

# Regions & Cities of Europe

News from the EU's assembly of regional and local representatives

Special Feature

Climate change

## COP21: On the road to Paris

Markku Markkula

Maroš Šefčovič

Annabelle Jaeger



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*Regions & Cities of Europe* — N° 92  
Director of Publication: Laurent Thieule  
Editor-in-Chief: Branislav Stanicek  
European Committee of the Regions  
Communication Directorate  
Rue Belliard/Belliardstraat 99–101  
1040 Bruxelles/Brussel  
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[www.cor.europa.eu](http://www.cor.europa.eu)  
*Regions & Cities of Europe* is a  
magazine of the European Committee  
of the Regions, published by the  
Communication Directorate.

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*Printed in Belgium*

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## EDITORIAL

# Climate change: Why a global strategy needs local government



**Markku Markkula**, President of the European Committee of the Regions

**T**he urgency to tackle climate change grows by the day. From the melting of our Arctic regions, to the severity of droughts in Southern Europe, to the floods in Central European countries: it is clear that we need to take global action. This is why all eyes are on the next UN climate talks in Paris later this year and expectations are running high. During the UN preparatory talks in Lima last year the European Committee of the Regions demanded that local government be formally recognised as a key player in all future climate negotiations. We will reiterate this message in a conference on climate change in Lyon this summer. Our message is clear: local governments can clean our air, protect our environment and reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions beyond the EU's 2030 climate targets. In Lima last year the initial talks were promising but the final text disappointing, with the reference to local government being removed. But why should local government shape international climate change agreements?

First, local governments are on the front line and are responsible for taking a wide range of decisions that can make or break the success of any international strategy on climate change. Local authorities are ultimately responsible for making policy a reality. According to UNDP estimates, more than 70% of climate change reduction measures and up to 90% of climate change adaptation measures are undertaken by local government. Projects delivered locally are designed to reflect local circumstances and it is these tailor-made solutions that allow us to take effective action. It is essential for these local experiences to be fed back to the highest decision-making bodies so that obstacles and potential improvements can be identified, saving time and money.

Second, the economic and social impact of climate change on communities cannot be understated. Local governments are leading the fight against climate change, taking decisive action on transport emissions, urban biodiversity, urban regeneration and waste management. In Europe, the success of programmes such as the Covenant of Mayors - with 6 000 local and regional authorities representing 191 million people that have agreed to meet and exceed the EU's 20% CO<sub>2</sub> reduction objectives by 2020 – demonstrates that local ambition often overrides the stalling commitments of national governments.

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***“According to UNDP estimates, more than 70% of climate change reduction measures and up to 90% of climate change adaptation measures are undertaken by local government.”***

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Third, we have to get a broad international public on board. No one is better placed to do this. One of the key roles local government can play in contributing to a global climate agreement is public engagement and stimulating local action. What is striking at many international climate conferences is how removed citizens are from the negotiations and decision-making process. The changes that need to be made will have a real impact on people's daily lives and it is vital to engage the public. Local government can be the link between international climate negotiations and the population at large. In this regard, we have also been active at a global level, with our American partners, within the

Covenant of Mayors, but also with Chinese mayors, mainly at the EU-China Mayor's Forum, where the environmental agenda is crucially important. We can only renew our hope that China will take increasing account of sustainable development principles in its rapid urbanisation, but also in the development of natural resources extraction and when building up its hydro-energy resources, in particular in the very fragile ecosystems of the Himalaya plateau. We have stressed this point in the past, as the whole region depends on a fragile balance between economic growth and use of natural resources.

Finally, the fight against climate change must be fought by everybody; strong local leadership and local government partnerships will cut costs and improve policy delivery. But local government needs support and investment to mobilise communities, businesses and civil society in order to reduce the impact of climate change. They can bring together economic operators and civil society to turn good ideas into concrete results – cooperatives for local energy production are a good example. Local politicians can facilitate public participation and ensure local people are consulted on projects such as wind farms that affect the landscape. Local coordination must therefore not be neglected by international decision makers. The fight against climate change must be fought by everybody, or it cannot be fought at all. ■





Climate change  
**COP21: On the road to Paris**





**H**umans are increasingly influencing the climate and the earth's temperature by burning fossil fuels, cutting down rainforests and farming livestock. This adds enormous amounts of greenhouse gases to those naturally occurring in the atmosphere, increasing the greenhouse effect and global warming. The world's leading climate scientists, members of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), think human activities are almost certainly the main cause of the warming observed since the middle of the 20th century. An increase of 2°C compared to the temperature in pre-industrial times is seen by scientists as the threshold beyond which there is a much higher risk that dangerous and possibly catastrophic changes in the global environment will occur. For this reason, the international community on the road to Paris COP21 conference has recognised the need to keep warming below 2°C and to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. An ambitious climate policy is a priority for global actors such as G7, and UN, as well as the European Union and an integral part of the new Energy Union strategy.

## OUR GUEST

# Maroš Šefčovič: Regions and cities have a strategic role in implementing the Energy Union

“I want to reform and reorganise Europe’s energy policy in a new European Energy Union”, said Jean-Claude Juncker, the new president of the European Commission, at the beginning of his term of office. We met with his Vice-President responsible for the Energy Union, Maroš Šefčovič, to see more clearly where we stand today in terms of deploying a new energy policy of this kind. Maroš Šefčovič explained the main feature of the Energy Union strategy, which is a fundamental transition in Europe’s energy system towards a low-carbon economy, as well as his commitment to climate policy: “An ambitious climate policy is an integral part of the Energy Union. EU Member States agreed to a 40% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions EU-wide compared to 1990. This is an inspiring contribution to international climate negotiations and the European Union engages in climate diplomacy to convince other countries to join the EU’s efforts”. He believes that local and regional governments have a strategic role in implementing this new strategy.

Interview by **Branislav Stanicek**

### **Mr Šefčovič, could you briefly set out the new Energy Union strategy?**

The Energy Union is primarily about a fundamental transition in Europe’s energy system towards a low-carbon economy, where energy security is based on solidarity and trust. We want energy to flow freely in an integrated EU-wide energy system and to create a market where strong and competitive companies can develop the products and technologies of the future with the help of European research and innovation. Furthermore, the Energy Union supports a sustainable, low-carbon, and environment-friendly economy, where, ultimately, citizens are empowered to take ownership of the energy transition by using smart technology to reduce their bills and participate in the market.

### **What are those key dimensions of the Energy Union?**

The strategy is built on five dimensions and we have identified 15 action points that we are going to develop in the next five years within these dimensions. In our search for energy security, we are going to focus on diversifying our energy supplies, stronger European energy diplomacy, and more transparency on gas supply. To achieve a fully-integrated internal energy market we are placing emphasis on the full implementation and enforcement of existing rules, prioritisation of key infrastructure projects, development of regional

cooperation, empowering consumers, and protecting the vulnerable ones.

We continue to emphasise the role of energy efficiency and its contribution to reducing energy demand. We need to start treating energy efficiency as an energy source in its own right, representing the value of energy saved. All economic sectors must take steps to reduce their energy consumption, particularly where there is still significant

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*“The Energy Union also places emphasis on decarbonising our economy. It draws on an ambitious climate policy based on a well-functioning carbon market.”*

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energy efficiency potential and where quick wins are possible, in particular the transport and buildings sector.

### **What is your view on decarbonisation and a well-functioning CO2 market?**

This is a very important issue. The Energy Union places emphasis on decarbonising our economy. It draws on an ambitious climate policy based on a well-functioning carbon market. It also relies on

a continuous and large-scale deployment of renewables and the decarbonisation of the transport sector. But both of these targets require a gradual transformation of both electricity and transport systems.

In order to achieve this transition towards a low-carbon economy, we need to regain our global technological leadership. Thus, we need to better coordinate and focus our research efforts so that they complement the transition on which we are embarking. Only through domestic technology development and its subsequent implementation across the EU will we create business opportunities, green growth, and jobs.

The strategy met with positive reactions in the European Parliament and was endorsed by the European Council in March, but now we are raising awareness and gathering support for it among stakeholders. That is why I announced the “Energy Union Tour” during which I will travel to EU Member States to present and discuss our preliminary analysis of the opportunities the Energy Union will bring and which will feed into the first State of the Energy Union report, which the European Commission will present to the European Parliament and Council in the autumn of this year. It will become an important instrument for monitoring our progress in implementing the Energy Union at the European, regional, and national level.



**Maroš Šefčovič is a Slovak diplomat and the current Vice-President of the European Commission, in charge of the Energy Union. He was previously European Commissioner for Interinstitutional Relations and Administration (2010-2014) and replaced Jan Figel as Commissioner for Education and Culture (2009). From 2004–2009, he was the Slovak Permanent Representative to the European Union. He studied at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations and Comenius University in Bratislava. He is married and has three children.**



**What is the Energy Union’s role in geopolitical stabilisation, especially towards our eastern border?**

In this respect, the Energy Union’s primary objective is securing the European Union’s supply of energy through the diversification of energies, suppliers, and routes, completion of the internal energy market and more efficient energy consumption. Only joint approaches and a spirit of solidarity can make the European Union stronger and more resilient to any supply disruptions resulting from geopolitical destabilisation in our neighbourhood.

But the political challenges that we have witnessed during the last year have both energy- related and external consequences. The Energy Union includes a strong energy diplomacy component that aims to project the EU’s weight on global energy markets and engage more constructively with its partners. We plan to establish strategic energy partnerships with important producing and transit countries such as Algeria, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and also countries in the Middle East, Africa, and others. Norway, being the second largest supplier of crude oil and natural gas, will continue to play a key role in our energy plans. Our energy diplomacy will also focus on transatlantic cooperation by developing partnerships with the United States and Canada. When conditions are right, the EU should also consider reframing the energy relationship with Russia.

We are pursuing these efforts and strategic partnerships, not only to increase the security of our energy supplies, but also to engage with these countries on other matters which can have a plethora of benefits for them. All of our activities with external dimensions are closely coordinated with those of the High Representative and other institutions.

**People often talk about the so-called green cities and regions. What role do local and**

**regional governments play in the Energy Union?**

Local and regional governments have a strategic role in implementing all the Commission’s initiatives, ranging from the Energy Union to the Growth and Investment Plan. 78% of Europeans live in cities and 85% of GDP is generated in cities, so their significance for our society is undeniable.

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If we want to achieve our energy transition, we have to get the mayors and regional representatives on board. If we want people to buy energy-efficient appliances, renovate their homes for efficiency gains, install solar panels on their roofs, drive electric cars, and conduct innovative research in this sector, people have to be encouraged by their national and local governments. And we all need to work together to provide the necessary conditions for city councils to promote a green, sustainable, and efficient way of life, while respecting the subsidiarity principle. The work of the Smart Cities and Communities initiatives as well as that of the Covenant of Mayors, which is primarily carried forward by mayors, civil society organisations, investors, financial institutions and service providers, is important for achieving progress on energy efficiency in and outside the EU.

**What will be the future of the Smart Cities initiatives?**

We are redesigning our current Smart Cities initiatives to ensure better regulation, streamlining of current projects, focusing on specific objectives and creating synergies between our efforts. In addition to simplifying the current framework, we are going to focus the Smart Cities agenda on connecting and integrating the hardware in our cities. Currently, all urban infrastructure including water, electricity, gas, waste, transportation, heating, and others have been built independently of one another. But to achieve real efficiency gains and make our cities more sustainable, we need to connect them so that they complement each other. Integrating and linking up energy, transport, water, waste, and ICT will create environmental and social impacts through resource efficiency, better air quality, better waste management, development of new skills in the population and other benefits.

Key aspects of the Energy Union agenda, such as energy efficiency, heating and cooling, renovation of the building sector, and installing renewables in individual homes depend on mayors across Europe. We, in turn, will do everything in our power to facilitate mayors’ access to good projects and financing through project development assistance and aggregation of proposals. We hope that European citizens will take ownership of this transition and by 2030 European cities will be the most energy-efficient, well-connected, sustainable and prosperous, offering a quality of life that is second to none.

**Europe is becoming the key actor in fighting climate change, but the largest CO2 emitters continue to be the US and China. What levers does the EU have to reach an agreement at the COP21 in Paris?**

An ambitious climate policy is an integral part of the Energy Union. EU Member States agreed to

a 40% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions EU-wide compared to 1990. This is an inspiring contribution to international climate negotiations and the European Union engages in climate diplomacy to convince other countries to join the EU's efforts. EU Foreign Ministers have endorsed a Climate Diplomacy Action Plan which was jointly developed by the European External Action Service and the Commission.

It focuses on raising climate change as a strategic priority in political dialogues, including at G7, G20, and UN meetings. In this respect, High Representative Federica Mogherini, Commissioner Cañete, other European officials and myself bring up the topic of climate change during our international travels. In the second week of July, I will be travelling to South Africa, Senegal, and the Democratic Republic of Congo to gather support for this binding agreement in Paris. We encourage and support all countries to submit their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) as soon as possible. We are also using development aid, climate finance, and trade agreements to assure our partners that the EU is committed to assisting

developing countries that choose to contribute to international climate agreement.

With our extensive outreach efforts, we hope that the agreement will be ironed out before Paris with most INDCs submitted well in advance of the conference. Stakes are high, so we hope that the long-term sustainability of our planet will be a sufficient motivation for everyone to commit their resources to stop severe, pervasive and irreversible impacts on all the world's people and ecosystems.

**Sustainable transport and electric vehicles are popular topics these days, but we haven't seen one member of the EC in a Tesla car... Could you mention a few innovative initiatives from the Commission for attempting to reduce its impact on the environment?**

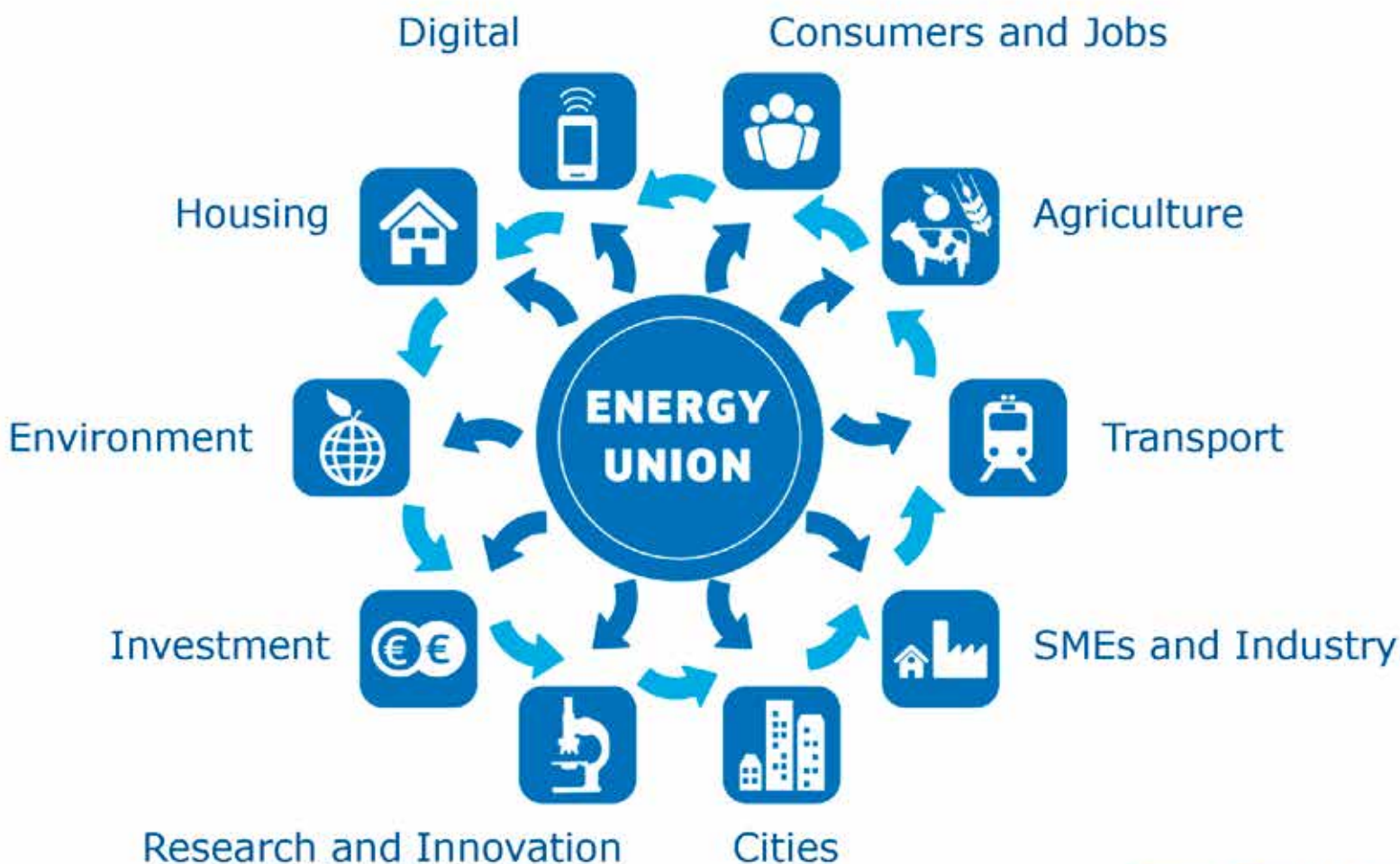
The transport sector also has a prominent place within the Energy Union. It represents more than 30% of final energy consumption in Europe. Together with buildings, it has the highest potential for efficiency gains and thus they are at the forefront of our energy efficiency efforts. Whilst a

transition towards a decarbonised transport sector is our ultimate goal, we need to focus first on improving our CO2 emission standards for passenger cars, increasing fuel efficiency, reducing CO2 emissions for heavy-duty trucks and buses, and implementing smart traffic management.

Subsequently, in preparation for decarbonising the transport sector completely, our efforts will have to focus on promoting alternative fuels and deploying the necessary infrastructure (refuelling and recharging stations), because a wide-ranging adoption of electric vehicles by the public will depend on the availability and affordability of vehicles and infrastructure. Europe does need to speed up electrification of its car fleet and become a leader in electro-mobility and energy storage technologies.

Therefore, I am also promoting new urban mobility technologies including electric vehicles. Most recently, in March 2015, I drove an electric car during an event with the Commissioner for Transport, Violeta Bulc. It was a great experience and I am convinced that the future of the transport sector lies in electric vehicles. ■

## Policy convergence



Source: European Commission



## CLIMATE CHANGE

Interview with Annabelle Jaeger, Member of Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur Regional Council with responsibility for biodiversity

# Annabelle Jaeger: We can go beyond the targets set by the European Union

**W**e met Annabelle Jaeger, member of Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur Regional Council (France) with responsibility for biodiversity, to hear her thoughts on the negotiations for COP21 that are currently underway. She emphasised that it was possible to make our environmental commitments even more robust by suggesting an even greater reduction in CO2 emissions: "By 2030, we believe that Europe could reduce emissions by half compared with 1990 levels, meet 40% of its energy consumption from renewable energy sources and make energy savings of 40%, particularly in the construction and transport sectors".

Interview by **Branislav Stanicek**

**You are the European Committee of the Regions rapporteur for COP21. Could you lay out the Committee's position on the current COP21 negotiations?**

The Committee of the Regions wants an ambitious agreement that will truly pave the way to limiting a temperature rise between now and the end of the century to less than 2°C, and also wants to see a global drive towards recognising and strengthening the role of all stakeholders facing the challenge of climate change. At COP21 and afterwards, it is vital to recognise the role of the world's regions and cities and to strengthen their ability to accelerate the action of states and private stakeholders. And this must be done without waiting for the new global agreement to come into force in 2020. This also means that, through the agreement to be reached in Paris, states will have to empower local and regional authorities to act, particularly those in the poorest countries. This is the role of the Green Fund established by the UN in 2011.

The Committee of the Regions also thinks that it is possible to go beyond the targets set by the European Union in October 2014. The energy transition contains the ingredients for future job creation and prosperity. By 2030, we believe that Europe could reduce emissions by half compared with 1990 levels, meet 40% of its energy consumption from renewable energy sources and make energy savings of 40%, particularly in the construction and transport sectors.

**Are your proposals realistic?**

Local and regional authorities are on the front line of the fight against climate change. The proposals that we are making are based on observations we have made on the ground: that there is great potential in terms of renewable energy, building insulation, clean modes of transport, etc., as well as the associated employment opportunities. We are also faced with the growing need to adapt to the impact of climate change. We are ready to take action if

the political, regulatory and financial framework allows us.

**The two largest polluters, the United States and China, have been very reluctant with regard to the climate. What is the state of play in these countries? Do you think that their positions are changing?**

In late 2014, the US and China concluded a bilateral agreement to reduce greenhouse gases, outside



Annabelle Jaeger: "The energy transition contains the ingredients for future job creation and prosperity."

the UN framework. Some people think that this agreement is good news and that it shows that the two major global polluters have decided to tackle climate change. Others are of the opinion that this agreement gets in the way of the UN's efforts, given its relatively limited scope. However, it is certainly the case that both countries have realised the economic advantages of the energy transition. That is why they are starting to act. They are now world leaders in renewable energy and have much to gain by going beyond what they have already announced. Europe should not appear to be lagging behind in this global context.

As regards China, however, we must stay alert and speak out against the impact of China's industrial extraction of raw materials and hydroelectric projects on the rivers of the Tibetan plateau, particularly the Yamdrok Tso, a holy lake located between Lhasa and Shigatse. This dam could bring about one of the worst ecological disasters in China of the 21st century, jeopardising the region's fragile equilibrium. Here and elsewhere, we must always aim to achieve consistency in public policies!

**In July, there will be a conference on COP21 in Lyon. What message will you be taking to this meeting?**

*"It would be positive for local and regional authorities to announce robust and tangible climate commitments in Lyon, whether it be to reduce greenhouse gases, to save energy or to develop real solutions to the climate crisis, such as renewable energy."*

We want to show that local and regional action and experience is vitally important and is complementary to that of states. If the national and international framework allows it, we can start doing more right now to respond to the climate emergency. We also want to demonstrate to the countries that will meet in Paris in December that the energy transition is underway in the regions. It is now up to

them to take note of this development and to accelerate it. Finally, it would be positive for local and regional authorities to announce robust and tangible climate commitments in Lyon, whether it be to reduce greenhouse gases, to save energy or to develop real solutions to the climate crisis, such as renewable energy.

**Finally, what would you recommend that our readers do in their daily lives to preserve the environment for future generations?**

Everyone can act in their own way. To take energy suppliers as an example: there are currently many European countries where energy suppliers using 100% renewable energy have sprung up, independent of the large national energy companies. Choosing one of these energy suppliers is taking action that benefits the climate. Likewise, you can use your bike to get around more often. Indeed, 50% of journeys in urban areas in Europe are less than 5 km long. Another example: changing your diet and making sure to eat more local, seasonal food, and to eat less meat. That can be very beneficial, as much for the climate as for your budget and your health. ■

## OECD: Two thirds of energy investments are still going into fossil fuels

**R**epresentatives of 195 countries are seeking to lay the foundations for an agreement on reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) to limit global warming to 2°C: this is the challenge facing the UN COP21 conference to be held in Paris from 30 November to 11 December 2015. One of the major obstacles to effective action is the continued pursuit of policies geared towards fossil fuels and carbon-intensive activities, which sends out contradictory signals, according to the authors of an OECD report to be published in early July.

“There is a problem with the alignment of public policies with the goals of combating climate change,” pointed out the report's coordinator Richard Baron, as he outlined its key points to the media on Tuesday 2 June. Two thirds of energy investments, for example, are still going into fossil fuels. Worse still: private-sector investment in oil, gas and coal continues to receive public aid – subsidies or taxation measures – amounting to EUR 50-82 billion per year for the 34 countries of the OECD alone. Transport aside, the use of fossil fuels in industry, electricity production and heating is “very under-taxed in relation to their CO2 emissions,” underlined Richard Baron.

### The absence of a carbon market

The OECD also points the finger at some EUR 118 billion per year in agricultural subsidies in its member countries which could have “harmful consequences on the environment”. It also criticises the fact that one third of food produced is wasted each year. At the same time, the share of energy in public research and development spending has dropped from 11% in 1980 to 4% in 2012 in the 29 countries of the International Energy Agency (IEA), the organisation adds.

According to the OECD, the absence of a structured carbon market is keenly felt: “We are lacking a robust carbon price to discourage investment in fossil fuels,” stresses Richard Baron. The OECD is also calling on governments to examine each of their ministries one by one to uncover “misalignments” of their policy with climate goals. One challenge on the road to alignment lies in concerns about distortions in competitiveness, caused by very unequal levels of ambition from country to country, it says. “A global agreement at COP21 in Paris could lead to progress in this area.” ■





## Malta: Climate change is on top of the agenda

By **Noel Formosa**, Mayor of San Lawrenz, Malta

Two years ago, the TIME magazine man of the year for 2013, Pope Francis, made a strong plea to “let us be ‘protectors’ of creation, protectors of God’s plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment.” I firmly believe that, as local administrators, we can make an important contribution to translating this proposal into an agenda for local and regional authorities, as part of their continuous struggle to protect nature and the environment. This has become an urgent matter, and although the clock is ticking against us, I believe that we still have time for concrete action ahead of the COP21 meeting in Paris. What we strongly require is the necessary will and political commitment. In this regard, to be successful, we have to join forces, irrespective of the size of our municipality or region. Coming from the smallest country in the European Union, and living in the second smallest locality on Gozo, the smaller inhabited island of the Maltese archipelago, I could easily ask what contribution I could possibly make in this regard.

Experience tells a different story! Looking back at the short twenty-year history of my village’s local council, I conclude that even though there is always more to do, we are in fact delivering. First of all, we rely on education to make the community aware of the urgent need to safeguard our environment. We are making every effort to inform local people of all ages about this topic and to raise their awareness as much as possible. This educational campaign starts at primary school and moves all the way up to lifelong education. Children are slowly becoming important advocates of this new awareness, taking it from their school

desks to their families. Climate change is on top of the agenda. In this regard we do our best to educate our families to use alternative sources of energy, as much as possible. And we are reaping the fruits of this new awareness! More than 60% of our households use some kind of alternative energy. Now, our next aim is to make our small locality an active participant in the COP21. Considering our geographical dimension, we may only be a drop in the ocean, but we are really happy to make this – albeit small – contribution!

### UNESCO’s World Natural Heritage

The territory of our locality is blessed by being one of the most naturally outstanding areas on the Maltese Islands. It brings together many elements

of nature’s beauty: geology, flora, fauna, ecology as well as history and archaeology. The area of Dwejra, which lies within the boundaries of our village of San Lawrenz, is a candidate for inclusion in the UNESCO’s World Natural Heritage list. It is a true gem that merits care and conservation and this burdens us with a huge responsibility, not just as political administrators but also as members of the community where it is situated. This unique site must be protected not just for us and our future generations, but even for Europe and for the rest of humanity. If each city in Europe and worldwide commits to protecting its own natural heritage we will certainly live in a better and more sustainable world than the one we inherited from our forefathers. This collective effort will make us true “protectors of creation”.



Photo by Ted Attard

The area of Dwejra, which lies within the boundaries of our village of San Lawrenz, is a candidate for inclusion in the UNESCO’s World Natural Heritage list.

## Organic farming celebrated in Wallonia, Belgium

On 6 June, a new family-run organic farm was inaugurated by Princess Claire of Belgium and her son, Prince Aymeric, in Grez-Doiceau, Wallonia. The new “Petit Sart” organic farm has been set up by Hubert del Marmol, a farmer who will also serve as Belgium’s “Organic Ambassador” during the organic week celebrating sustainable and green agriculture..

“In the last couple of years, we have seen a return to sustainable farming. This is a very important and encouraging development. Organic farming

is a key aspect of environmental protection and the prevention of climate change,” says Professor Jean-Pascal van Ypersele, Vice-Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The organic farm project has also been supported by Philippe Henry, Walloon Minister for the Environment and Isabelle Kibassa-Maliba, Member of the Walloon Parliament.

Sybille de Coster-Bauchau, Mayor of Grez-Doiceau, welcomed the opening of the new farm and said that by cultivating 20 hectares of land,

it is creating jobs for 8 employees. “Small family-run organic farms are more labour-intensive and provide more jobs than big, highly-mechanised farms”, add Carl Vandoorne and Eric Damiens from the association “Amis de la Ferme Bio” (Friends of Organic Farming). Furthermore, the Grez-Doiceau farm is built to be passive in terms of energy consumption and contributes not only to achieving the EU target of making 20% of farming organic by 2020, but also to reducing the carbon footprint.

## MIGRATION POLICY



# We need a coherent and comprehensive migration policy

By **François Decoster**, Mayor of Saint-Omer, France and President of the CoR CIVEX Commission

I would like to start by expressing my deep sorrow at the dramatic situation in the Mediterranean and I warmly welcome not only the new European agenda on migration but also the European neighbourhood policy. I believe that both policies must be treated together so as to tackle the political and economic factors behind the phenomenon of immigration at their source. Local and regional authorities, as in Calais in France, are confronted with the challenges of this phenomenon and they should not be left to handle these dramatic and overwhelming humanitarian situations alone. It is crucial that cities and regions be empowered to enable them to respond properly and effectively to emergencies at the local level. The EU needs com-

prehensive migration and asylum policies which are to be based on respect for migrants' fundamental rights while maintaining a Union that is open to the outside world.

### European agenda on migration

Before becoming the president of CIVEX, I was the CoR's rapporteur on an Italian Presidency referral on migration policy. I defended the fact that the EU must commit to guaranteeing the principles of solidarity and responsibility-sharing when addressing the challenges posed by migration, and stressed the important role that local and regional authorities should play in creating safe and legal migration pathways into Europe, as well

as integrating migrants and preventing irregular migration. Following the publication of the European Commission's new European agenda on migration, the CIVEX commission appointed me as rapporteur to come up with a comprehensive response to the migration crisis.

Another important step is to set up migration and immigration partnerships between cities and regions in countries of origin and destination countries in order to increase cooperation and enhance mutual trust. Migration is a global and complex phenomenon that requires a global and comprehensive vision as well as a coherent and long-term approach, and we will do our best to contribute to this process. ■



# Recent tragedies in the Mediterranean: What can local and regional authorities do to prevent them from happening again?

By **Cllr Gordon Keymer**, CBE, ECR Group President

**"The ECR Group position in the CoR on issues relating to Justice and Home Affairs is clear", stated ECR Group President Gordon Keymer (Leader of Tandridge District Council, UK). "The CoR should not be commenting on issues such as visa regimes and security budgets, which are not a local or regional competence and therefore not areas in which we have expertise."**

The ECR Group Vice-President Jerzy Zajacka (Poland) expressed deep sorrow due to the recent tragic events in the Mediterranean Sea where those seeking to enter EU Member States have lost their lives. "These recent events are a tragedy. In order to prevent such tragedies in the future, we must tackle the heart of the problem. We need to promote peace and stability in our neighbourhood and we must work with countries of origin to prevent human trafficking, smuggling and criminal Groups. As the Committee of the Regions, we have two platforms (COR-

***"We have two platforms (CORLEAP and ARLEM), through which we engage in a dialogue with EU Member States' Southern and Eastern neighbourhoods. We must use these to do our part in helping prevent these tragedies."***

LEAP and ARLEM), through which we engage in a dialogue with EU Member States' Southern and Eastern neighbourhoods. We must use these to do our part in helping prevent these tragedies" stated Cllr Gordon Keymer CBE (ECR Group President/UK).

Mr Zajacka explained that "some of the local and regional authorities are struggling to cope with the surge in the number of people trying to enter the EU illegally through the Mediterranean Sea. They should share and voice their experiences. However, most importantly, we must make full use of our



local and regional platforms with countries of origin.”

In light of the recent developments in the regions neighbouring the Member States of the European Union, there has been a high increase in the number of individuals seeking to enter the EU with many losing their lives at sea. According to the 2014 risk analysis of the EU's agency for management of operation cooperation at the EU Member States external borders (FRONTEX), detections of illegal border crossing at the EU external borders increased sharply in 2013 compared to 2012, rising

from 75,000 to over 107,000. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), so far in 2015, more than 35,000 asylum seekers and migrants have arrived by boat in southern Europe and some 1600 have died. In 2014, around 219,000 people crossed the Mediterranean, and 3,500 lives were lost.

Member States responded in the Council with calls for increased emphasis on tackling root causes of migration, including fostered cooperation with third countries and providing additional funds for EU operations, while the European Commission

tabled a proposal to create a temporary resettlement scheme for migrants. The ECR Group advocates a “firm but fair” approach to migration.

Jerzy Zająkała, addressing the June Plenary Session, noted that “while trying to address the matter, the EU must respect the legal distinction between seeking asylum and refuge and economic migration. The two are completely different and therefore require different approaches and solutions. We need realism for sustainable migration.” ■



## The migration situation in the municipality of Aigaleo, Greece

By **Dimitris Birmpas**, Mayor of Aigaleo, Greece

Since 1990, the municipality of Aigaleo has developed a comprehensive range of measures to integrate and support immigrants and refugees in the area. A home to refugees since the arrival of Greek refugees from Asia Minor in 1922, followed by Assyrians and post-war internally displaced migrants, the municipality has more recently been endeavouring to deal with the influx of refugees and migrants from countries to the east and from conflict zones in the Middle East.

According to its 2011 census, 8% of the municipality's residents are non-Greek. Furthermore, based on the 2015 census, the total number of schoolchildren is 8 841, of whom

857 (9.7 %) are foreign. The municipality made community initiatives a priority, introducing facilities that unfortunately had to be discontinued when the funding came to an end. Currently, most problems are handled by the municipality's social and solidarity services and the Migrant Integration Council. In accordance with Article 78 of Greek Law No 3852/10, the municipality ran an office for migrants until 2012, which closed when competence was transferred to the decentralised regional administration.

Now it is the Migrant Integration Council, consisting of nine members (five members of the municipal council, one member of the public, one representative of the Labour Centre and two

community representatives), that is responsible for organising activities in support of migrants and multicultural events, making space available for events and providing support through the

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**“According to its 2011 census, 8% of the municipality's residents are non-Greek.”**

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municipality's social services. The municipality works closely with the Panhellenic Union of Assyrians (1932), which is extremely active in the region and acts as a bridge for refugees and migrants from the Middle East passing through the city. It provides awareness-raising initiatives for the local population, particularly the school community, and support for refugees and migrants in cooperation with organisations such as the UNHCR, the Red Cross, the UN, the National Youth Foundation, universities and other non-governmental organisations active in the area.

At the present time, with the country plunged into deep economic recession, the main challenges are on the one hand stepping up efforts to find jobs for everyone, and on the other combating racism and xenophobia, which are aggravated by widespread poverty.

In order to meet these challenges, investment is urgently needed in the municipality's support infrastructure, as is the contribution of civil society, to ensure that the difficult tasks of managing migration flows and integrating migrants can be fairly distributed. ■



Municipality of Aigaleo has developed a comprehensive range of measures to integrate and support immigrants and refugees in the area.

## NEW TERM OF OFFICE 2015-2020

### Interview with Catuscia Marini, President of the PES Group in the CoR and President of the Umbria region, Italy

# Catuscia Marini: We have to strengthen the social dimension of European integration

**W**e met Catuscia Marini, the new President of the PES Group in the European Committee of the Regions, to discuss her political priorities for the 2015-2020 term of office. She stressed the need for investments to re-launch economic growth and employment. She expects that the European Commission will further develop the EU unemployment insurance scheme and move beyond the debate about a minimum wage towards a concept of a decent living wage.

**You have recently been elected President of the PES Group in the CoR. What is your main priority for the 2015-2020 CoR term of office?**

The key priority for our Group will be to put in place the conditions for a re-launch of sustainable growth and job creation in EU cities and regions. The start of the new term of office for the CoR comes after the first timid steps taken by the new European Commission to move beyond the austerity dogma that Juncker's predecessor, José Manuel Barroso, arduously defended. The Commission has acknowledged that the EU is currently suffering from dramatic under-investment, but the proposed investment plan will not in itself be sufficient to redress the situation rapidly. In fact, it should be seen as a kick-off initiative to re-launch growth and job creation. Our aim is to ensure that investments do not go chiefly to quick-win projects concentrated in some highly developed regions, leaving all the others behind, but that they genuinely foster sustainable development across the EU and in areas such as public transport, energy efficiency and broadband projects in rural areas.

**How can the EU win back citizens' trust in the European project?**

To regain citizens' – and especially young people's – trust in the EU, we have to strengthen the social dimension of European integration and resolutely move away from austerity-only policies. The PES Group will therefore continue to put pressure on

the European Commission to propose incentive measures for achieving the social objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy and to include further key employment and social indicators in the scoreboard which is used to measure progress. We also expect the European Commission to develop ideas for an EU unemployment insurance scheme and to move beyond the debate about a minimum wage towards a concept of a decent living wage, and also come forward with ambitious proposals to improve labour mobility.

**What are your priorities regarding Europe's transition towards a sustainable and energy-efficient economy?**

The PES Group calls for a revision and strengthening of the energy efficiency directive, which should take into account the need for decentralised energy solutions to reduce Europe's dependency on fossil fuels. Moreover, we will continue to put pressure on the European Commission to present an Action Plan against energy poverty,



Catuscia Marini: "We have to give serious consideration to building a European migration policy which offers safe, legal channels for immigration, and which should not be limited solely to highly-skilled workers."



which should propose measures at European, national and regional/local level to improve the situation of the EU's most vulnerable consumers. The PES Group will also persevere with its demand for ambitious climate targets, that is, binding targets of 50% CO<sup>2</sup> reduction, 40% renewable energy and 40% energy efficiency by 2030. We know that these targets can be met at the local and regional level and we are convinced that the EU needs to lead the way to ensure that a deal is made at the Paris climate change conference in order to still have a chance of limiting global warming to no more than 2°C.

### What is your position in the current debate on migration?

The most recent tragedies in the Mediterranean Sea have once again highlighted the urgent need for swift, fair and long-term EU action. We need a just asylum policy which offers protection to those who need it, prevents the unacceptable loss of lives in trying to reach the EU and is based on solidarity between Member States and regions in receiving refugees and asylum seekers. At the same time, we finally have to give serious consideration to build-

ing a European migration policy which offers safe, legal channels for immigration, and which should not be limited solely to highly-skilled workers. A thorough overhaul of the Dublin regulation is urgently needed in this context. We also need to actively support cooperation with third countries of origin and transit of migratory movements. We must coordinate these policies much more closely with the EU's development policies, building also on the European Year for Development 2015. ■

## Interview with Luca Zaia, President of the Veneto Region, Italy

# Luca Zaia: Regions have a central role to play in driving forward Europe

**L**uca Zaia is a former Italian Minister of Agriculture and the President of the Veneto Region since 2010. In 1995, he became a Councillor for Agriculture for the Province of Treviso and in 1998 he was elected as the youngest Provincial President in Italy, working in various sectors including agriculture, safety, tourism and education. As a new member of the European Committee of the Regions in Brussels, he has stressed the need to place local authorities at the heart of cohesion policy in order to promote economic growth, revitalise industry, boost employment and combat poverty and social exclusion.

### What do you expect as a new member of the European Committee of the Regions?

I have always firmly believed that regions have a central role to play in driving forward the dynamics of the EU. As a new member of the Committee of the Regions, I shall strive to foster the involvement of the regions in the EU decision-making process and ensure that citizens play a more active part. The Europe of the future is a Europe of Regions and Macro-regions. I believe that this is the real challenge: to place local authorities at the heart of cohesion policy in order to promote economic growth, revitalise industry, boost employment and combat poverty and social exclusion.

### What will be your priorities in Brussels?

Europe's richness lies in its diversity. Harnessing local resources is thus key to ending the current economic crisis while preserving the special characteristics of local products. SMEs form the backbone of many regional economies, and they need strategic investment that will also help to boost employment, especially among young people. My work at the Committee will focus on these issues. The key priorities that will guide my work at the Committee of the Regions will be boosting employment and economic growth.

The 2014 report on the labour market in the Veneto region shows a period of crisis, with unemployment at 7.6%, and more especially a situation where one young person in two is either unable to find work or only has insecure employment. The region is working to tackle this situation, which is

common to many EU regions, by making full use of EU instruments such as the Youth Guarantee and the opportunities provided by projects such as "FITTT! Forma il tuo Futuro", a new scheme for devising innovative ways to support apprenticeship pathways.



Luca Zaia: "The Veneto region has taken major initiatives to support youth entrepreneurship, such as its "Crea Lavoro" project, to encourage the creation of new businesses and channel the creative and innovative potential of large numbers of young people."

**Looking at the impact of the financial crisis, how do you see the implementation of the Juncker plan?**

Helping to end the crisis and boost employment means giving businesses practical opportunities for growth. The projects submitted by our region for the Juncker plan thus focus on the development of major infrastructure. Our projects include the expansion of Venice airport and its rail links, modernising the Venice-Trieste motorway, the offshore port and deep-water terminal, and the agreement between the northern Adriatic ports. I believe that a framework agreement between the northern Adriatic ports, with the opening of the Adriatic-Baltic corridor, is crucial for the competitiveness of the Adriatic region. Similarly, the inclusion of the offshore port in the Juncker plan recognises the strategic nature of this infrastructure.

**How could your innovative actions in the Veneto Region inspire other members of the Committee?**

The region is developing major European initiatives to stimulate employment, especially among young people. In recent decades the Veneto has offered Italy and Europe a strong business-development model based on the talent and skills of its many small businesses. This model remains relevant and can still prove a force for regional development and an example for other European regions. The Veneto region has thus taken major initiatives to support youth entrepreneurship, such as its “Crea Lavoro” project, to encourage the creation of new businesses and channel the creative and innovative potential of large numbers of young people.

This has been flanked in recent years by a number of policies to support the central role of the family, as a key factor for strengthening social cohesion and economic development. Particular examples would

include policies for improving work-life balance: distance working, part-time, work and home-based crèches, paternity leave; household mutual support networks; “work-life balance audits” – a quality certificate given to firms which adopt measures to improve work-life balance. At the same time, the Veneto region is striving to address the challenge of an ageing population by working to integrate health and social care so as to improve quality of life and reduce the costs of assistance.

And it is not only young people who can provide a resource for economic and social development. Our region also pursues active ageing policies which make the most of the experience and skills of older people, with innovative projects such as “civic service” whereby older people can get involved in local community activities. These are good practices which we are keen to share with members from other regions, and which can provide important input for re-launching the economy and jobs, thereby also helping to improve quality of life. ■

**Interview with Ivo Nesrovnal, Mayor of Bratislava**

# Ivo Nesrovnal: Bratislava would need double its budget

**W**e met Bratislava mayor Ivan Nesrovnal to talk about what he wants to achieve as a member of the European Committee of the Regions and the challenges facing the Slovak capital. Although Bratislava is one of the EU’s six wealthiest regions, for Nesrovnal the reality is an inadequate budget and difficulty getting EU funds. “For Bratislava to develop properly, especially its transport system, it would need twice the budget,” says the mayor, adding: “The priority for us is not just drawing more funding from the European Union, but using the opportunities the Union affords us to boost competitiveness and the quality of life of the population.”

Interview by **Branislav Stanicek**

**You have recently been elected mayor of the Slovak capital, Bratislava. What do you see as the main challenges and priorities?**

There are a lot of things that need changing, but it has to be gradual and systemic. The key pillars of my campaign included cleaning up public areas, sound urban planning and transport. At the moment we are working on improving the quality of public spaces. We are refurbishing the approach to the main station, which is in a disastrous state, and we are drafting a plan to regulate where advertising hoardings can be placed to cut down on visual pollution. We are also looking for ways

to ensure effective management of public finances. Bratislava is underfunded and I am engaged in discussions, including with the country’s leaders, to improve this. We also have a lot of work to do on management of the city’s public companies, which I want to professionalise and depoliticise.

**Bratislava is one of the richest regions in the EU and this makes it difficult to tap EU funds. At the same time, it faces some major challenges in terms of development. Could you shed some light on this paradox and how you are trying to deal with it?**

Thank you for that question. According to Eurostat, Bratislava region is one of the six richest in the EU. But come to Bratislava and you’ll see that this is completely at odds with reality in terms of the size – or rather the inadequacy – of the city’s budget. And this has been the case for a few electoral terms now. When we put together the 2015 budget, which is EUR 362 million, we had to think very carefully where to spend money, apart from on day-to-day running of the city, in order to stimulate development and not just stagnate. So, the Slovak capital needs a systemic change in its financing. For Bratislava to develop properly,





especially its transport system, it would need twice the budget.

**How do you think Brussels could support Bratislava’s development in the new programming period and under new initiatives such as the Juncker plan?**

Cooperation with the European Union is very important not just for Bratislava, but for Slovakia as a whole. There are several important projects we are in a position to go ahead with thanks to support from operational programmes and EU representatives.

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*“When we put together the 2015 budget, which is EUR 362 million, we had to think very carefully where to spend money, apart from on day-to-day running of the city, in order to stimulate development and not just stagnate.”*

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**As a new member of the Committee of the Regions, what is it you would like to achieve in your time here?**

I would like to raise awareness of Bratislava and its needs – through the Bratislava Self-governing Region’s office here in Brussels, at the heart of the



Ivo Nesrovnal

European Union. As president of the Union of Towns and Cities of Slovakia, which is the umbrella organisation for the country’s municipalities, I can also bring this dimension into addressing problems. At the same time, I represent Bratislava in our largest organisation of self-governing authorities – the Association of Towns and Municipalities of Slovakia. In a word, more has to be heard about Bratislava at the European level as well.

**EU funds are seen as an important instrument for the development of cities and regions. How would you want to improve take-up of these funds and how could they be used more effectively?**

One of Bratislava’s very clear and long-term priorities is addressing transport in the city and the region as a whole, connecting the city to international networks and replacing vehicle fleets. We want to focus on rail use in particular, because we have 80 km of track that is not being used at all for passengers. So, the priority for us is not just drawing funding from the European Union for transport projects – which we talked about with regional policy commissioner Corina Crețu when she came to Bratislava in March – but also using the possibilities the European Union affords us to use the regions’ own resources effectively as well to boost competitiveness and the quality of life of the population. ■

# Investment Plan for Europe: Opportunities and challenges for regions and cities

**A**gainst the backdrop of fragile signs of recovery, and a 15% drop in the level of investment in the EU since 2007 due to the economic and financial crisis, European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker presented the Investment Plan for Europe after only three weeks in office, in November 2014. Following endorsement by the European Council on 18 December 2014, the Commission published its legislative proposal on 13 January 2015. This proposal is aimed at establishing a European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), which will be designed and managed in partnership between the Commission and the European Investment Bank (EIB); a European Investment Advisory Hub to support the identification and implementation of investment projects across the Union; and a European investment project pipeline to improve investors' knowledge of existing and future projects.

By **Andrea Forti**

**T**he Fund will mobilise at least EUR 315 billion in private and public investment across the European Union, to provide targeted support to strategic investments. Funding will be directed towards viable projects, with a real added value for the European social market economy, a non-exhaustive list of which includes:

- strategic infrastructure (digital and energy investments in line with EU policies);
- transport infrastructure in industrial centres, education, research and innovation;
- investments boosting employment, in particular through SME funding and measures for youth employment;
- environmentally sustainable projects; and
- innovation and research & development.

## EUR 315 billion of investments in three years

The rationale of what is now known as the Juncker Plan is that significant liquidity does, in fact, exist in Europe, but investment is being held back by a lack of confidence in the return on these investments, linked to a perception of excessive risks. The EFSI aims to provide guarantees to bring this risk down to a level acceptable for private investors. Based on the EIB's experience, the EUR 21 billion of guarantees that will be made available (EUR 16 billion from the Commission and EUR 5 billion from the EIB) will have an overall multiplier effect of 1:15, eventually generating more than EUR 315 billion of additional investments in three years.

The daily management of the EFSI will be with the EIB. Its governance structure includes a steering board (including only Commission and EIB members) that will give guidelines on the strategy,

investment policy and risk profile of the fund, and an investment committee (consisting of eight independent experts and a managing director). The latter will ensure the day-to-day management of the fund and will be accountable to the steering board; by simple majority, it will take decisions on the investment projects to receive EFSI support – which will then require approval by the EIB. The European Investment Hub and the European investment pipeline will ensure that public and private investors make the most of the Plan, which has no sectoral or regional pre-allocations. The EFSI will have an initial duration of three years. Before the end of this period, the Commission will seek an independent evaluation to assess whether the EFSI has achieved its goals, and will present a proposal to continue it or not.

An agreement on the Juncker Plan legislative proposal reached on 28 May 2015 between the Latvian presidency of the Council and the European Parliament arrived at a compromise solution on some pending issues. One of the key

outcomes was that unused margins in the EU budget will generate part of the Commission's share of financing of the EFSI, thus enabling the contribution from Horizon 2020 and the Connecting Europe Facility to be reduced. This agreement paves the way for the final approval of the Plan, which is expected to start funding investments in summer 2015.

## Opportunities and challenges for regions and cities

In the time that has passed since the presentation of the legislative proposal, a clearer picture has emerged about the basic features of the Plan. As regards how the Plan will be funded, the Commission has made clear that national contributions to the EFSI will not be counted towards the deficit and debt calculations under the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP). Despite an explicit request by the European Committee of the Regions, countries in the corrective arm of



Jean-Claude Juncker and Markku Markkula at the plenary session in June. "Juncker Plan will mobilise at least EUR 315 billion in private and public investment across the European Union, to provide targeted support to strategic investments."



the SGP will not get the same treatment for the national co-financing of the Structural Funds. This circumstance has an impact on the use of the Juncker Plan in this group of countries, since the Structural Funds can be used to co-finance investment projects eligible under the Juncker Plan (although, obviously, not by directly contributing to the EFSI, which would be outside the scope of cohesion policy).

Besides contributing to the ESIF – which in itself, as already said, does not guarantee any sectoral or territorial allocation of funds – Member States, their sub-national authorities and their national promotional banks will have the opportunity to co-finance investment projects jointly with the EFSI. This will be possible either on a project-by-project basis or through investment platforms – i.e., policy mechanisms “wrapping up” different projects, including small ones and those concerning SMEs, in a given area or sector.

Since the EFSI does not provide for preventive territorial allocation of funds, the Juncker Plan poses a challenge to cities and regions in terms of the administrative capacity needed to draft a good investment project including financial and governance solutions able to attract private

investors. Following up on its opinion on the Juncker Plan adopted on 16-17 April 2015, the CoR has launched a joint initiative with the EIB to help regions and cities benefit from the new investment tool. The CoR also supports pooling together regional development banks and other institutional investors to support delivery of the Plan.

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***“Since the EFSI does not provide for preventive territorial allocation of funds, the Juncker Plan poses a challenge to cities and regions in terms of the administrative capacity needed to draft a good investment project including financial and governance solutions able to attract private investors.”***

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For regions and cities to step up to the challenge, though, Member States will have to play their part not only in mobilising financial resources in the various ways mentioned above, but also in

improving the business environment in the fields that fall within their remits. In this regard, the latest edition of the World Bank’s “Ease of doing business” database compares and ranks the way in which a country’s regulations translate into constraints for businesses. This World Bank exercise is based on accurate measures of the following aspects: starting a business, dealing with construction permits, getting electricity, registering property, getting credit, protecting minority investors, paying taxes, trading across borders, enforcing contracts and resolving insolvency; a summary indicator provides a ranking including several countries around the world. EU Member States are spread over a long span of this ranking, from Denmark at the top (4th place in the world ranking) down to Malta in 94th position. Most countries are stronger in certain areas, while their weakness is often concentrated in a few administrative areas. It is in the interests of EU cities and regions that – as requested by the European Commission in the 2015 Annual Growth Survey – their national governments undertake the structural reforms needed to improve the business environment, which is, besides funding, a key prerequisite for the success of the Juncker Plan. ■

## Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga

By **Julien De Ridder**

On 22 May, the CoR First Vice-President, Karl-Heinz Lambertz, participated in the Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga together with the Armenian Co-Chair of the Conference of the Regional and Local Authorities for Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP) Emin Yeritsyan. Although cooperation with the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries to promote stability and development in the EU’s neighbourhood is amongst the priorities of the current Latvian Presidency of the EU Council, especially in the aftermath of Russia’s annexation of Crimea and against the backdrop of the ongoing war in Eastern Ukraine, the Summit did not make any further commitments to stepping up the EU’s relationships, in particular with Moldova, Georgia or Ukraine, and was therefore disappointing for some.

The geopolitical caution displayed at intergovernmental level contrasts however with the willingness of local and regional authorities, who are anxious to step up their efforts regarding partnership and territorial cooperation. One way they wish to do this is by setting up cross-border and macro-regional projects, and maintaining a multilateral cooperation platform, while at

the same time promoting the “more for more” approach for States carrying out reform processes, including moves towards decentralisation. The declaration by the Heads of State in fact

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***“Summit did not make any further commitments to stepping up the EU’s relationships, in particular with Moldova, Georgia or Ukraine, and was therefore disappointing for some.”***

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recognises these efforts, calling on “the European Commission to ensure appropriate, targeted support to local and regional authorities to assist their role in pursuing the goals and objectives of the Eastern Partnership”. One concrete action that the European Commission could support would be to extend the scope of the Local Administration Facility (LAF) to the Eastern neighbourhood, in order to facilitate the exchange of best practices in institutional efficiency.

CORLEAP and the Committee of the Regions are also closely following events in Ukraine with a strong focus on decentralisation and constitutional reform. We have a specific role to play in implementing the reform process as far as decentralisation is concerned. The CoR Ukraine task force will meet in Kiev in July in order to stimulate the debate that is needed, at the local level, with civil society organisations, government counterparts and all stakeholders. Such a debate needs to accompany the reforms, to ensure that they are recognised by citizens. ■



Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga. Donald Tusk, Karl-Heinz Lambertz and Jean-Claude Juncker.

# Decentralised cooperation and development

By Bernard Chane Kune



Local and regional authorities are closer to the people than other public institutions and can therefore act as catalysts for change.

On 1-2 June the European Committee of the Regions opened its doors to around 700 participants from all over the world for the 4th Assises of Decentralised Cooperation. It brought together elected representatives from the European Union, Africa, Asia, Latin America and North America. The event – which takes place during the European Year for Development – began with a presentation of the EYD2015, followed by an opening ceremony led by the Deputy Director General of the Directorate General for International Development and Cooperation at the European Commission, Marcus Cornaro.

Participants were able to exchange views and good practices at five round tables and associated seminars, covering relevant issues such as: the Post-2015 Agenda, urban challenges, climate change, biodiversity, migration and the future of decentralised cooperation. The outcomes of

these round tables and associated seminars were presented by rapporteurs at the plenary session, chaired by the President of the Committee of the Regions, Markku Markkula. Representatives from the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Latvian Presidency, the European External Action Service and the European Committee of the Regions put forward their views on decentralised cooperation between the EU and its counterparts in the rest of the world.

## Cities and regions: key players in the area of development

The two-day conference once again achieved its aim of contributing towards efforts to enhance the effectiveness of European development aid and to fully integrate local and regional authorities into development cooperation policies.

It also encouraged the formation of genuine EU partnerships with different stakeholders in the field of development. One of the key messages to emerge from this year's event – which was also stressed by Mr Markkula in his speech – is that the subnational dimension must be maintained within the future international framework for development. Cities and regions should be increasingly recognised as key players in the area of development, as they not only provide financial resources and expertise, they also generate new ideas. Local and regional authorities are closer to the people than other public institutions and can therefore act as catalysts for change. They are also able to improve the quality of citizens' lives and their wellbeing. The European Commission and the Council have already recognised this, but more tangible tools are needed in order to step up the drive towards decentralisation via European development policy. ■



## Poland celebrates the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of local government

**O**n 4 June, on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the restoration of local government in Poland, Markku Markkula, president of the European Committee of the Regions, met Jerzy Buzek, MEP, and Marek Woźniak, president of the Polish delegation, to discuss new challenges for the Polish regions, in particular the impact of the economic crisis on local finances and fiscal decentralisation.

By **Julia Rokicka**



Markku Markkula, President of the European Committee of the Regions during the opening session. Marek Woźniak, Marshal of Wielkopolska Region, pointed out that “Decentralisation and democratisation of public life go hand in hand. They are not a single act but a continuing process that must be always improved.”

**A**s a result of the ongoing economic crisis and budgetary constraints, local and regional authorities in Poland have encountered two main challenges. First, fiscal competition with central government has increased since 2008. Second, co-financing with EU funds has become more challenging, especially for small municipalities. Even if the level of fiscal decentralisation in Poland is 22%, slightly higher than the EU average (18%), there are still regional authorities that have a very low level of autonomy with regard to their tax revenues.

Congratulating Polish regions on their path towards decentralisation, Markku Markkula said that Poland’s transformation in less than three decades had been remarkable. Poland had moved to a truly democratic political system, reformed its economy and advanced swiftly to administrative decentralisation”. Jerzy Buzek MEP believes that this experience can serve as a good example for other countries reforming their local government, saying “In self-government we can look for opportunities for a real community of values, not only at national level, but also at European level”. Marek Woźniak,

Marshal of Wielkopolska Region, pointed out that “Decentralisation and democratisation of public life go hand in hand. They are not a single act but a continuing process that must be always improved.”

Finally, it was recalled that, according to the Eurobarometer survey conducted in the autumn of 2014, nearly nine out of ten Europeans felt closely attached to their city or town. This European survey shows that 94% of Poles do feel attached to their local community, which puts them just behind the citizens of Portugal, Greece and Italy. ■

## RAPORTEURS HAVE THEIR SAY

In this column, members of the Committee of the Regions explain what motivates them to take on the role of as a rapporteur. The following op-eds cover a diverse range of topics from local and regional support for fair trade in Europe to the cohesion policy reform.



Barbara Duden, Member of the Hamburg City Parliament, Germany

First of all, the Committee of the Regions is a long-standing supporter of the concept of fair trade. This was clearly set out in its 2010 opinion by former PES Group member Kerstin Kiessler from Bremen, which called for a “European Fair Trade Strategy” for local and regional authorities. Unfortunately, we have not seen any real follow-up to this opinion from the European Commission. With 2015 a landmark year for development at EU as well as global level, I saw this as an ideal opportunity to put this topic at the top of the EU agenda on sustainable development. As indicated in my own-initiative opinion, there is a need to promote a consistent and coordinated approach to fair trade across all EU policy areas, in particular trade, development and sustainable consumption

and production. In support of the opinion, I have also asked the CoR to commission a study on the existing policy frameworks to promote fair trade in the EU, to include a selection of relevant best practices from cities and regions in Europe.

In my country, Germany, many of the good practices supporting fair trade are encouraged by cities and regions, particularly the German Fair Trade Capital award. This contest, run by the “Communities in One World” Service Agency, has been very successful in scaling up the efforts of German cities in this area. In addition, it raises the public profile of fair trade. The EU should follow this model and launch a “European Fair Trade Capital” award scheme that would give incentives to European

municipalities to carry out their commitments in the area of fair trade. In this context, it is also very important to allow local and regional authorities to exchange their experiences and learn from each other, especially in areas such as public procurement and partnerships with cities in the South.

I am looking forward to seeing my opinion adopted by the CoR plenary. The upcoming EU trade strategy (to be adopted shortly by the European Commission) as well as the implementation of the -yet to be agreed - Sustainable Development Goals at global level provide two excellent opportunities for pursuing an ambitious EU stance on fair trade. ■

## Local and regional support for fair trade in Europe



Hermann Kuhn, Member of the Bremen City Parliament, Germany

Europe’s seas and coasts are not in a healthy state. Seas are under threat from overfishing, waste and non-native species. The objective of the own-initiative opinion on “Better protecting the marine environment” by rapporteur Hermann Kuhn, member of the Bremen City Parliament in Germany, is to draw attention to this issue and to urge cities and regions to play a bigger role in marine protection.

The reference point for the CoR opinion is the EU’s Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), which requires the Member States to take the necessary steps to achieve “good environmental status” in the marine environment by 2020. An interim Commission report concludes that the seas are

still far from achieving this “good environmental status”. A step-change is therefore urgently needed.

The opinion contains very practical proposals and requests for the programmes of measures which the Member States must present in 2015. Reducing sea waste is a key requirement for improving the marine environment. The rapporteur is, for example, in favour of imposing a general ban on the disposal and incineration of waste at sea. In order to avoid the serious impact of micro-plastics on marine organisms, an EU-wide ban on the use of micro-plastics in cosmetics should be introduced as a first step. Since noise and light also affect the marine environment, Mr Kuhn advocates introducing a noise register for marine waters. On the basis of

this, limit values should be set for reducing noise in the marine environment.

Mr Kuhn is convinced that marine protection is possible only through cross-border measures and with the involvement of all levels of government, as well as civil society and business. Dialogue with the public is the key to the success of marine protection. We are pleased that the opinion has already met with considerable interest. For example, in late May the rapporteur had the opportunity to present the key points of his opinion to the EU working group Water and Marine Directors, which has warmly welcomed his preliminary recommendations. ■

## Committee calls for better protection of the seas





**Tadeusz Truskolaski**, Mayor of Białystok, Poland

On 7 May the members of the ECON Commission adopted the opinion of Tadeusz Truskolaski, Mayor of Białystok and coordinator of the EA Group, on Building a Capital Markets Union. Building a Capital Markets Union is one of the European Commission's main priorities in the current term of office. In the opinion I express particular interest in, and strongly support, all actions aimed at:

- strengthening the potential of SMEs, recognising their role in promoting local entrepreneurship, creating innovation and shaping a society based on the value of work;
- financial feasibility support for important and long-term investment projects with key regional significance which create conditions for effective local and regional development. In my opinion I welcome programmes and funds like the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) that will promote investments of great public importance and I express the view that the building of a Capital Markets Union will above all support the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, stressing the importance of that sector for the European economy and regional development. There are over 20 million SMEs in the EU28, making up approximately 67% of jobs and 58% of gross value added. The opinion also points out key factors enabling SMEs to develop, such as a business-friendly environment, modern infrastructure, the existence of technologically advanced sectors of the economy and a highly skilled workforce.

We would like to encourage the holding of more broadly based consultations on securitisation processes, taking account of the conclusions drawn from the financial crisis. Securitisation should avoid high-leverage instruments and dependence on short-term financing. Unfortunately, in Europe there is a low level of financial knowledge and investment culture among retail investors and owners of small businesses and micro-enterprises. Local and regional government institutions can play a significant and varied role in capital markets as investors offering long-term start-up capital, and their liabilities could be traded on markets. At the same time rapporteur suggests setting up a common European database of credit information which would help investors assess investment risk, and establishing simplified International Financial



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***“Local and regional authorities consider themselves jointly responsible for promoting the development of SMEs and of infrastructure in Europe.”***

Reporting Standards (IFRS) which could ensure comparability of businesses and increase their ratings.

The CoR has been studying with great interest the Commission's new ideas about improving the EU economy's resilience against asymmetric shocks. The action taken to date, such as the Banking Union, and now the stated intention of building a Capital Markets Union, can help mitigate the damaging consequences of the economic cycle. It should be pointed out that the high degree of diversity of the EU's individual regions with respect to development points to a strongly asymmetric dimension. Only integrated measures – to ensure local and regional but also national and international cohesion - can protect the EU against the severe consequences of the current economic downturn. The regulatory environment should be stimulating and not limit the accessibility of new instruments

and forms of capital distribution. At the same time, I fear that the current objectives of the Capital Markets Union are still too general and need to be fleshed out in detail, on the basis of the consultations currently in progress.

Local and regional authorities consider themselves jointly responsible for promoting the development of SMEs and of infrastructure in Europe. The establishment of a Capital Markets Union may in future safeguard the interests of local communities, which, for years if not decades, will probably be obliged to seek new sources of finance for development, on various markets. This could also be a way of making it possible to carry out expensive and high-risk projects over the coming decades. The Capital Markets Union can offer local and regional authorities, in Poland and elsewhere, an opportunity for continued stable and sustainable development. With regard to the potential problem of a lack of harmonisation of financial markets, given that some Member States are not members of the Banking Union, the objective of the Capital Markets Union is not to replace banks in the European economy. It is therefore very important for the Committee of the Regions and local and regional authorities throughout Europe to play an active role in the building of the Capital Markets Union. ■



Mauro D'Attis, Member of the Municipal Council of Brindisi, Italy

## Integrated Economic and Employment Policy Guidelines

The European Committee of the Regions' plenary session is to discuss one of the most important EU political acts: the Integrated Economic and Employment Policy Guidelines, specifically, those dedicated to employment and social inclusion, which were published by the European Commission on 2 March this year.

The Guidelines are significant because the Treaty requires Member States to treat their economic and employment policies as a matter of common concern and therefore to coordinate their actions. They are also important in that the EU as a whole continues to suffer a high rate of unemployment - an intolerable state of affairs for the continent that has made welfare one of its distinctive features - indiscriminately affecting both young people and adults, frequently heads of households, who have lost their jobs following the closure of the production plants where they worked.

*"It should always be borne in mind that local and regional authorities are the last outposts of the decision-making process on the ground, and people's first point of contact with the institutions and policymakers. They could be called the front desk of the institutions. Sometimes this is too easily overlooked."*

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policymakers. They could be called the front desk of the institutions. Sometimes this is too easily overlooked.

The opinion was drafted with the aim of asserting the role of local and regional authorities and highlighting the action that can be taken at that level to fight unemployment and social exclusion and to support growth and employment. We must not forget that "our" Europe boasts great diversity when it comes to regional economic and social indicators, even within the same Member State. It would be foolish and ill-advised to ignore them if we want to build a more inclusive European dimension. Promoting the subsidiarity principle means precisely this: pointing out that a strategy that is more responsive to local needs will undoubtedly be more successful in the long-term, as it will be better able to interpret the needs of individuals and businesses and to develop social cohesion. ■



Ivan Žagar, Mayor of the Municipality of Slovenska Bistrica, Slovenia

## Outcome of the negotiations on the partnership agreements and operational programmes

Cohesion policy has made progress in reducing disparities between and within European regions. However, significant imbalances remain and the future cohesion policy must have the resources to reduce these disparities further. As envisaged by Article 96.2(a) of the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR), these efforts must be based on the development needs of regions, cities and municipalities, and should not serve solely to support the Europe 2020 goals. The 2013 cohesion policy reform strengthened the connection with the EU's priorities (greater synergies between cohesion policy and the Europe 2020 Strategy).

New implementation methods and new tools, along with a stronger link between cohesion policy and other EU policies and initiatives and a stronger focus on effectiveness, efficiency and results, in par-

ticular, have been introduced in the new 2014-2020 programming period. It is therefore important to look at how effectiveness and efficiency can be achieved in practice, as this can make a significant contribution to the development of the regions.

The Juncker Commission's first new core initiative, the Investment Plan for Europe, highlights cohesion policy's potential for promoting growth and jobs in Europe, but it should be noted that the Investment Plan and cohesion policy target different policy levels and must therefore complement each other.

If cohesion policy is to be implemented successfully, its most important strategic elements are the partnership agreements and the operational programmes, as they outline how the Structural and

Investment Funds are to be spent in a particular Member State or region. The quality of partnership in European funds is of crucial importance and effective partnership means faster development for EU citizens. There is some concern that the partnership principle is not being applied appropriately in all Member States. The negotiations on the PAs and OPs showed that while LRAs were consulted in most cases, unfortunately their involvement did not amount to full partnership as outlined in the European Code of Conduct on Partnership. In fact, LRAs have rarely been sufficiently involved in drafting the PAs and OPs (although this varies from country to country), as can be seen from the results of an online survey conducted by the Committee of the Regions. ■



## BRIEF NEWS AND EVENTS

### CoR calls for a better definition of the subsidiarity principle



Guy Verhofstadt, Elmar Brok and Mercedes Bresso

At its 112th plenary session, the European Committee of the Regions' (CoR) President Markku Markkula called for a better definition of the subsidiarity principle and the introduction of a territorial impact assessment of EU European legislation. Among the keynote speakers taking part in the debate on the future functioning of the EU were Mercedes Bresso (Italy/S&D) and Elmar Brok (Germany/EPP) – European Parliament co-rapporteurs of the report on “Improving the functioning of the European Union, building on the potential of the Lisbon Treaty”, as well as Guy Verhofstadt (Belgium/ALDE) the Parliament's rapporteur on “Possible evolutions and adjustments of the current institutional set up of the European Union”.

Opening the debate, Markku Markkula, called for a wide public discussion involving local and regional authorities to reform the Lisbon Treaty: “As local and regional representatives we know the everyday impact of EU policy in our territories which is why we ask that the territorial impact assessment should be a part of the pre-legislative phase in EU decision-making. We now need a clearer definition of the principle of subsidiarity”. President Markkula also addressed the increased democratic deficit which breeds euroscepticism: “The talk of a democratic deficit of the European Union is still continuing, despite the increased power of the European Parliament and the openness of the Commission. In our assembly, we host locally elected leaders, closest to the EU citizens' everyday lives.”

Echoing his words, Mercedes Bresso MEP said that whilst progress had been made towards a closer union in the Digital Single Market and Economic and Monetary affairs, more needed to be done to reinforce democratic accountability and the political union. She further called for an extension of the application of the principle of subsidi-

arity within the European semester. Finally, she stressed the need for genuine European defence and security policy to face renewed geopolitical threats and challenges.

Elmar Brok MEP proclaimed that he wanted to continue the European construction as a federal system. “But I don't agree that regions should form a fourth or fifth legislative chamber of the Union”, he said. In his view, the institutional and political role of a second European chamber could be attributed to the Council. Reflecting the wish of President Markkula to redefine the subsidiarity principle application, he mentioned that this was ongoing in the UK with regards to relations to Scotland reflecting “a balance between subsidiarity and solidarity”.

Guy Verhofstadt MEP recalled that, “Further political integration is more a problem of national political elites who fear the sharing of national sovereignty and not the lack of support of European citizens”. He remarked that the fiscal capacity of the EU should be developed as well: “We need our own fiscal resources; we need a Treasury Commissioner as well”, he concluded. ■

### New Policy Group on Subsidiarity and Localism



Andrew Lewer MEP

The ECR Group in the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions have joined forces to establish a Policy Group on subsidiarity and localism. Launched at the CoR on 16 April in the presence of MEPs and local and regional politicians, the policy group met on 3 June to discuss the Commission's recently announced Better Regulation package. The policy group launched a subsidiarity watchdog procedure calling on local and regional authorities to make full use of the new territorial impact assessment process launched by the package and to report any concerns they have with EU legislation. “We must ensure that the day-to-day experience of local and regional mandate holders is taken into account by the Brussels Administra-

tion without making the consultation process a new piece of bureaucracy. For this reason, as ECR Group politicians in the EU, we are launching a local and regional watchdog procedure on EU legislation to ensure that the local impact of legislation is truly taken into account” said Andrew Lewer. Gordon Keymer, President of the ECR Group in the Committee of the Regions and Deputy-Chair of the policy group, said “as ECR local and regional elected politicians, we look forward to further contributing to the evaluation of EU legislations impact and will following this new procedure closely.”

Europe needs a new direction if it is to respect the rights of its Member States and fulfil the expectations of their citizens. We are pooling together the experience and knowledge of the ECR in this group with a particular focus on those politicians within it who have local and regional government experience so as to enable a wide discussion on relevant EU issues. My more personal motivation is that as a former English County Council Leader and as a Vice-President of the Local Government Association for England I want to ensure that the activities of MEPs appear as relevant and inclusive as possible for my colleagues who remain at the front line of political delivery, in local and regional government. The large attendance of MEPs and their teams at our launch event at the Committee of the Regions building indicates this is a desire many of them share.

A key motivation is based on the need for greater monitoring and reporting on the impact of EU legislation at local level. We will enable the ECR mandate holders to identify areas where the cost of implementing EU legislation outweighs what is considered as “the cost of non-Europe”. We want to anticipate and implement EU legal provisions on subsidiarity and proportionality, and facilitate the contribution of national parliaments (and beyond, to local government). The group shall develop its own “subsidiarity score board” indicating the political willingness to transfer legislative power back to the Member States when amending existing EU legislation and spending procedures.

The EU Treaty itself indicates that the principle of subsidiarity does not apply to the entirety of Union law: the Union's exclusive competences are exempt. The narrative of “Europe of Regions” and “subsidiarity” is intended to calm critics of EU centralisation. Like other such principles, it is praised more than practiced. What enthusiasts for all things EU need to realise is that work of this sort and a sceptical attitude towards some sort of federal European state is needed to save the EU from itself. The ECR is, in this respect, the best friend an EU that can retain all of its current members has. Subsidiarity is a key part of reshaping the EU into an entity that truly works for the citizens of

its Member States. We will explore the best practices of local alliances for the wellbeing of children and the family towards an European label “Family Friendly Region”. Another important issue is the role of local and regional authorities in the circular economy, where we will explore the compliance of binding targets with the principle of subsidiarity and localism. ■

## ECR Group Bureau meeting in Kruszwica, Poland



Adam Banaszak

The ECR Group Bureau is due to meet in Kruszwica, Poland on 20 July to discuss the role of public-private partnership in Smart Cities projects. The Smart Cities projects are part of the European Innovation Partnership on Smart Cities and Communities and fall under the umbrella of the EU's European Innovation Partnerships. These partnerships are a new approach to EU research and Innovation, which is challenge-driven, focusing on societal benefits and a rapid modernisation of the associated sectors and markets. In the areas of smart cities, the projects aim to bring together cities, industry and citizens to improve urban life through more sustainable integrated solutions

“The role of innovation is crucial to the sustainable development of our local and regional communities”, underlined Mr Adam Banaszak (ECR/PL). “I will be hosting my Group's bureau to explore the important role that the private sector play in helping drive forward sustainable development” said Mr Banaszak. The ECR Group Bureau holds annual meetings strategic meetings in different parts of Europe. This meeting is taking place in Poland following the 25 May electoral success of ECR MEP Andrzej Duda, in being successfully elected the new President of Poland. ■

## 11<sup>th</sup> Self-Government Forum in Kolobrzeg, Poland



Kolobrzeg

On 22-24 June 2015, a high level delegation of the European Committee of the Regions attended the 11th Self-Government Forum in Kolobrzeg, Poland. Alongside the conference, an external meeting of the Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX) was also held, chaired by François Decoster (FR/ALDE). Keynote speakers, among them Janusz Gromek, Mayor of Kolobrzeg and Olgierd Geblewicz, Marshal of the West Pomeranian Region, discussed recent developments in the European Neighbourhood Policy and the situation in Ukraine, as well as progress in the enlargement process. The conference also covered 25 years of decentralisation reforms in Poland, European financial instruments and new challenges in the financial perspective for the 2014-2020 period.

The role of the European Committee of the Regions in the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy was introduced by François Decoster, chairman of the CIVEX commission. He stressed the need for stable and prosperous Eastern Partnership countries. Regarding Ukraine, he said that “what we need today is further decentralisation reforms”. Echoing his statement, Emin Yeritsyan, Chairman of the Association for Municipalities of Armenia and Co-Chair of CORLEAP said that he welcomed cooperation with the European Committee of the Regions and experience sharing at the Conference. However, more results-oriented initiatives were needed.

Both Janusz Gromek, Mayor of Kolobrzeg and Olgierd Geblewicz, Marshal of the West Pomeranian Region expressed their support for Ukraine's economic, social and political reforms. Olgierd Geblewicz recalled that “Within the cooperation in the Committee of the Regions and the CIVEX committee our everyday experience in local and regional government should translate into valuable advice for the European Commission, the Council and Parliament. We must skilfully use the support instruments for Neighbourhood Policy implementation at the regional level and share the related good practices”. ■

## 6<sup>th</sup> EuroPcom will take place on 21-22 October 2015



The sixth annual EuroPcom, the European Conference on Public Communication, will be held in Brussels on 21 and 22 October 2015. It will bring together communication managers and senior experts from local, regional, national and European authorities, with over 1 000 colleagues spanning all the EU Member States expected to attend this networking event. Lectures, debates and interactive workshops will focus on major challenges in both EU and public communication. The conference will take place immediately after the annual meeting of the more than 500 Europe Direct Information Centres, making EuroPcom the key meeting place for all communicators bringing Europe closer to its people.

Jointly organised by the EU institutions, EuroPcom is the annual event on communicating in and on Europe. On Wednesday and Thursday morning, participants will be able to attend a series of workshops and thematic debates. The programme will also include interactive networking and conversation sessions on specific subjects. The plenary session on Wednesday afternoon, hosted by the European Parliament, will give the floor to top-level EU representatives and communication experts who will share their views on European citizenship and communication. It will also be an opportunity to present and discuss the results of a new Eurobarometer survey, mapping the opinion of 50 000 citizens in over 170 regions of the 28 EU Member States.

The annual EuroPcom conference is an initiative of the European Committee of the Regions, organised in partnership with the European Parliament, the Council of the EU, the European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee. The conference programme and registration form will be available in the second half of June. All updates will be published on the [www.cor.europa.eu/europcom](http://www.cor.europa.eu/europcom) ■



## EU regions and cities are going live on MOOC



Preparation of the MOOC project

A new learning resource has been designed for people eager to discover more about the important role and impact of EU cities and regions. The free and interactive MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) will feature around two hours a week of educational videos, fact sheets, infographics and weekly, web streamed live debates with a focus on EU and regional affairs, spanning an eight week period, starting on Monday October 19. Each week will have a specific theme and content will be provided from 50 politicians and experts from other EU institutions, agencies, European associations and academic institutions. Participants are also encouraged to exchange experiences and views via social media through the MOOC account @EU\_MOOC and course followers who complete 80% of the course will receive a certificate.

The MOOC has been developed in response to a survey to which 1000 people replied and showed an interest in learning more about: the EU institutions; the role of regions and cities; EU Cohesion Policy and Structural and Investment Funds; research and innovation, social, employment, education and youth policies; environment, natural resources, energy and sustainable development policies, free movement and migration; regions and the single market; and the EU budget, programmes and projects. More information: [www.cor.europa.eu/MOOC](http://www.cor.europa.eu/MOOC)

## OPEN DAYS 2015

The OPEN DAYS is an annual Brussels-based, four-day event during which officials from administrations in regions and cities, as well as experts and academics, can exchange good practices and know-how in the field of regional and urban development. It is an acknowledged platform for political communication on the development of EU Cohesion Policy, jointly organised by the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO).



### 13<sup>th</sup> European Week of Regions and Cities Brussels 12-15 October 2015

The OPEN DAYS is also the biggest European public event of its kind. Some 180 regions and cities, mainly grouped into thematic consortia ('regional partnerships'), several European Commission Directorates-General, CoR departments and other European institutions, associations and networks will organise sessions under this year's overall slogan "Europe's regions and cities: Partners for investment and growth", structured around three thematic strands:

- Modernising Europe: The regions in the Energy Union and the single digital market;
- Regions open for business: Development of small and medium-sized enterprises, innovation and job creation;
- Places and spaces: Urban and rural development, urban-rural integration.



European Committee of the Regions will welcome OPEN DAYS 2015 participants

As cross-cutting issues, the implementation of the 2014-2020 ESI Fund programmes and territorial cooperation will be included in each of these strands.

Attended by top-level EU representatives, the opening session on 12 October will analyse challenges and opportunities arising from the reformed Cohesion Policy, the EU's principal investment tool which will make up to EUR 351.8 billion available for investment in Europe's regions and cities. Participants can follow various workshops, debates and networking sessions in about 30 different venues in Brussels' EU quarter, the representations of the Member States and regions, the European Commission and CoR buildings, and for the first time in Brussels' Canal Area, where on 14 October a series of events will be organised under the heading "OPEN Urban DAY". The programme will also feature the Regio Stars Awards Ceremony, organised in tandem with the OPEN DAYS of-

ficial reception at Brussels' Centre for Fine Arts, the BOZAR, on 13 October.

Find out more and book your seats from 8 July on [www.opendays.europa.eu](http://www.opendays.europa.eu). Follow @EU\_Regional and @EU\_CoR for regular updates about the OPEN DAYS, and use the hashtag #euopendays on Twitter. ■

## Digital Assembly in Riga



Markku Markkula took part in the Digital Assembly held in Riga on 17 and 18 June, presenting the views regions' and cities' on digital innovation in Europe. President Markkula also presented a case study of concrete experiences developed in his district of Espoo, in Finland. "Achieving a true Digital Single Market is one of the pressing topics on the Commission's agenda at the moment to enable much needed growth in Europe and the CoR has been very active on this topic" said President Markkula, adding that: "Through our opinions and events we stress achieving tangible results through implementing smart specialisation strategies, open innovation and scaling up those results to benefit all cities and regions in Europe. Unless these measures are taken to the ground for a realistic assessment of skills and resources needed for societal digitalisation, we risk the deepening of the digital divide". Consequently he warmly welcomed the emphasis put by this year's Digital Assembly on digital skills' development.

This key challenge was highlighted also by EU Commissioner for digital economy and society, Günther Oettinger, who pointed out that: "There is a clear need for promoting digital skills at all levels, for re-skilling, and for lifelong learning across Europe and its regions. Given the dimension and urgency of the challenge, I believe we need a concerted effort to be able to progress more rapidly". President Markkula and Commissioner Oettinger also agreed on the need to support and coordinate national and regional initiatives on digitising the industry, in order to succeed in creating critical mass and attracting private investment. In keeping with this view they stressed the relevance of the CoR commitment in supporting regions and cities that want to pioneer the digitalisation of EU economies and society, also taking advantage of new opportunities such as the European Fund for Strategic Investment. ■



13<sup>th</sup> European Week of Regions and Cities  
**OPEN DAYS** Brussels  
12 - 15 October 2015



## Regions and cities ready for the OPEN DAYS 2015

Around 180 regions and cities from 30 countries are joining forces with the European Commission, the European Committee of the Regions and other partner institutions, networks and associations to participate at the OPEN DAYS 2015, taking place from 12-15 October 2015. Online registration of participants will open on 8 July.

[www.opendays.europa.eu](http://www.opendays.europa.eu)

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