

THE

ReppORTER

July 2018

Activity report of the EPP Group in the European Committee of the Regions



Reactions to the MFF

COP24

Austrian Presidency



European Committee
of the Regions

Foreword

by **President Schneider**

A lot has happened since we last met in May, not least our successful event in Warsaw alongside the EPP Political Assembly and a major debate on the future of Cohesion Policy in Sofia with our friends from the Bulgarian Presidency. We have also seen some promising conclusions from the June European Council on issues of key importance for local and regional authorities including migration, trade and the digital economy. Unsurprisingly, the proposals from the European Commission for the next EU 7 year budget still dominate many of our discussions on the future of the European Union and how local and regional authorities can represent our citizens, both at home and when we travel to Brussels. As co-rapporteur on the Common Provisions Regulation, which establishes the framework for most shared management Funds, I will be delving into the details of these proposals and can assure you that there will be many opportunities to discuss the topics that most concern you. As I mentioned during the last Bureau and Group meetings, there is still work to be done, but given the challenge of balancing this budget in view of new demands and one Member State less, I think we should work together in a positive manner to get a decision before the European Parliament elections in May. Another positive development is the increase of members taking up the opportunity to organise EPP local dialogues as part of our Grassroots Movement. If you have not yet done so, please do consider organising an exchange with people in your village, city or region and get in touch with the secretariat to see how we can support you.



Michael Schneider

President of the EPP-CoR Group

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael Schneider". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

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Members on the field

Arnoldas Abramavičius attended a breakfast discussion with UN Deputy Secretary-General, **Amina J. Mohammed**, on 5 June to prepare the SDGs platform and to help identify cities or regions willing to engage in the delivery of SDGs within their constituencies.

CITY LEVEL INITIATIVE WELCOMED AT CORLEAP

Learning that a new city-level initiative by the EU has already generated “outstanding” interest in the Eastern Partnership countries, local and regional leaders underlined their wish for a budget that provides adequate financial and administrative support for local-level democracy at a meeting of Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP) on 29 May.

HEALTHY LIFESYLES PROMOTED IN PILOS

Olive oil trees are part of emblematic picture of many Mediterranean regions’ landscape as well as their local rural culture, culinary traditions and heritage. Meeting in in Pilos on 24 May, members of the CoR NAT Commission discussed the challenges and prospects of the olive oil

sector as well as ways to promote healthy lifestyles based on the Mediterranean diet, upon the initiative of **Nikolaos Chiotakis**, member of Kifissia Municipal Council.



EER AWARD UPDATES



The European Entrepreneurial Region scheme identifies and rewards EU regions, which show an outstanding and innovative entrepreneurial policy strategy, irrespective of their size, wealth and

competences. The regions with the most credible, forward-thinking and promising vision plan are granted the label “European Entrepreneurial Region” (EER) for a specific year. As part of the evaluation of the 2017 EER winners, **Paul Lindquist** visited Extremadura on 22-23 May. The European Entrepreneurial Region 2019 Award ceremony is set to take place on 4 July.

SHARING COR WORK WITH ROYALTY



Queen Letizia of Spain visited the CoR’s stand at the European Development Days on 5 May to hear about the Nicosia Initiative and the efforts the CoR is making to support in Libya. She spoke at length with **Manuel Alonso Pleguezuelo** and **Jesús Gamallo Aller** to this affect.

EPP Grassroots engagement: highlights from recent EPP Local Dialogues

Following the successful launch of the EPP grassroots engagement in Sofia last March, EPP Local Dialogues are now spreading throughout the continent. The first discussions were held by the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) political party in the Netherlands and covered topics as diverse as sustainability in Friesland and regional development in Zeeland. On 28 June, **Olgierd Geblewicz** initiated a dialogue in Szczecin to look at local and European measures to combat hate speech, fake

news and propaganda. This was followed on 8 June by the first Romanian EPP local dialogue held in Harghita County focussed on the future of the EU’s rural development policy and hosted by **Csaba Borboly**. Just one day later, on 9 June, alongside the Kokoomus congress in Turku, talks focussed on plenty of subjects including Brexit and

its consequences, the future MFF, role of cities and the European Commission’s achievements.

Ireland’s transformation by EU membership was the topic for a further dialogue in Cork on 25 June, hosted by **Deirdre Forde** and **Deirdre Clune** MEP.



Strengthening regions and cities to deliver a secure and prosperous Europe to citizens



Strengthening regions and cities to deliver a secure and prosperous Europe to the citizens

Warsaw, 5th June 2018, 14.00-17.30
Palace of Culture and Science

#WarsawEPPCoR

@EPP_CoR



The EPP Group in the European Committee of the Regions hosted a high-level debate entitled “Strengthening Regions and Cities to Deliver a Secure and Prosperous Europe to Citizens” in the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw on 5 June, together with the European People’s Party, the Civic Platform and the Polish People’s Party. Against the backdrop of the recent long-term EU budget proposals, Michael Schneider, President of the EPP Group in the European Committee of the Regions, underlined “Europe needs stronger local democracy to succeed. By successfully delivering Structural funds and working with the institutions, we can rebuild trust in the European project. Cohesion is much more than just financing projects, it also serves as a platform for deepening the European integration and creation of European identity.”

The meeting was held alongside the EPP political assembly with the aim to demonstrate the EPP family’s support for the Civic Platform and the Polish People’s Party in view of the local and regional elections this autumn. “The European People’s Party has always worked tirelessly to build a strong European Union and deliver concrete solutions to our citizens’ concerns, demands and aspirations. We remain committed to continue doing so

together with our EPP local, regional and national politicians for a more secure and prosperous Europe” Joseph Daul, President of the EPP, underlined.

Jacek Protas, Member of the Polish Parliament and representative of the Civic Platform, stressed that the growth and improvement of citizens’ lives in Warsaw is thanks to financial support from the EU. “I believe that the effective use of EU funds would not be possible without a streamlined structure of

local government” he said. Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz, Leader of the Polish People’s Party, stressed that Europe starts in its cities and regions.

Other speakers included Marianne Thyssen, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Rafał Trzaskowski, EPP Vice-President, Yordanka Fandakova, Mayor of Sofia, and MEPs Esther de Lange, Janusz Lewandowski and Jan Olbrycht.



COP 24: making the Paris agreement a reality



“ Reaching an agreement in Paris was a historic moment to move from climate ambition towards climate action. We praise the good and tangible work that the Covenant of Mayors has been doing so far. Local and regional authorities are a guiding example of how to improve the quality of life of our citizens by managing the decarbonisation of the economy and the energy transition. Their proximity to citizens’ concerns makes them pivotal to echo their voices at the COP24. This is why I am delighted that we will select a number of front-running Mayors to accompany me to Katowice, and work hand-by-hand with Ministers and decision-makers to deliver a sustainable future for our citizens.

Arias Cañete,
European Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy

“ We need to ensure our economy is competitive and our cities and regions more sustainable, more attractive, and more healthy. Therefore we need a strong political leadership to move to a more climate friendly Europe, adequate resources in the next EU budget post-2020 and proper climate governance. Regional and local authorities are essential in the planning and implementing climate change mitigation and adaptation measures.

Cor Lamers,
Chairman of the CoR’s ENVE
Commission



The UN climate summits, otherwise known as COP (Conference of the Parties), are global conferences where the action for climate policy is negotiated. In December 2018, the COP 24 is taking place in Katowice in the South of Poland. This conference comes three years after the adoption of the Paris Agreement, which framed

the international action against climate change for the post-2020 period, including the formal recognition of a role for cities and regions in combating global warming. In Bonn last year, the CoR underlined that a well-functioning multi-level governance framework is crucial in climate action. Moreover, local and regional

leaders from around the world issued the Bonn-Fiji Commitment of Local and Regional Leaders to Deliver the Paris Agreement at all levels; a pledge that signals their commitment to bring forward a critical shift in global development.



“ Non-party-stakeholders and in particular cities and regions are instrumental to the implementation of the Paris Agreement. At COP 23 in Bonn, Germany, the Bonn Climate Summit of Local and Regional Leaders brought together more than 1.000 participants - for the first time as part of the official COP-agenda. Their Bonn-Fiji-Commitment is a powerful demonstration of initiative, dedication, action and multilevel-multistakeholder cooperation, acknowledged by the EU-Council in their evaluation document of COP 23. It is a living document, having led to real projects and new cooperations, like in the Frontline Cities and Islands Initiative bringing together waterfront cities and small islands towards resilience. In order to fuel a joint implementation of the Paris Agreement, cities and regions all over the world are hosting Talanoa-Dialogue events right now and adding their knowledge and resources to the global, international and national level. In Katowice, local and regional leaders will be present again. And they will build up on the cornerstones set by the Bonn-Fiji-Commitment to enter the next phase of multilevel climate governance.

Ashok Sridharan,
Mayor of Bonn and President of ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability

JULY PLENARY SESSION:



One of the most important tasks for the 24th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP24) will be to work out and adopt a package of decisions ensuring the full implementation of the Paris Agreement, in accordance with the decisions adopted in Paris (COP21) and in Marrakesh (CMA1.1). Local and regional authorities clearly have a role to play and their exact involvement

will be the subject for debate with **Miguel Arias Cañete**, Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy and **Ashok Alexander Sridharan**, Mayor of Bonn on the second day of the Plenary. As Austria assumes the Presidency of the Council of the EU for the third time from 1 July until 31 December 2018, **Karolina Edtstadler**, State Secretary for the Federal Ministry of the Interior, will address the Plenary on their priorities. Under the slogan 'A Europe that protects'

the Austrian Presidency has chosen to focus on security and the fight against illegal migration, securing prosperity and competitiveness through digitalisation, and stability in the European neighbourhood. **Dr. Reinhold Lopatka**, Chair of the EU affairs Committee, Austrian Parliament on the political priorities of the Austrian Presidency, Subsidiarity and the 2019 EU elections, will also address the EPP Group in its pre-Plenary meeting on 4 July.



EPP-LED OPINIONS ON THE AGENDA

Eastern Partnership deliverables for 2020: the contribution of local and regional authorities

CIVEX-VI/030

Rapporteur: **Sören Herbst** (DE/EPP),
Member of Magdeburg City Council



// *Thanks to the reform of local self-government in the Eastern Partnership countries, local and regional authorities have a decisive role to play in the successful implementation of the 20 deliverables for 2020.*

During the Eastern Partnership (EaP) Summit held in Brussels on 24 November 2017, 20 deliverables for 2020 were adopted as part of the declaration, which also highlights local and regional authorities as active promoters of the Partnership's objectives through their participation in the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP). The main aim of these deliverables is to strengthen the economy, governance, connectivity and the society to these countries. The draft opinion

focuses on strengthening institutions and good governance, boosting mobility and people-to-people contacts, economic development and market opportunities as well as some cross-cutting deliverables, which should be understood against the background of local government and decentralisation reform. The rapporteur therefore underlines that new democratic forces and leaders should be supported through targeted measures. Indeed, local and regional authorities operate in many of the abovementioned areas and CoR therefore considers it particularly important to promote exchanges between EU local and regional authorities and those in the EaP countries in the form of urban and regional partnerships, as well as between individual authorities within the EaP countries themselves.

Boosting Growth and Cohesion in EU Border Regions

COTER-VI/036

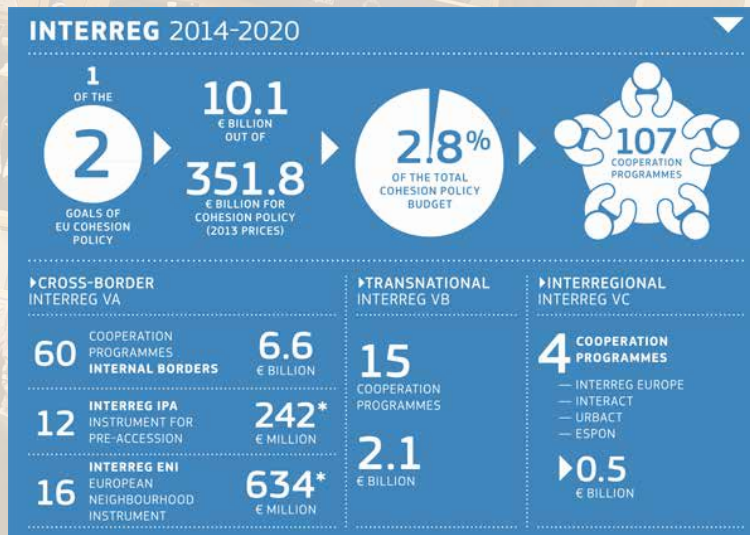
Rapporteur: **János Ádám Karácsony** (HU/EPP), Member of Tahitótfalu council



Supporting European Territorial Cooperation initiatives offer an extremely high European added value in terms of boosting economic growth and cohesion, as well as in building a better EU for its citizens.

European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), better known as Interreg, is one of the two goals of cohesion policy and provides a framework for the implementation of joint actions and policy exchanges between national, regional and local actors from different Member States. The benefits of ETC are not only the projects themselves but also the fact that a range of bodies at regional and local level including public authorities work together in common programmes and projects. This opinion underlines the fact that legal, administrative,

physical and cultural obstacles still need to be addressed in order to strengthen cooperation along EU border regions and in this respect, financial support for ETC initiatives remains vital. The EU's financial support to these initiatives should be significantly increased in the next MFF. It is therefore unacceptable that the current proposal is cutting amounts instead. This opinion includes a number of concrete and practical proposals for improvement. For example, cross-border impacts should be taken into account more systematically at decision-making level. At project level, EU support must ensure that initiatives to build mutual trust, which is the foundation of cross-border cooperation, are eligible for funding. Such initiatives include cultural and sports event as well as all other types of projects targeting citizens directly.



The Public procurement package

ECON-VI/030

Rapporteur: **Adrian Ovidiu Teban** (RO/EPP), Mayor of Cugir



The 2014 directives on public procurement have recently been transposed in many Member States and the authorities and economic players are still adjusting to them by means of training and advisory processes.

Public procurement is a recurrent territory-related obstacle to investment. The CoR has already indicated that public procurement rules represent a significant challenge to investment for cities and regions, in particular due to complexity or inefficiency in the public procurement framework and to the excessive length and uncertainty regarding legal procedures. Consequently, the opinion asks the Commission to carry out, within three years of transposition in any Member State, an in-depth assessment of how EU public procurement rules

have been transposed into national law and how they are implemented at local and regional level in order to facilitate SMEs' access to procurement procedures, reduce bureaucratic hurdles and increase the use of strategic procurement. It also underlines that strategic procurement, introduced by the 2014 reform, added a layer of complexity to procurement procedures and, therefore, procurement officers may need further training to avoid uncertainty as regards the legality of adding additional criteria to promote innovative or social and environmental objectives. Naturally, local and regional authorities fully embrace such objectives, but the rapporteur believes that any new EC initiative in the area of public procurement has to be assessed carefully in terms of avoiding administrative burden upon the awarding authorities.

Local and regional incentives to promote healthy and sustainable diets

NAT-VI/026

Rapporteur: **Nikolaos Chiotakis** (GR/EPP),
Member of Kifissia Municipal Council



“ *Local and regional authorities have an opportunity to serve as role models by selling and providing healthy, local and seasonal foodstuffs that ensure sustainability given they are often responsible for the public procurement in the food sector for public bodies.* ”

The opinion of the European Committee of the Regions regarding “local and regional incentives to promote healthy and sustainable diets” emphasises the importance of promoting healthy lifestyle, as well as sustainable diet patterns and sustainable production methods of food products in EU. Since local and regional authorities provide a link between all the stakeholders and at the same

time are situated closest to citizens, actions that highlight local and regional incentives to promote healthy and sustainable food choices are crucial. The aim of this opinion is to promote local and regional actions that boost sustainability by promoting short supply chains, planning effective food waste prevention schemes, conducting targeted public information campaigns to raise awareness, and additionally to promote healthier habits by introducing effective action plans on nutrition and physical activity. The rapporteur therefore calls upon local and regional authorities to coordinate by building on partnerships between all the relevant levels of government and stakeholders in this direction.

Agriculture and rural development Commissioner **Phil Hogan** said:

“ *Any chain is only as strong as its weakest link. An efficient and effective food supply chain is a fair one. Today's proposal is fundamentally about fairness – about giving voice to the voiceless - for those who, through no fault of their own, find themselves the victims of a weak bargaining position. Today's initiative to ban unfair trading practices is about strengthening the position of producers and SMEs in the food supply chain. The initiative is equally about providing strong and effective enforcement. We are looking to eliminate the “fear factor” in the food supply chain, through a confidential complaints procedure.* ”



Unfair trading practices in the food supply chain

NAT-VI/0

Rapporteur General: **Jacques Blanc** (FR/EPP),
Mayor of La Canourgue



“ *EU-level rules are needed to harmonise conditions for competition and ensure that European farmers and consumers enjoy conditions for fair selling and buying.* ”

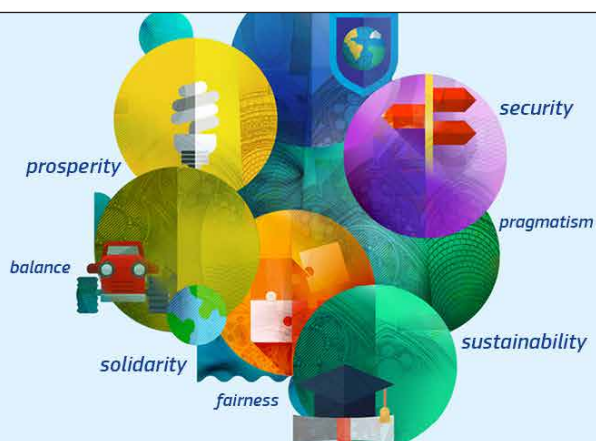
According to the rapporteur, an “unfair trading practice” should be defined as the action of subjecting or trying to subject a trading partner to obligations, which would create an imbalance between their rights and obligations. Within this context, the opinion seeks to ensure that mechanisms to safeguard farmers’ incomes are significantly strengthened in order to reduce the negative impact of the high volatility of agricultural product prices and preserve vibrant rural communities. Moreover and in view of the internationalisation of companies, particularly

in the agricultural sector, the rapporteur recommends that transactions involving suppliers/buyers based in third countries should also be included in the proposals to combat unfair trading practices. This would reduce the likelihood of SMEs buying outside the EU and better guarantee the protection of EU companies that sell to foreign buyers. He concludes by highlighting the following measures that should also be ensured alongside the directive: making contractualisation attractive for producers, by ensuring that contracts take into account agricultural production costs when setting prices; introducing additional measures on price transparency; tackling the over-concentration of the distribution, agri-food and agri-supply sectors and developing fairer international trade relations in agriculture, as advocated in the opinion on the post-2020 CAP.

EU BUDGET FOR THE FUTURE

EU BUDGET FOR THE FUTURE

#EUBudget



The European Commission proposed its “pragmatic, modern, long-term budget for the 2021-2027 period” on 2 May.

The proposal aims to be an honest response to today’s reality in which Europe is expected to play a greater role in providing security and stability in an unstable world, at a time when Brexit will leave a sizeable gap in the EU budget. Overall, this budget would represent €1.135 billion in commitments (expressed in 2018 prices) over the period from 2021 to 2027, equivalent to 1.11% of the EU27’s gross national income.

Investment priorities include areas such as research and innovation, young people, the digital economy, border management, security and defence. However, cuts have been proposed to the Common Agricultural Policy and Cohesion Policy. These policies will need to be modernised, according to the European Commission, to ensure they can still deliver with less.

Announcing the proposals, **Jean-Claude Juncker**, President of the European Commission said:

“The new budget is an opportunity to shape our future as a new, ambitious Union of 27 bound together by solidarity... we have put forward a pragmatic plan for how to do more with less. The economic wind in our sails gives us some breathing space but does not shelter us from having to make savings in some areas. We will ensure sound financial management through the first ever rule of law mechanism. This is what it means to act responsibly with our taxpayers’ money. The ball is now in the court of Parliament and Council. I strongly believe we should aim to have agreement before the European Parliament elections next year.”

This was complemented by **Günther H. Oettinger**, European Commissioner responsible for Budget and Human Resources, who said:

“This budget proposal is truly about EU added value. We invest

even more in areas where one single Member State cannot act alone or where it is more efficient to act together - be it research, migration, border control or defence. And we continue to finance traditional - but modernised - policies, such as Common Agricultural Policy and Cohesion Policy, because we all benefit from the high standard of our agricultural products and regions catching up economically.”

President **Michael Schneider** reacted to the proposals with a tweet:



Timeline for the 2021-2027 Budget

2 May 2018	Commissioners adopt EU budget for the future
2 May 2018	Budget proposals are presented to the European Parliament
29 May 2018 - 12 June 2018	European Commission’s legislative proposals for spending programmes
October 2018	Adoption of the CoR opinion on the MFF, rapporteur Nikola Dobrosravić
9 May 2019	EU leaders’ summit, Sibiu, Romania
23-26 May 2019	European elections

Less than a week later, EU local and regional leaders gathered in Sofia to express concern about the 10% cuts to cohesion policy as planned by the European Commission in its proposal for the EU budget 2021-2027. Together with the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU, the CoR members called for securing sufficient resources and improving rules in order to ensure that reducing disparities by involving local actors remains the key objective and function of the future European structural and investment funds.

“ *The proposal seems to be a positive starting point for negotiations. We fully support the decision to invest more in opportunities for youth, better control of our external border, increased cooperation in managing migration and making*

new common steps on security and defence. However, at the same time, we also hear the serious concerns from regions and cities with regards to the proposed cuts for cohesion and the common agricultural policy. The strengthening of conditionalities and centralisation, links to the European semester, structural reforms and rule of law as well as macro-economic imbalances are further issues that we will pay attention to. The CoR must make sure that the role of local and regional authorities are sufficiently recognised in EU governance, partnership and multi-level governance principles in the next MFF.

”

Nikola Dobroslavić,
rapporteur on the
Multiannual Financial
Framework package for
the years 2021-2027



Speaking at the conference, Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria, **Tomislav Donchev** said:

“ *The Bulgarian Presidency does not hesitate to ‘put the issues on the table’ and to provoke a frank and honest discussion about our common future. This is also valid about the debate on the future of the Cohesion Policy - a policy meant to provide answers to our problems, leading us to prosperity and shared values.*

”

Speaking more broadly on the proposals, **Markku Markkula**, 1st Vice-President of the CoR, said:

“ *We have seen several important increases in relation to the Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, Research and innovation as well as the fight against the climate change. I think I can say it loud and clear: our future is in our youth, in our researchers, in our sustainable environment and our budget should be here to support it.*

”

In other reactions, **Manfred Weber** MEP, Chairman of the EPP Group in the European Parliament, said:

“ *The money that is being used in the EU budget is money well-in-*

vested. It is about investing in the future, about showing solidarity, about shaping a good future for young Europeans. The Commission’s proposal of a measured but ambitious budget is a good starting point for the discussions. Yet, for us it is clear that new tasks require new resources. The EU makes a difference in so many aspects of peoples’ lives. We have more and more tasks ahead of us, for example on defence, strengthening Frontex, and building a brighter future for young Europeans.

”

Upcoming events

→ 10 July	CIVEX
→ 11 September	JCC FYROM (Joint Skopje)
→ 14 September	CoR Bureau
→ 20-21 September	CIVEX (Athens)
→ 24 September	CoRLEAP (Kiev)
→ 25 September	Ukraine Task Force (Kiev)
→ 27 September	ENVE
→ 1 October	NAT
→ 9-10 October	Plenary Session - European Week of Regions and Cities
→ 7-8 November	EPP Congress, Helsinki including EPP-CoR conference
→ 10 December	EPP Group meeting, Klosterneuburg, Austria

EPP cities joining forces to deliver sustainable solutions for citizens - EPP Congress Side Event

7 November 2018, 11:00 – 12:30, Helsinki

The Congress is the highest decision-making body of the European People's Party and it is composed of delegates from EPP member and associated member parties, member associations and groups. During the Helsinki Congress in November, the EPP has the intention to elect its Spitzenkandidat – or lead candidate to become President of the European Commission – for the 2019 European elections. It is alongside this milestone that the EPP-CoR Group will hold a side event to underline the value of EPP cities working together and how all levels of government can collaborate in the fight against climate change.

Ongoing opinions

CIVEX

Reflecting on Europe: the voice of regional and local authorities to rebuild trust in the European Union -

Markku Markkula
(with **Karl-Heinz Lambertz/PES**)
Adoption foreseen October 2018

COTER

The Multiannual Financial Framework package for the years 2021-2027 - **Nikola Dobroslavić**
Adoption foreseen October 2018

Road Safety and Automated mobility - **Jozsef Ribányi**
Adoption foreseen March/April 2019

Common Provisions Regulation - **Michael Schneider**
(with **Catusca Marini/PES**)
Adoption foreseen Jan/Feb 2019

ECON

Fair Taxation Package - **Paul Lindquist**
Adoption foreseen October 2018

Regulation establishing the InvestEU programme - **Konstantinos Agorastos**
Adoption foreseen December 2018

Single market package – **Deirdre Forde**
Adoption foreseen December 2018

ENVE

Towards an 8th Environment Action Plan – **Cor Lamers**
Adoption foreseen December 2018

Directive on single-use plastics – **Sipa Hertell**
Adoption foreseen October 2018

NAT

New deal for Consumers – **Samuel Azzopardi**
Adoption foreseen December 2018

Enabling the digital transformation of health and care in the Digital Single Market; empowering citizens and building a healthier society – **Fernando López Miras**
Adoption foreseen January 2019

SEDEC

'Mainstreaming sport into the EU agenda post-2020' – **Roberto Pella**
Adoption foreseen October 2018

Digital Education Action Plan - **Domenico Gambacorta**
Adoption foreseen October 2018

Creative Europe and a new European Agenda for Culture - **Adam Karacsony**
Adoption foreseen December 2018

Digital Europe programme - **Markku Markkula**
Adoption foreseen December 2018

Artificial Intelligence for Europe - **Jan Trei**
Adoption foreseen February 2019

A renewed European Agenda for Research and Innovation - **Birgitta Sacrédeus**
Adoption foreseen February 2019

A Europe that protects

An interview with **Gernot Blümel**, Federal Minister within the Federal Chancellery for the EU, Arts, Culture and Media.

1 How will you be engaging with local and regional authorities to achieve the Austrian Presidency's objectives?

Our presidency comes at an important moment for the European Union. The migration crisis and the Brexit referendum have kicked off a discussion about the future of the EU where concrete steps will have to be decided soon. In our view, the European Union will become stronger by strengthening the subsidiarity principle; that means that the EU should provide solutions on big issues such as the protection of external EU Borders, security and trade. At the same time other issues should be left to be regulated on national, regional and local level. A close exchange with local and regional authorities is therefore crucial to achieve that objective.

2 Subsidiarity has been identified as a key priority for the future of Europe. What are your thoughts on this?

Subsidiarity is seen as a general - horizontal approach, in order to create more proximity to citizens and restore confidence in the EU. It must therefore be at the center of our debate on the future of Europe! We welcome that the Task Force on Subsidiarity and Proportionality was set up and we look forward to the presentation of its findings in July. It will be important to see concrete

results and strengthen the subsidiarity principle as soon as possible. To that end we will also host a conference on Subsidiarity in November. This conference will be co-hosted by the government of Vorarlberg, since we believe that regional and local authorities play a key role in the implementation of this principle.

3 The Austrian Presidency slogan "A Europe that protects" sends a clear message to EU citizens one year ahead of the European Parliament elections: what other steps will you be taking during the Presidency to raise awareness of the elections and ensure voter turnout?

The low voter turnout is a result of low approval ratings. If we manage to strengthen the European Union, especially by providing answers to the big issues, approval ratings will go up again. The Presidency also provides a good opportunity for a discussion with the citizens on how to improve the EU. If citizens feel that the EU is close to them and close to their wishes and needs, they will also go out and vote in the elections. I believe that that was also the reason for our successful national elections in Austria. Sebastian Kurz showed that he understood what the problems were and was able to credibly provide the right solutions.



4 What are your thoughts on the Grassroots Engagement in view of the 2019 European elections? Austria's culture of subsidiarity is strongly rooted on the national, regional and local levels, in communities and civil society. We therefore welcome all European initiatives that encourage local responsibility and commitment, and thus also help making Europe bigger on big things while reducing over-regulation and bureaucratic burden. Austria's EU Presidency will strongly focus on the added value of the subsidiarity principle for shaping a Europe that protects and delivers. The grassroots movement launched by the EPP Group in the CoR will certainly contribute to that, and we look forward to its high level Summit that will take place in the leading region of Lower Austria later this year with a broad involvement of local, regional, national and European stakeholders.

Secretary General: **Heinz-Peter Knapp**
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July 2018