

European Alliance Group

Local actions can be stepping stones for achieving worldwide goals

by Karl Vanlouwe, President of the European Alliance Group



Karl Vanlouwe, president of the EA Group

On the eve of the COP28 it is very clear that we can only achieve objectives set out at an EU level locally and regionally. To achieve these goals, local and regional governments need to be part of the decision-making process as our group representative in the CoR's delegation Andries Gryffroy has mentioned. We wish them all the very best in their endeavours at COP28.

The local approach was also highlighted by the European Free Alliance when adopting their manifesto and selecting their Spitzenkandidaten Raúl Romeva and Maylis Roßberg for the elections. The EU

cannot be a top-down process and must reflect local needs, local priorities and local languages and culture. This is also why I support Catalan, Basque and Galician becoming official EU languages. We have had the privilege of listening to those beautiful languages at the CoR Plenary, something which has not been possible in the European Parliament to date.

As the EU undertakes its mid-term evaluation of the MFF, it is time to insist that funding such as the #NextGenerationEU should be done at a regional level and not centrally in the Member States. The regions are best placed to have projects which will drive economic and social development.

Peace is something that we should not take for granted, the terrible loss of life in the war between Israel and Hamas shows that we need to do everything to achieve an enduring peace. The hostages need to be released to ensure that innocent civilians won't become a human shield for terrorists. A humanitarian crisis is unfolding before our eyes and this needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency in the Security Council of the United Nations

Finally, as this is the last newsletter before the holiday season, we wish all of you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Peaceful New Year.

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European Free Alliance choses Roßberg and Romeva as their Spitzenkandidaten

The European Alliance group participated in the European Free Alliance (EFA) congress in Strasbourg on 13-14 October. The EFA is the only European political party that stands for self-determination as its foundational principle, and this was highlighted in the manifesto for the European Elections 2024. The EFA Party chose their Spitzenkandidaten Raúl Romeva and Maylis Roßberg for the

elections and we wish them both well in the forthcoming campaign.

Our Member Nanette Maupertuis participated in the congress where she highlighted the need to have a greater role for regions in the interinstitutional process, an enhanced role for the European Committee of the Regions and a real application of multi-level governance. Ms Maupertuis also spoke of the need to

reflect the specificities of islands in more EU policies as these are largely forgotten.



EFA Congress in Strasbourg

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Karl Vanlouwe, president of the EA group



European Alliance

EU Regions Week: EA Group calls for a new EU Blue Deal to combat drought and water shortages



EA Group seminar "Towards a new EU Blue Deal"

On 10 October, EA Group organised a seminar "Towards a new EU Blue Deal to combat drought and water shortages" in the context of the European Week of Regions and Cities.

Chaired by the EA President Karl Vanlouwe, the seminar saw the participation of high-level speakers, including European Commission's DG Environment Director Veronica Manfredi, Tom De Vits, Special Advisor to Flemish Minister for Environment and Energy Zuhail Demir and

Druk Krol, Executive Director of Water Europe.

Regions across the EU have been experiencing recurring droughts and water shortages which are becoming more regular and severe, causing huge socio-economic problems and increasing the probability of natural disasters.

Dry riverbeds and depleted water reserves are putting a huge strain on our ecosystems, economy and communities. We can no longer afford to remain passive observers"

said EA President Karl Vanlouwe, while opening the seminar.

Ms Manfredi, European Commission Director in DG Environment pointed out that as much as 28% of the treated water is lost during distribution in the EU and that we need a systemic transformation as to how water is managed, used, and valued, bearing in mind the need to protect nature and ecosystems

Flanders' Blue Deal Strategy was also presented as a case of best practice to tackle drought and water shortages. Flanders government special advisor Tom De Vits pointed out that with this strategy Flanders will ameliorate water retention, restore wetlands and promote circular use of water in industry and agriculture.

Mr Druk Krol, Executive Director of Water Europe presented the Water Europe Manifesto for a Water Smart Strategy that highlights the importance of dealing with cross-sectoral water risk and challenges and to take into account its crucial contribution to EU competitiveness.

The EA Group in the CoR called for an EU Blue Deal and coordinated action at the European scale to address the water crisis as a priority. We hope this will become one of the top priorities of the next, concluded EA President Karl Vanlouwe.

CoR Plenary to adopt Maupertuis opinion on boosting cross border cooperation with neighbouring countries

Following unanimous approval in the COTER commission, the CoR Plenary on 30 November will discuss and adopt Nanette Maupertuis' opinion on cross-border cooperation with local and regional authorities in the EU's neighbourhood, which stresses the role of local and regional authorities in improving the EU's external relations through a bottom-up approach.

The opinion sees territorial cooperation as a strategic tool to promote sustainable development in countries neighbouring the EU and calls for a simplification of procedures in Interreg projects, for funding to be made more flexible in order to meet the needs of cross-border areas, and for cross-border cooperation actions to be connected more effectively with other EU funding programmes. The opinion

particularly emphasises the urgent need to stand by Ukrainian regions and cities. The European Committee of the Regions was one of the founders, in 2022, of the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine.

"Russia's brutal war against Ukraine has reminded us of the importance of ensuring stability in the EU neighbourhood, both at eastern and southern borders, through enhanced land and maritime cross-border cooperation. Good cooperation between regions and local governments from the EU and its neighbouring countries is key to maintaining peace and promoting cohesion and prosperity. For this reason, states the rapporteur Marie-Antoinette Maupertuis, President of the Regional Assembly of Corsica,

we call for an increase of funding for Interreg programmes that are crucial to build trust and develop expertise and joint projects in neighbouring local and regional authorities, while they prepare to join the EU".



Ms Marie-Antoinette Maupertuis

Gryffoy to be part of the CoR Delegation to COP28



Mr Andries Gryffoy

The 28th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 28) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will take place from 30 November to 12 December 2023 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. As part of the delegation of the European Union, the European Committee of the Regions will be present to continue advocating for the recognition of the crucial role of subnational governments in international climate negotiations and the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

Subnational governments are advancing and broadening climate action, adopting ambitious local strategies, and providing

Parties with confidence that the Paris Agreement and SDGs goals are implemented on the ground and the CoR emphasises that any delay in implementing effective cross-level measures to fight climate change will further amplify climate risks, resulting in increasing biodiversity loss, health risks and loss and damage.

Andries Gryffoy, EA member who will be part of the CoR delegation stressed that COP28 has to be the final recognition of the fact that local and regional authorities are important in achieving the objectives – not only in executing the objectives but also by being part of the decision-making process.

EA group hosted young local leaders from across the EU

During the October plenary session of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), we hosted 7 participants of the CoR's Young Elected Politicians programme from Flanders, Catalonia and Ireland.

During the EA group meeting held before the plenary session, the participants of the programme had an exchange of views with our members on what they think should be the EU's main priorities in the next year from a local and regional perspective. The young politicians also attended and took part in a number of sessions during the European Week of Regions and Cities.

Launched by the CoR in 2019, the Young Elected Politicians programme (YEPs) is a network of politicians who are no older than 40 and hold a mandate at regional or local level

in the EU. Several times per year, they have an opportunity to come to Brussels and take part in the works of the European Committee of the Regions.



EA members and staff with the participants of the programme

Vanlouwe and McDonnell highlight the need for investment in Rural Areas

At the CoR Bureau meeting in Logroño on the 31st of October our President Karl Vanlouwe called for an EU Blue deal which would deal with the increasing instances of drought and

floods across Europe. He further insisted that physical and digital connectivity needs to be a priority. This was reinforced by Cllr Declan McDonnell who gave examples of the west of

Ireland where digital and transport facilities needed to be improved. Cllr McDonnell also called for investment in sports facilities as an example of essential needs to ensure building cohesive communities in rural areas.



CoR Bureau members in Logroño

Rural areas across the European Union are facing long-term challenges including depopulation, a shrinking labour force, the lack of essential services, and insufficient investments to respond swiftly to the green and digital transitions. The CoR bureau adopted the Logroño declaration on ensuring the development of thriving and vibrant rural areas. This declaration is fully supported by the European Alliance Group.

Euro-Mediterranean: Maupertuis highlights the essential role of cooperation to promote dialogue and mutual understanding across local communities in turbulent times

During the annual plenary meeting of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM), which took place in Alghero, Sardinia, on 24 October, local and regional leaders from the three shores of the Mediterranean paid tribute to innocent civilian victims in the Middle East and debated about cooperation on important themes such as civil protection and disaster risk prevention, territorial cooperation and sustainable transport.

Regional and local politicians from across the Mediterranean have urged national

governments to establish a Euro-Mediterranean approach to disaster risk reduction, to ensure that authorities are better prepared for earthquakes, water scarcity, floods and wildfires.

The topic of territorial cooperation was discussed in a high-level round table including Nanette Maupertuis, President of the Assembly of Corsica and Francois Alfonsi, member of the European Parliament.

Ms Maupertuis, who is CoR rapporteur on the opinion “ Boosting lasting and

effective cross border cooperation with our neighbours” highlighted that, while the current context is truly challenging, territorial cooperation programmes are essential to achieve cohesion and sustainable development at the local level.

“We reiterate the fact that cooperation and dialogue have never been so important. By joining forces, we will contribute to greater cohesion, stability and prosperity for all in the Mediterranean”.

Lech in Lviv, calls for special structural support for rural areas in Ukraine



Mr Miroslaw Lech in Lviv

On 17 October, Mr Miroslaw Lech, Mayor of Korycin (Poland) represented the EA Group in the official CoR Working Group on Ukraine visit to Lviv. The CoR Members were received in the City Council of Lviv by Mr Andriy Sadovyi, Mayor of Lviv. During the visit, they toured the hospital that provides care to wounded soldiers from the war frontlines, as well as the new section of the Lviv graveyard.

After visiting the hospital, Mr Lech expressed his solidarity with Ukraine and its citizens. He highlighted that current

assistance to Ukraine from various LRAs within the EU is primarily concentrated on urban areas and urged for the implementation of a special programme aimed at providing structural support for rural areas in Ukraine, drawing parallels to the support given to Poland before its accession to the EU. He emphasized that rural areas in Ukraine also have distinct needs but are currently overlooked and left behind.

15th edition of the Primary School Art Competition ‘My Region, Our EU Region’

The European Alliance Group’s annual primary school art competition is back for its 15th edition. This competition offers a fantastic platform for primary school children across Europe to unleash their artistic expressions about their respective regions and Europe as a whole. We’re excited to have schools from Poland, Lithuania, Ireland, and Romania participating this year, with their drawing projects already underway.

The theme for the 2023 competition is “My Region, Our EU Region,” encouraging

children to explore and portray the European Union while describing their regions with a focus on regional cooperation, rich history, and traditions. The exhibition showcasing these wonderful drawings will take place during the upcoming November plenary week in the CoR. We eagerly anticipate celebrating the creativity and cultural diversity expressed by these young artists.

