues around the Northern Ireland protocol.

The EA President highlighted that all Regions and in particular Flanders can benefit economically from better relations between the EU and UK. The EA Group recently visited the port of Antwerp Bruges to see the additional complications of Brexit and how these could be resolved. He also reiterated that for the EA group it is hugely important not to have a border on the Island of Ireland.

EA Group Cllr Enda Stenson, Leitrim County Council hoped the new proposals of

green and red lanes would facilitate trade, and resolve outstanding issues. What is important, he added is to build trust across the community and this can only be enhanced by good neighbourly relations.

At the last CoR Plenary the European Alliance group invited Caitriona Ingoldsby, Director of BREXIT unit in the Permanent Representation of Ireland, to discuss EU and UK relations. She gave an overview of discussions and expressed the wish of the Irish government to ensure that our relations with the UK improve, that we safeguard the Good Friday Agreement and ensure no border on the Island of Ireland.

EP conference on Multilevel governance: McCarthy and Maupertuis recall need for more active subsidiarity and greater involvement of CoR and regions in EU policy making

On 8 February the European Free Alliance Group in the European Parliament organised a conference on the importance of devolved and multi-level governance in the European Union. Experts and politicians across political parties underlined

that proper implementation of multi-level governance is hugely beneficial to the socio-economic and governance of regions. Besides EFA MEPs, speakers included Alain Lamassoure, former French Minister and MEP as well as European Alliance members

Nanette Maupertuis, President of the Corsican Assembly, and EA Group Vice President Kieran McCarthy from Cork city council.

Nanette Maupertuis, while presenting the case of the island of Corsica and the benefit of devolution of powers to regions, stressed

that decentralization, subsidiarity and co-operation are key conditions for an effective multilevel governance system.

Kieran McCarthy recalled the work of Committee of the Regions as the EU body bringing Europe closer to its citizens, and its commitment to ensure the voice of local communities and citizens is listened to and followed up with tangible outcomes.



Ms Maupertuis and Cllr McCarthy participating at the event

Kóbor calls for more clarity to improve EU Green Deal objectives delivery

On 7 March, EA member József Kóbor, city councillor of Pécs, Hungary, took part in the



Mr József Kóbor

meeting of the CoR Green Deal Going Local Working group.

Members adopted its 2023 roadmap and exchanged on concrete ways to boost green investments and innovative financing to allow local and regional authorities to move the climate-neutral transition forward.

In his intervention, Mr Kóbor pointed out that the EU should be more clear as to ways the

EU Green Deal objectives is delivered. "If the EU is to achieve its Green Deal objectives, it should avoid sending mixed messages on topical issues such as Taxonomy, where only truly green investments should be supported.

When it comes electric mobility, pointing to the case of Hungary, Mr Kóbor warned against over reliance on one single supplier for the production of batteries and the development of electric buses.

Maupertuis presented CoR opinion at CPMR Island commission general assembly

On 22 February, Nanette Maupertuis, President of the Corsican Assembly, took part in the annual general assembly of the Island commission of the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions (CPMR) in Palma de Mallorca.

During the meeting, the EA Group Vice president, while presenting the CoR opin-

ion on enhancing support to territories with geographical and demographic challenges, underlined the need for EU policies to assess ex ante the territorial impact on insular territories. A place-based approach should be truly implemented to foster Cohesion for a better implementation the art.174 of the treaty, she added.



Ms Nanette Maupertuis

Andries Gryffroy leads Stakeholder Consultation on the opinion "Fostering the potential and synergies of EU Green Deal initiatives for regions and cities"



Mr Andries Gryffroy

On 7th March Andries Gryffroy, member of the Flemish Parliament, chaired a stakeholder event to gather input on his opinion "Fostering the potential and synergies of EU Green Deal initiatives for regions and cities". The meeting was attended by representatives of the different European Commission

directorates as well the main organisations and networks involved in their management.

Initiated by the EA Group, the opinion aims to shed light on various existing EU initiatives providing support to local and regional authorities in the implementation of the EU Green Deal and to analyse the functioning of the overall framework in order to provide policy recommendations for their future development so they can better cater to the needs of cities and regions.

Participants in the discussion reflected on possible synergies and better integration across the different initiatives, with a view to address issues such as addressing general fatigue, improving monitoring systems while avoiding additional administrative burden on local and regional authorities.

Andries Gryffroy stressed the importance of taking stock of existing initiatives while simplifying the framework. "There is large scope for improvement as to the accessibility of the various EU Green Deal initiatives. Smaller cities and regions face significant hurdles to navigate the complexity as they do not have the capacity to get access and be involved in all of them," he said. He also pointed out that we need to shift the attention from planning to implementation. "We want to focus more on the outcome, rather than on the process," he added in his concluding remarks.

A draft opinion will be presented and voted at the next ENVE meeting on the 10th of May with the final adoption taking place during the CoR's plenary on 5-6th July.

Urban policy: McCarthy to attend High Level Event in Turin

On 16-17 March our First Vice President Kieran McCarthy will participate in the 5th edition of the Cities Forum that will take place in Turin, Italy. This European Commission biannual flagship event will offer high level debates and discussions on EU initiatives and policies supporting Europe cohesion and recovery in cities.

Kieran McCarthy, in his capacity of rap-

porteur on the role of small urban areas in managing just transition, as well as on the New European Bauhaus initiative, will take part as speaker in the official launch of the European Urban Initiative in the presence of Commissioner Elisa Ferreira and in a dedicated session on the role of small and medium sized cities in developing tailored solutions to local challenges.



Cllr Kieran McCarthy

Strugała congratulates Paweł Adamowicz award nominees



Mr Dariusz Strugała and Mr Krzysztof Iwaniuk with the laureates

The 153rd plenary session of the European Committee of the Regions, held in Brussels on 8th February, saw the Paweł Adamowicz Award ceremony as one of its key agenda points. The award is a testament to the commitment of individuals and communities to humanity, promoting freedom and standing against tyranny, xenophobia, and injustice. It

was created to promote the legacy of 20-year Mayor Adamowicz, and this year was attributed to the Mayor of Michałowo, Mr Marek Nazarko.

The ceremony was attended by prominent figures, including Ylva Johansson, the Commissioner for Home Affairs, Magdalena Ada-

mowicz, Member of the European Parliament, and Aleksandra Dulkiewicz, Mayor of Gdańsk. Henriette Reker, Mayor of Cologne, Oleksandr Slobozhan, Executive Director of the Association of Ukrainian Cities, and Christopher Gribble, Chair of the Board of Directors of the International Cities of Refuge Network, were also present at the event.

Dariusz Strugała, Vice-President of the European Alliance, congratulated the citizens of Michałowo for their work in defense of freedom and for standing up against oppression. He expressed his hope that the award will raise awareness about the difficult situation in the border regions of Eastern Poland. Strugała also approved the award committee's decision to recognize Mayor of Hola Prystan - Oleksandr Babych - who was abducted by Russian forces and is currently incarcerated in Russia.

Building bridges to Regions: Galicia in Europe

On the initiative of Ana Miranda MEP, a delegation from Ourense, Galicia led by local Councillor Xosé Luis SEARA FERNÁNDEZ met with our 1st Vice President Kieran McCarthy to discuss the New European Bauhaus, Urban policy and preserving local culture. They are leading the way in planning for regenerating this spa town to ensure that citizens return to work and live in the city centre.



The delegation from Galicia with the EA Group's 1st vice president Kieran McCarthy and Ana Miranda MEP