



# ECR

EUROPEAN CONSERVATIVES  
& REFORMISTS GROUP

COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

# ECR News

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## Pavel Branda's opinion on cross-border public services adopted in plenary

During the February plenary session, the members of the European Committee of the Regions adopted Pavel Branda's opinion on cross-border public services by an overwhelming majority. With close to one-third of EU citizens living and working in Europe's border regions, they often face specific challenges, whether it is finding a job, accessing healthcare and other public services. ECR Member and Deputy Mayor of Rádlo in the Czech Republic, Mr Branda, highlights in the opinion the need for EU-wide rules, permanent cross-border structures as well as funding to make these cross-border services more widespread.



ECR Member Pavel Branda

## ECR CoR Study Days focus on smart specialisation and EU budget



ECR Study Days

The second edition of ECR CoR Study Days brought together local and regional leaders from eleven EU Member States, as well as other leading thinkers from academia, government and EU institutions. The focus of this edition's Study Days, held on February 19th and hosted by Podkarpackie region in Poland, was on smart specialisation and new trends in the EU budget 2021-2027.

## Marco Marsilio calls for an EU agency dedicated to social cohesion

During a debate with the Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, Elisa Ferreira, ECR Vice-President Marco Marsilio called for the creation of a European agency dedicated to social cohesion. For the President of the Abruzzo region, the creation of such an agency would enable emergencies to be dealt with more quickly and without all the bureaucracy. "We should learn from our experience with the current COVID-19 pandemic", he urged.



ECR Vice-President Marco Marsilio



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### European local and regional authorities adopt Pavel Branda's opinion on cross-border public services



ECR Member Pavel Branda

In the opinion, the ECR member highlights the advantages of providing public services across borders and urges for a "stronger legal framework", and "permanent structures such as cross-border contact points as well as financial support through the REACT-EU initiative".

One-third of EU citizens live or work in border regions where access to public

**Better access to public services for citizens living in EU border regions is the main focus of the opinion prepared by Pavel Branda, Deputy Mayor of Rádlo, which was adopted by an overwhelming majority by the members of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) during their February plenary session.**

services, such as transport, education or health care is often limited compared to central or capital regions. This is especially true for sparsely populated areas with ageing populations. Providing public services across borders would not only increase the quality of life of citizens on each side, but also make public services more cost-efficient.

The opinion emphasizes that a stronger legal framework within the EU is required to allow for the efficient establishment and management of cross border public services. It also calls on Member States to "reassess their own legal frameworks regarding their impact on border regions", as the current frameworks often impose

overwhelming administrative burdens and costs, which cause many local and regional authorities to abandon their plans.

Mr Branda recommends that Member States allocate part of their resources within the REACT-EU initiative to cross-border cooperation programmes, thus enabling the efficient restart and strengthening of cross-border cooperation after the COVID-19 crisis. He further suggests establishing stable, permanent, cross-administration national cross-border contact points where necessary, which could help with the systematic removal of border obstacles, and notes that a "minimum level of cross-border cooperation must be maintained even in times of crisis".

### ECR President appointed CoR spokesperson on regional airports

**ECR President Władysław Ortyl has been appointed rapporteur on an upcoming own initiative opinion on "the future of regional airports – challenges and opportunities" during a Bureau meeting of the CoR on 7 December 2020.**

**Mr Ortyl, President of the Podkarpackie region in Poland, will draw up the CoR's opinion on the difficult situation faced by regional airports as a result of COVID-19 and will illustrate the current situation with specific examples from different Member States. In particular, the position paper will focus on the investment needs of regional airports, with particular consideration of safety and security issues as well as economic and environmental standards.**

Marshal Ortyl believes that "the potential of regional airports goes just as far as the implementation of the Green Deal especially by creating interconnections with rail and

building multimodal hubs" and considers that Member States should be called on to ensure that support for regional airports is included in the national recovery and resilience plans.

The topic of regional airports also ties in with the priorities of the CoR for 2020-2025 as territorial cohesion has been recognised as a core value. Regional airports are a strategic factor for cohesive development in regions and Mr Ortyl expressed that "without strong regional airports, it is impossible to boost tourism and develop the economy of peripheral regions".

The ECR President would like to see a new tailor-made approach for regional airports considering their importance: "local and



Rzeszów-Jasionka airport. Fot. Michał Mielniczuk, UMWP



ECR President Władysław Ortyl



regional airports play a crucial role in connectivity of many regions, in particular peripheral regions and outermost regions. They contribute to the territorial and social cohesion of the EU”.

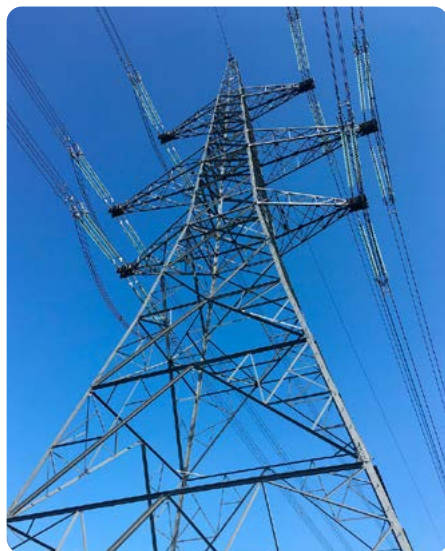
The opinion could not be more timely - the aviation market has undergone major

changes since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and many regional airports have been close to bankruptcy. The losses at airports could amount to as much as USD 100 billion. The combined impact – direct, indirect and knock-on effects – on regional economies is estimated at 1.4-2.5% of their GDP.

Adoption in the COTER Commission in April will be followed by adoption in plenary in July. It is the second opinion from an ECR CoR Group President on the topic of regional airports. The first one was prepared in 2004 by Cllr Gordon Keymer CBE FCA, former leader of Tandridge District Council in the UK and former ECR President.

## Mario Guarente appointed CoR rapporteur on critical infrastructure

ECR Member Mario Guarente has been appointed CoR rapporteur on “critical infrastructure” during the Natural Resources (NAT) Commission meeting on 29 January.



Mr Guarente, Mayor of Potenza in Italy, will draw up the CoR’s opinion on expanding the scope of the 2008 European Critical Infrastructure directive. In 2019 an evaluation of the Directive 2008/114/EC on the identifica-

tion and designation of European critical infrastructures (ECIs) concluded that the directive is only of partial relevance today due to a very different security landscape as well as the directive having a limited scope (covering only transport and energy sectors).

Mayor Guarente underlined the honour for him to be a CoR rapporteur on this issue right now, saying: “it is imperative that critical infrastructures are adequately protected against a wide spectrum of threats, be it natural or man-made, unintentional or with malicious intent. Critical infrastructures must be resilient wherever and whenever disruptions appear”.

The objectives of the European Commission’s proposal are to ensure greater coherence of EU critical infrastructure protection approach, to help Member States achieve resilience of national infrastructures, and

to improve information exchange and co-operation. The proposed Critical Entities Resilience (CER) directive would cover ten sectors: energy, transport, banking, financial market infrastructures, health, drinking water, wastewater, digital infrastructure, public administration and space.

There will be an exchange of views on Mr Guarente’s opinion in March in the NAT Commission followed by adoption in May and adoption in plenary in October.



ECR Member Mario Guarente

## REFORMING THE EU

### Władysław Ortyl on the priorities of the Portuguese Presidency

The priorities of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU was the main topic discussed during the last day of the 142nd plenary session of the CoR. Marshal of the Podkarpackie region, Władysław Ortyl, underlined which issues in his view should require greatest attention from the EU in the challenging pandemic times.

Ana Zacarias, Secretary of State for European Affairs for the Republic of Portugal was the guest for the debate on the priorities of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU. Mr Ortyl actively took part in the debate on behalf of the ECR Group, referring to sev-

eral issues that the Group felt required particular emphasis during the current presidency: protection of health, economic recovery, the European Emissions Trading System, illegal immigration and freedom of expression.

“The issue the Portuguese Presidency should

address most urgently is to protect the health of Europeans. A global vaccine race is taking place before our eyes. Looking at the number of people who have been vaccinated, the EU is lagging behind countries such as Israel, the United Kingdom and Iceland. The European



Commission has paid hundreds of millions of euro in advances, but pharmaceutical companies are not meeting their commitments. There have also been worrying reports that companies are sending vaccines outside the EU," he said. "The current situation is unacceptable. New legal arrangements are urgently needed for export controls and forcing pharmaceutical companies to supply the agreed doses of vaccines."

"The economic recovery of European countries that should take place through the Recovery Fund does not reflect real market needs", Mr Ortyl noted.



"The second priority of the Portuguese Presidency should be economic recovery. We are happy with the strong EU budget and the Recovery Fund, but we are worried about the rigidity of spending. 60% of the Fund's resources must be allocated to predefined objectives – primarily those related to the environment and digitalisation. The extent to which such a spending structure will contribute to the economic rebound is open to debate," said Mr Ortyl, adding that "the Recovery Fund was supposed to be easy and quick to use, but we can already see that it will be difficult and time-consuming to implement".

Another element is emissions trading, which Mr Ortyl believes needs to be revised. The European emissions pricing system has gotten out of control, which has a negative impact on the competitiveness of European industry."

Illegal immigration was another issue raised by Mr Ortyl: "The fight against illegal immigration should be stepped up. This problem has not disappeared. The EU should therefore be equipped with instruments to put pressure on



ECR President Władysław Ortyl

third countries that are not cooperating in the field of migration."

The Marshal argued that the right to freedom of expression needed to be protected: "We must protect the right to freedom of expression. This topic has been overlooked in the priorities of the current presidency. We cannot allow freedom of expression to be arbitrarily restricted by technological giants. This is a threat to all politicians, including local and regional politicians," Marshal Władysław Ortyl said.

The debate on the priorities of the Portuguese Presidency took place during the CoR February plenary.

## Matteo Bianchi: Give the CoR more weight in the European decision-making process

ECR Member Matteo Bianchi highlighted what he sees should be the main focus of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU during a debate with the Secretary of State for European Affairs of Portugal, Ana Zacarias. Mr Bianchi opened the floor by saying he is pleased "to note that the Portuguese Presidency wants the Conference on the Future of Europe to start as soon as possible".

For him, it is essential that the Conference leads to a "revision of the Treaties" to lay the foundations for a "new Europe".

Mr Bianchi, Member of Morazzone Municipal Council and Member of the Italian Parliament, continued to say that this revision must include an "awareness that Europe cannot exist without its local and regional authorities". In this context, he added that the institutional role of the CoR should be

reviewed and given more "weight in the European decision-making process".

The ECR Member concluded by calling for a "pragmatic leadership" at European level – the pandemic has shown that "ideological leadership" no longer has a place. He reiterated the necessity for the EU to boost its role on the international scene, and in doing so the European position should be "uncompromising about its reference val-

ues and be easily recognisable".



ECR Member Matteo Bianchi

## High time for burden reduction at EU level

ECR First Vice-President Mr Rob Jonkman urged European Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič to show people, businesses, and local authorities, that the EU is capable of reducing red tape and unnecessary bureaucracy during a debate on strategic foresight and the European Commission's Work Programme 2021. Mr Jonkman highlighted that "people, businesses, but also local and regional authorities, must see that the EU is capable of not only adding regulations, but also relieving them from administrative burdens".

Mr Jonkman, an Alderman of the Opsterland municipality in the Netherlands, first addressed Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič,

responsible for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight, on the issue of the gravity of economic repercussions caused by the

COVID-19 pandemic. He described the arrival of the virus on European doorsteps as a "ruthless appearance" which "in its path



of destruction has caused one of the greatest economic fallout the world has ever experienced”.



ECR First Vice-President Rob Jonkman

At the same time, climate change was also acknowledged by Mr Jonkman as an “undeniable threat” and said that something needs to be done to address these issues. However, when you line the two of them up together, which should take precedence? He put that question to Mr Šefčovič adding that “revenue losses of EU companies are estimated in the range of 13-24% of EU GDP”.

So, what is it? “Ensuring a swift recovery from the pandemic that has inflicted hardship in every single EU region, or pushing through the costly climate laws that take centre stage in the Commission’s Work Programme 2021?”

Mr Jonkman then evoked the topic of better regulation underlining that he is very much

“looking forward to the European Commission communication on this issue expected to be adopted in mid-December”. For him, it is crucial that the EU cuts back on regulations and red tape and launches the ‘one-in, one-out’ approach. Mr Jonkman referred to the ECR political group who he says “has been calling for the ‘one-in, one-out’ approach for many years” and now “we feel that these calls have finally been listened to”.

However, he concluded his intervention by emphasising that “to make this a reality, the “one in one out” principle will need to be applied coherently in all policy domains and for all EU legislation”.

The debate took place as part of the CoR’s December plenary.

## ECR Vice-President Marsilio calls for creation of European Agency on Social Cohesion

Europe has been confronted with many emergencies but the “COVID-19 pandemic is probably the most striking” as it has put a “severe” strain on healthcare facilities in Europe, highlighted Marco Marsilio in a debate with the Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, Elisa Ferreira.

With the pandemic leading to the loss of thousands of jobs and the closure of many economic activities, “restarting will not be easy” he emphasized, and this mainly due to “economic assistance not always arriving on time”. In this regard, Mr Marsilio, President of the Abruzzo Region, called on Commissioner Ferreira to envisage the “creation of an ad hoc European Agency on Social Cohesion”.

On the assumption that our territory is vulnerable to an increasing number of disasters, he added that “the Agency should be provided with adequate funding to continuously monitor the state of health (in the broadest sense) of all European countries”, and that in any

emergency could act quickly and concretely “by cutting red tape”. For the ECR Vice-President, an EU agency dedicated to social cohesion would also mean that Europe would be closer to our most “vulnerable” areas, which would ultimately “facilitate the role of the regions” who act as a “bridge” between the institutions.

He concluded his intervention by saying that the recovery must be based on social, economic and territorial cohesion, and “involve local authorities in drawing up recovery plans through structured cooperation with the Member States”.



ECR Vice-President Marco Marsilio

The debate took place as part of the February plenary of the CoR.

## Let’s safeguard the most important right, the right not to migrate

During a plenary session debate on the New Migration and Asylum Pact with the European Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ms Ylva Johansson, ECR Member Massimiliano Fedriga, delivered some key message on ECR’s immigration policies.

Mr Fedriga, who serves as President of the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, outlined ECR’s clearly defined priorities on the issue including the need to “protect EU’s external border, putting an end to illegal immigration and fighting human trafficking”.

He expressed disappointment at the false hope embedded in the title of the proposal of the “New Pact for Asylum and Migration”, further explaining that it led to believe “that the Commission had finally received the mes-

sage of having to make the necessary distinctions between refugees and illegal economic migrants.” We thought that “perhaps Europe was finally adopting realism and common sense in terms of immigration” and had un-

derstood the clear message of the “need to start working on blocking departures, rather than trying to manage arrivals”.



Mr Fedriga continued to address Commissioner Johansson by saying that unfortunately this was not the case. In the “new” pact we find the same proposals as before but this time “presented in another guise”. We still see quotas for the relocation of migrants this time dressed up as a request for “mandatory solidarity between Member States”.

Mr Fedriga gave the example of his own country, Italy – a frontline Member State struggling to cope with the migration crisis and the inevitable unprecedented pressure



ECR Member Massimiliano Fedriga

attached to it: “we have the impression that the EU is not helping us, only burdening us with new requirements”. Specifically, in his region, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Mr Fedriga referred to the constant arrivals of illegal immigrants who, before reaching his region, pass through other European countries. “If we fail to stop these arrivals, we will end up abdicating our role and not being able to guarantee the safety of our citizens.”

He feels that his region is “constantly experiencing the impact of wrong choices in terms of European migration policies”. The fact that it’s a border region exposes it to irregular immigrant arrivals, in particular those from the Balkan Route. However, he highlighted the positive ad-hoc agreements convened with Slovenia, which have enabled them to manage immigration and facilitate returns.

Mr Fedriga underlined the need for investment in third countries to ensure a future in which economic development could potentially discourage and dissuade those willing to undertake dangerous journeys in search of a better future on our continent, but ultimately falling into the hands of traf-

fickers and organised crime. He added that “although mentioned in the proposals, there is no real change of direction as regards the security of the EU’s external borders and co-operation with third countries of origin and transit”.

Another issue at stake he highlighted are those NGOs, whose only interest is encouraging the indiscriminate entry of illegal immigrants into Europe. “We should implement sanctions for those third countries that do not accept returns and stop financing those NGOs that go against Member States by encouraging illegal immigration”.

He urged and appealed to the Commissioner to rethink the measures needed to guard the borders and to control irregular immigration. Mr Fedriga concluded the debate saying “instead of encouraging irregular migrants the EU should help people in third countries to safeguard the most important right, the right not to migrate”.

The debate on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum with Commissioner Johansson took place in the framework of the European Committee of the Regions December plenary.

## The European Commission has turned its back on indigenous minorities

**ECR Member Raymund Kovács highlighted that with its decision not to introduce legislation to protect national minorities under the Minority SafePack initiative, the European Commission had effectively “turned its back on indigenous minorities”.**

The European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI) has been serving the purpose of closing the gap between citizens and the EU – “an opportunity for citizens to directly shape the future of the EU”. However, for Mr Kovács, who is also Member of the Local Government of District 16 of Budapest, the ECIs “cannot be deemed a success story”.

During the CoR debate, he urged for the ECI to be “more simple and effective”. Mr Kovács continued to say that 76 initiatives had been registered, but the required signatures were collected in only six cases, and the European Commission had given a partially favourable answer on only two occasions.

The Minority Safe Pack Initiative affects 50 million citizens of the EU belonging to national and linguistic minorities. Its aim is to protect the language rights of indigenous national minorities and provide financial support to re-

gions inhabited by these groups, and to preserve the linguistic diversity of the EU.

With its decision, the European Commission not only turned its back on the indigenous minorities, but also the citizens who supported the initiative, the European Parliament that adopted a resolution by a large majority, and the supportive national and regional parliaments. Mr Kovács claimed that such decision “disregards the request of more than one million citizens”.

Mr Kovács concluded his intervention by asking the Vice-President of the European Parliament, Mr Pedro Silveira, to closely follow the initiative entitled “Cohesion Policy for regional equalities and for sustainability of regional cultures”, which may succeed in gathering the required amount of signatures. He called on the MEP to “do the most we can to show European

citizens that their views are being taken into account and that the EU is ready to reduce the shortcomings currently present in the functioning of democracy”.

The debate took place in the framework of the CoR February plenary.



ECR Member Raymund Kovács



## Łukasz Smółka proposes creation of programme to finance European sports events

**“In 2000, Kraków - the capital of Małopolska - was the European Capital of Culture, which really contributed to the development of this part of our region. That is why I am pleased with the planned increased budget for the Creative Europe programme”, said ECR Member Łukasz Smółka, who also called for creation of an EU programme to finance European sports events.**

During a debate with Commissioner Gabriel on the recovery of the cultural and creative sectors, Mr Smółka, Vice-Marshall of the Małopolskie Region, also announced that his region would host the European Games in 2023. In this regard, he urged the Commissioner “to consider the possibility of creating a programme dedicated to European sports events”. For the Vice-Marshall it would be an “opportunity to comple-

ment post-COVID activities” launched at the EU level in the area of specific support for the sporting activities of Małopolskie’s inhabitants.

“So far, no instruments have been developed to enable direct financing of sports events of this scale - hence my appeal to the European Commission”, he concluded.

The debate took place during the February plenary of the CoR.



ECR Member Łukasz Smółka

## INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

### The UK may be leaving the European Union but it is not leaving Europe

**This was the resounding statement made by ECR Vice-President Mr Juraj Droba and the sentiment echoed by many others during a debate on the EU-UK Agreement and territorial consequences of Brexit with London Mayor, Mr Sadiq Khan.**

Mr Droba, President of the Bratislava Region, took the floor declaring that “inevitable change is imminent”. The end of December will bear witness to the end of the transition period, which Mr Droba emphasised means that “the UK and the EU will no longer do business as usual”.

He continued to say that regardless of the outcome of the Brexit negotiations, we must remain positive as “Brexit will create new ways of trading in goods and services, new cross-border mobility, and new exchanges”. Mr Droba highlighted the importance of continuing to get along with the UK “as it will

become an important and strategic international partner for us”.

However, one of the most crucial aspects for Mr Droba is support to local and regional authorities that will be most affected by Brexit. In this regard, he very much welcomed the announcement of a ‘Brexit Adjustment Reserve’ amounting to EUR 5 billion in support for those countries and sectors most affected by Brexit, as part of the July’s proposal for the new multiannual financial framework 2021-2027.

The ECR Vice-President provided context for the debate when he gave the example of his home country, Slovakia, where British investments have covered sectors producing rubber and plastic products, metal products and motor vehicles. So what would a no-deal Brexit mean for Slovakia?

Quite solemnly, he explained that it “would disrupt and hit our industry hard, translating to a loss of jobs and investment capacity in addition to the dire consequences on bilateral trading”. In reality and in terms of trade im-



ECR Vice-President Juraj Droba

pacts, Slovak exports to the UK might be cut by some 60%, which would amount to EUR 4.5 billion a year.

Mr Droba concluded by saying that cooperation with the UK, in particular at regional level, must continue. “There are many opportunities for us to tackle problems together. Continued dialogue and exchange can help us to define joint projects that could be developed between local and regional authorities after Brexit.”





## Brexit Trade Deal fails to make any reference to local government

The ECR Group in the European Committee of the Regions “very much welcomes the new EU-UK post-Brexit trade deal”, which Pavel Branda, ECR Member, described as “the most comprehensive one that the EU has with any third country”. Continued cooperation with the UK on many essential areas of common interest such as “cross-border crime and terrorism” is very promising, he highlighted.

However, for the Deputy Mayor of the municipality of Rádlo in the Czech Republic, he expressed his disappointment that “although there is a reference to continuing dialogue between governments of the EU and UK and civil society in the agreement, there is barely, if any at all, reference to local government”.

During the debate with Clara Martinez Alberola, Deputy Head of Task Force for Relations with the United Kingdom, Mr Branda called on the European Commission to include in the Agreement a provision in

its article 7 “ensuring that not only civil society, but also local and regional authorities must be consulted in the process of its implementation”.

He concluded by referring to the Contact Group that was established between the European Committee of the Regions and the United Kingdom in which local associations and devolved administrations from the UK and members of the CoR take part. Mr Branda urged for this body to be “recognised by the European Commission and the UK Government”.



ECR Member Pavel Branda

The debate took place on 2 February as part of the CoR’s Bureau meeting in the framework of the February plenary session .

## Development of a new macroregional strategy mechanism only way forward

One of the topics discussed at the 141st plenary session was the macro-regional strategy for the Carpathian region. ECR President Marshal Władysław Ortyl spoke on the subject, mentioning actions taken to date to frame this planned fifth EU macro-regional strategy, which – if created – would be the second such strategy for a mountainous region. Putting in place a fifth macro-regional strategy would mean additional funding for all countries in the Carpathians, both EU and non-EU such as Ukraine, Serbia and Moldova.

Mr Ortyl (Marshal of Podkarpackie region in Poland) talked about the region’s particular economic characteristics, which “relies primarily on tourism, handicrafts and organic food production”, and argued that the only way forward was the development of a macro-regional strategy mechanism enabling real multilevel governance, from local authorities to the European Commission.

The ECR President drew attention to the need of the region to open up to digital technologies claiming that they can “improve public service provision, facilitate interpersonal communication, increase public involvement in new and diverse ways, enhance transparency, inclusion, accountability and responsiveness within the decision-making process, while at the same time improving local governance.”

In addition to a digital revolution, the need and importance of promoting cultural diversity was also highlighted by Mr Ortyl: “We must promote cultural diversity within our local, regional, national and European identities, as well as the different tradi-

tions that make up our European cultural heritage.”

The Marshal also talked about the challenges of implementing the main environmental priorities of the European Green Deal: “One huge challenge is ensuring that the role of the local and regional level in the Carpathians is adequately considered when drawing up and implementing the main environmental priorities of the European Green Deal, above all in relation to biodiversity and reducing pollutant emissions. It is also critically important when framing environmental and climate policies to think about how they can be implemented in practice in different types of communities and about the particular characteristics of the macro-region.”

Mr Ortyl described a macro-regional strategy as help “to level out the living standards of people living in neighbouring regions”. In particular, for the Carpathian region, he declared “extra protection and support are needed, including for the traditional pastoral farming long established in the Car-

pathians, which is gravely threatened by the diminishing number of people in the profession and emigration of the younger generations.”

An EU macro-regional strategy is a policy framework which allows countries located in the same region to jointly tackle and find solutions to problems or to better use the potential they have in common. The Carpathians cover a larger landmass than the Alps, stretching over 190 000 square kilometres from the Austrian-Czech border in the west to the Romanian-Serbian border in the south-east, passing through Czechia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine, with lower hills in Hungary.



Bieszczady mountains



## Don't write off nuclear energy

On the first day of the December plenary session of the CoR, ECR Vice-President Oldřich Vlasák addressed the German Minister of the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Svenja Schulze. Mr Vlasák spoke on the benefits of nuclear energy, particularly in the Czech Republic, where it has been instrumental in lowering carbon emissions in the past three decades.

Mr Vlasák, Councillor in the city of Hradec Králové, acknowledged the importance of embracing clean energy sources that will not raise energy costs for citizens. It is for this reason that he adamantly defended nuclear energy. He described how historically speaking the Czech Republic was very dependent on energy from coal and that despite energy consumption going up in the Czech Republic in the past few decades, overall emissions have been on the decline due to his country's increased reliance on nuclear energy.



Dukovany Nuclear Power Plant, Czechia

The ECR Vice-President also discussed the macro-level and underlined how various European countries including Sweden, Slovakia and France have been able to lower their emissions by increasing their investments in nuclear energy. Mr Vlasák was rather critical about the nuclear phase-out in Germany, pointing out that this actually increased emissions because wind, solar and other green technologies often need to be backed up with generators powered by fossil fuels.

Mr Vlasák concluded his speech by addressing EU policy in a broad sense, saying: "In the light of this (nuclear power's efficiency) I am surprised that the EU seems skeptical towards nuclear energy. The European Commission did not even mention nuclear among low-carbon electricity sources in its hydrogen strategy from July this year."

For the ECR Vice-President, we must realise that "technological progress is advancing but without stable sources of energy – we

cannot guarantee enough energy at all". He also added that it is important to continuously support "research on the safety of nuclear power stations as well as nuclear waste disposal".

While Mr Vlasák acknowledges nuclear energy is not the sole solution to climate change and the energy crisis, he emphasized that it should be used in concert with renewable sources of energy if we are to fulfill the goals of the European Green Deal and just transition.



ECR Vice-President Oldřich Vlasák

## Tjisse Stelpstra on the Circular Economy: "There is no waste"

During a webinar entitled "Circular Economy beyond energy: recycling and reducing waste", ECR Member Tjisse Stelpstra, emphasized the "urgent need to begin improving the circularity of materials and systems". Existing linear economies have proven to be "environmentally damaging" as we continue to be more and more dependent on "globalised supply chains and cheap raw materials".

"This is nothing new", added Mr Stelpstra, who also serves as Regional Minister for the Drenthe province in the Netherlands, and whose opinion on the New Circular Economy Action Plan was adopted by the CoR on 14 October 2020. However, the COVID-19 crisis has very much exposed that dependency.

Mr Stelpstra continued by saying that a shift in mind-set should be the first step in further developing the circular economy. This mind-set of "there is no waste" is not something we only want for governments but also for citizens and businesses. "Everyone has a role to play". To promote the principle of zero waste, we need to stop labelling what are essentially

resources as waste – "there is no waste", he reiterated.

"With the resilience and resourcefulness" we have seen in the current pandemic situation on behalf of citizens and businesses, "we can achieve results", encouraged Mr Stelpstra. He concluded by calling on Member States to devise their national recovery plans from the crisis with long-term investments for environmental progress. "It is our duty to show our children that the transition to a circular economy is not only about the environment but about welfare".

Mr Stelpstra was invited to take part in the webinar, which is part of FEDARENE's Circular Economy Webinar Series.



ECR Member Tjisse Stelpstra



## Substantive support required for local and regional authorities to implement ambitious goals of Renovation Wave

Keen to point out and recognise the obvious merits of the Renovation Wave, ECR Member Jakub Chelstowski just as eagerly reiterated the necessity to offer substantive support for local and regional authorities to implement the ambitious goals of the Renovation Wave.

Mr Chelstowski, who also serves as ECR Coordinator for the Commission on Environment, Climate change and Energy (ENVE) in the CoR, described the situation in Poland, where “around 4.6 million people live in energy poverty”. Unfortunately, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has only served to worsen this situation with “many people struggling to afford proper indoor thermal comfort”.

For the Marshal of the Silesian region, the Renovation Wave offers a two-fold solution – it will en-



ECR Member Marshal Jakub Chelstowski

able our citizens to live in warmer and healthier buildings, and will kick-start Europe's economic recovery. However, there are some aspects of particular importance for local and regional authorities, which are of cause for concern.

Mr Chelstowski first referred to the 2030 target to cut greenhouse-gas emission by 55%, which for him has “added an enormous burden for businesses and consumers”. He asks how this will be financed in reality – will the new EU long-term budget and the NextGenerationEU recovery facility be enough? With estimations of €275 billion needed every year in building renovation to meet the new 2030 targets, Mr Chelstowski fears that the “Renovation Wave will become an empty promise for our citizens”.

The second point concerns support for local and regional authorities. With financial resources

and human capacities “diminished” due to the pandemic, Mr Chelstowski urged for substantive support to be provided such as “technical assistance, reskilling and upskilling for our employees and strengthening of our capacities”.

He offered examples of his region's project of modernising a large number of public buildings such as the “thermal modernisation of historic residential buildings in Old Knurów with the elimination of low emission sources” or the “thermal modernisation of the building of the Main Library of the Public Library in Sosnowiec”.

Mr Chelstowski concluded his participation in the debate by saying “we want to constantly reduce the negative impact on the environment, contribute to the achievement of our ambitious goals, and at the same time improve the conditions and quality of life of residents”.

## Subsidiarity and proportionality are key to Green Deal

During the December plenary session of the CoR, ECR Member and President of the Małopolska region Witold Kozłowski spoke on the EU Green Deal, specifically in how financing can best be allocated in order to yield maximum effectiveness. During his intervention, Mr Kozłowski underlined the need for pragmatism and realism as it relates to the implementation of Green Deal policies.

The ECR Member took the opportunity to address the need for subsidiarity and localism. Fundamentally, when financial assistance is granted to Member States to help them reach their Green Deal objectives, these principles must always be respected.

He stressed: “There must be a bottom-up approach, where activities are supported by the local and regional authorities in concert with the central governments of Member States.”

Mr Kozłowski spoke on how the ECR Group is opposed to any proposal which would exclude either central governments or regional authorities from the allocation processes. Fundamentally, if the EU wishes to succeed in advancing its environmental objectives, cooperation and coordination between all relevant government stakeholders and actors is paramount.



ECR Member Marshal Witold Kozłowski

## CURRENT CHALLENGES

### Ciambetti: Commission must do better to expand vaccine rollout

ECR Member Roberto Ciambetti, also rapporteur in the CoR on the future of the Health Union, spoke on behalf of the Group during a debate on the COVID-19 vaccine campaign saying that it is a topic which the EU must prioritise, but on which it has so far failed to deliver.

Mr Ciambetti, President of the Regional Council in Veneto, emphasised that “no citizen, no business, no region and no state has been able to escape the clutches of the pandemic”.

He made reference to the very early days describing it as a sort of “trade war” between Member States over the procurement of face masks.

And now, almost a year after it began, Mr Ciambetti expressed his disappointment at those Member States who are bypassing EU agreements to obtain additional vaccine



doses through bilateral agreements. For him, this calls into question “the principle of solidarity between Member States”.

Mr Ciambetti continued to say that the EU decision to adopt a common vaccination strategy was met with optimism, but now there is only frustration at the “poor progress made”. The enthusiasm of December 27, the date on which the first EU countries started vaccinating the public, now seems a “distant memory”, he highlighted.



ECR Member Roberto Ciambetti

He described that situation in Italy where plans for the distribution of vaccines had to be revised after pharmaceutical companies, such as Pfizer, announced that they would reduce the delivery of agreed doses. “If we really want to reach the target of 70% of the EU population vaccinated by the summer, it is time to change course”, he urged.

The debate took place as part of the February plenary session with Dr Hans Kluge, Regional Director for Europe of the World Health Organization (WHO).

## Spending should be measured and responsible says ECR First Vice-President

During a debate on the European economic governance framework at the European Committee of the Regions winter plenary, ECR First Vice-President Rob Jonkman called for responsible and targeted policies to address the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic.



ECR First Vice-President Rob Jonkman

Mr Jonkman argued that while the European economic governance framework was a valuable tool in helping Europe recover from the 2008 financial crisis, the situation with regard to the current recession is unprecedented.

He therefore underlined that the economic governance framework must continue to be updated and fine-tuned in order to ensure economic recovery.

The Alderman of Opsterland spoke in particular on the need for minimising regula-

tions and stimulating economic growth: “We must introduce the ‘one in one out principle’ in the EU to limit bureaucracy and reject calls for linking national budgets, which could decrease a given Member State’s drive for higher competitiveness.”

He concluded by calling on CoR members to oppose an uncontrolled increase in public expenditure in their Member States, which would inevitably add to the tax burden levied on businesses, citizens and future generations.

## More support required to enable European culture to recover from pandemic

The pandemic has shown us the vulnerability of the cultural and creative industry. According to various statistics, Europe’s cultural and creative sector has been hit harder by the pandemic than any other industry with the exception of aviation. During a debate with the European Commissioner Mariya Gabriel, ECR Vice-President Juraj Droba highlighted the “difficult situation” of the sector and pleaded for targeted EU assistance.



Bratislava, capital of Slovakia



ECR Vice-President Juraj Droba

Also serving as President of the Bratislava Region, Mr Droba emphasized the role that local and regional authorities have in the area of culture; “they play a key role in supporting individual artists through various grant schemes”. He gave the example of his own region, which “has established a very successful



and popular regional subsidy scheme for the culture sector”.

Last year, when “our budget was heavily affected” we had to look for an “out-of-the-box solution”. The regional authority joined forces with a commercial bank in Slovakia to support their cultural entities. Mr Droba described it as a “unique collaboration

that allowed many artists to gain access to financing”.

The ECR Vice-President concluded his intervention at the European Committee of the Regions’ plenary session by saying that during these exceptional situations like the pandemic, we must look for effective ways to support this sector. He called

on the European institutions to provide the tools required “to enable European culture to recover quickly from the consequences caused by the pandemic”. Although regions and municipalities are doing whatever they can to support culture, “we count on the support of the European Commission as well to complement our efforts”.

## Councillor Godek: EU Recovery Fund can achieve greater territorial cohesion if supported by all stakeholders

**In addition to economic recovery, the main objective of national recovery plans is to achieve greater territorial cohesion. However, according to ECR Member Robert Godek, this is only possible with “good cooperation between local and regional authorities, the European Union and central government”.**

Mr Godek, Councillor of Strzyżów District Council, describes the devastating impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on European economies, including in his home country, Poland, where “GDP has fallen sharply after three decades of uninterrupted economic growth”.

He recognises that “while prudent macro-economic policies and social programmes have helped his country mitigate the impact of the pandemic”, “a return to previous levels of economic growth is, even in the best case scenarios, not expected until 2022”.

However, Mr Godek has faith that the EU’s new Recovery Fund will contribute to the recovery and growth of EU economies and

highlights that the great advantage of the Fund from a regional perspective is full 100% financing of investments.

In Mr Godek’s region in south-eastern Poland, they have put forward as many as 71 projects for the National Recovery Plan, which are key to limiting the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the development processes of the region and supporting the region’s resilience against future crisis factors.

The Podkarpackie region is the coordinator of two bundles of projects identified under the National Recovery Plan - the development of regional road infrastructure and public safety in mountain areas.

Mr Godek delivered his speech in the European Committee of the Region’s hearing on “LRAs and the Recovery and Resilience Plans that took place on 22 January and was organised by the CoR Commission on Economic Policy.



ECR Member Robert Godek

## MEMBERS’ ACTIVITIES

### Good practices in the culture sector

**ECR Member Marshal Andrzej Bętkowski discusses implementation of the international KEEP ON project and shares some initial conclusions.**

**Marshal Bętkowski of the Świętokrzyskie region in Poland says that when they joined this international project three years ago, it was with “high hopes” about the possibility of sharing experiences, and of observing good practices and introducing them in the region. The KEEP ON project brings together partners from European countries with vast experience of successfully managing a rich cultural heritage.**

The Marshal highlighted that the stakeholder group for the project in the Świętokrzyskie region included a few dozen organisations that manage cultural sites, such as the Kielce Village Museum, the Regional Science and Technology Centre in Podzamcze, the municipality and town of Chęciny, the National Museum in Kielce, the

District Museum and municipal authority in Sandomierz, the regional House of Culture in Kielce, Opatów District, the Camaldolese monastery in Rytwiany, and Kielce Geopark. He added that each of these contributed their experience to the project, but also gained “valuable knowledge and practical tips about the efficient management of

cultural sites, in particular their funding and effective use of EU resources to that end”. The KEEP ON project, which runs under the Interreg Europe 2014-2020 programme, is really an international venture whose partners include countries such as Greece, Spain, Italy, Portugal and Croatia. The Świętokrzyskie region is the only Polish





ECR Member Marshal Andrzej Bętkowski.  
Fot. UMWS

partner in the project. Many meetings between partners, field trips and workshops have taken place under the project. Mr Bętkowski emphasized that the “international dimension allows a broad view of culture management so that the funding available to us to invest in this area is utilised to best effect”. With every country having its own customs, “we can observe that each of the partners has its particular approach to cultural heritage management”, he added. The ECR Member said that “we can each show each other ways of finding resources to make effective use of existing cultural infrastructure”. He also underlined that it is worth applying best practice bearing in

mind the start of the European Union’s financial perspective for 2021-2027.

With the outbreak of the pandemic at the beginning of 2020, the Marshal discussed whether the good practices developed in the framework of KEEP ON were still relevant, and for him there is no better time to look at them: “protection of cultural heritage is an area in which we encounter many difficult challenges”. Cultural sites must be flexible and must learn to respond to reality. He reiterated that “we should also remember that the pandemic will end at some point and we will return to normality: theatres, concert halls and museums will fill with people again”. Many cultural sites are making major investments despite the pandemic, involving huge outlays that will be difficult to make returns on.

He concluded by saying that “the main thing is for cultural institutions to serve society and be widely accessible”. It is important in the KEEP ON project that the public funding allocated for investment in cultural heritage be “spent wisely”, basically so that projects in this sphere can



be as financially viable and autonomous as possible. The Marshal said that the project will result in the drawing up of a Regional Action Plan within a transnational partnership, which will then serve as a tool to support the process for evaluating the Regional Operational Programme of the Świętokrzyskie region, also in the context of utilising EU funding post-2020.

*The KEEP ON project – Effective policies for durable and self-sustainable projects in the cultural heritage sector – is co-funded by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund under the Interreg Europe Programme, Priority Axis 4, Environment and Resource Efficiency.*

## The Małopolska anti-crisis shield – effective protection through European funds

For ECR Member Witold Kozłowski, Marshal of Małopolska, deepening cooperation within the European Union is a strategic direction. Through action and close cooperation with EU partners, Małopolska, one of Poland’s most beautiful regions, is becoming safer and stronger. “The global pandemic has confirmed the strength and importance of the European ties and values that bind us. Thanks to Małopolska’s ‘anti-crisis shield’ and European funds, we have managed to save lives, health and tens of thousands of jobs for people in our region,” Mr Kozłowski said.



Kraków, capital of Małopolska region

The strength of our European community is determined by common values and ideals. The global pandemic has shown that cooperation is an essential precondition for shaping the future of Europe and the world. Marshal of Małopolska, Witold Kozłowski, stressed that in these extremely difficult times, European solidarity is rising to the challenge.

Thanks to its determination and the full commitment to cooperation from many communities and institutions as well as EU funds, the Małopolska regional government has allocated some PLN 1.5 billion to fighting the effects of the pandemic. The Małopolska anti-crisis shield, a pioneering programme in Poland, has provided real support for hundreds of thousands of the region’s residents and aid reaches the places where it is most needed and anticipated.

“In the early months of 2020, we began our pioneering work on these systemic, local government programmes designed to address the social and economic consequences of the pandemic. At that time, although we had an inkling, we did not yet know what we were about to be faced with. Thanks to this rapid

response, cooperation with many partner institutions and European funds, we were able to create a comprehensive programme of assistance for the Małopolska community. We are protecting health and lives. We have saved tens of thousands of jobs. We are supporting education. The Małopolska anti-crisis shield has already allocated approximately PLN 1.5 billion to combat the consequences of the pandemic,” Mr Kozłowski emphasised.



ECR Member Witold Kozłowski



## “Solidarity and local realities are pivotal in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic” highlighted ECR Members at the Łódzkie European Economic Forum

Marshal Grzegorz Schreiber, President of the Łódzkie region, who was hosting the inaugural session of the European Economic Forum, opened the floor by describing the situation in his region, offering an insight into the many initiatives and projects developed by local authorities in fighting COVID-19. “Every area of life has been impacted, it has been a very difficult time in Poland and in Europe, with no region being spared. “Local governments must be recognised for all the hard work they have done”, said Marshal Schreiber.

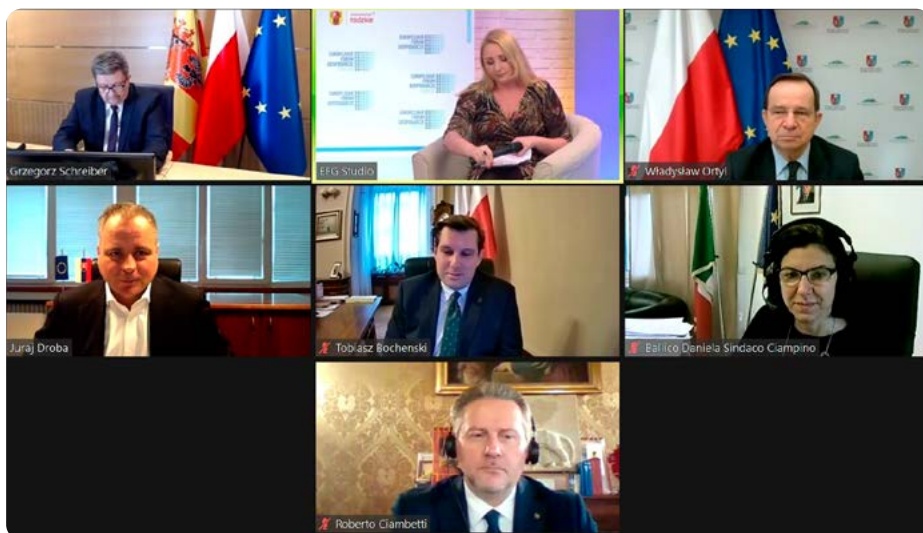
One of Łódzkie region’s biggest projects was locally producing masks and the purchasing of personal protective equipment (PPE). Care homes in the area were also assisted as well as staff and many masks were distributed free of charge – this was done in cooperation with the army and the police. Hospitals were equipped with ventilators, respirators, and computers. In terms of economic measures, financial assistance was offered to NGOs in the form of micro-grants totalling EUR 80,000.

The Mayor of Ciampino, ECR Member Daniela Ballico, described the “heart-breaking image of an empty Rome, a city reliant on tourism” but also shared her hopes and optimism for the recovery of the economy.

Mr Juraj Droba, ECR Vice-President and President of the Bratislava region, also spoke on how Slovakia saw the early warning signs in Italy which inspired the convening of many committees and meetings, but people were “too scared to act, too scared to make any decisions”. Mr Droba took the decision to close schools in his region on 8 March 2020 and a few days later the national government followed suit and closed down schools across the country.



ECR Member Marshal Grzegorz Schreiber – host of the European Economic Forum



Opening session of the European Economic Forum

ECR President Władysław Ortyl said that policies and strategies needed to change to include COVID issues. He continued by saying that the pandemic even “launched some safeguarding measures, local authorities are now more interested in innovation, R&D teams are developing new products”. He focused on the importance of solidarity and cooperation and said we should not be importing masks from abroad but to produce them domestically.

ECR Member, Mr Roberto Ciambetti, who is also President of the Regional Council of Veneto in Italy, believes that despite the 4% decrease in the Italian budget, “new technologies will help accelerate the rebound of the new economy”. Mr Ciambetti also said that the pandemic has given his region an opportunity to look forward and to analyse “whether people have access to basic healthcare services”.

On the subject of lockdown measures, ECR panellists shared the view that total

lockdowns should be avoided where possible and that the main focus at this time is getting the economy to bounce back. The subject of a COVID-19 vaccine was also discussed with many of the ECR members stating that vaccines should not pose a health threat and that the elderly and vulnerable must be given priority. President Ortyl summarised by saying “everyone, including the economy, our societies – we are all waiting for the vaccine”.

The European Economic Forum has been organised periodically for several years by the Łódzkie region in Poland and has become a fixture in the calendar of the most prominent business events in the country.

The inauguration session of the Forum this year was hosted by the Marshal of Łódzkie region in Poland, ECR Member Grzegorz Schreiber, and organised in partnership with the ECR Group in the CoR. It took place on 2 December in a virtual format.



## ECR Members welcome Bert-Jan Ruissen MEP to their Group meeting

The ECR Group were delighted to welcome Mr Bert-Jan Ruissen, Member of the European Parliament, to our group meeting on 28 January in the context of the CoR's February plenary session. Mr Ruissen was invited to discuss the main political developments in the EU from the perspective of the ECR Group in the European Parliament such as the new EU budget, relations with the United Kingdom, the Conference on the Future of Europe and EU relations with Israel.

On the EU budget Mr Ruissen described the agreement as a "historic mistake" with months of negotiations only serving to produce an even greater "EU superstate". For him, the EU should be more "modest and support and facilitate EU Member States".

The MEP expressed relief at the Brexit agreement but fears that the good intentions of preserving a good relationship with the UK sound promising in theory but wondered how it will work in reality. "The proof of the pudding is in the eating", he claimed and continued to say that only time will tell "whether it's a good deal or not". One thing that could already be done to help ease the "extra administrative burdens placed on

businesses as a result of Brexit" is the "digitalisation of all the paperwork".

Mr Ruissen's reflections also referred to the Conference on the Future of Europe during which he explained just how active the ECR Group in the Parliament are. They have already started their own events with a tour currently being organised throughout various Member States. For him, the future of Europe is "sovereign states working together on limited topics" and enhancing "cross-border cooperation".

As Vice-Chair of the Delegation for relations with Israel, Mr Ruissen concluded his intervention by expressing disappointment at the lack of contact on behalf of the EU with Israel. As "the only democratic country



ECR MEP Mr Bert Jan Ruissen

in the Middle East", Israel is a very strategic partner for the EU and a stronger relationship should be further developed. As front-runner in the vaccine campaign, Mr Ruissen described Israel as "at the cutting edge of research and development".

## Quality of life must be improved in rural areas or we won't have farmers

The ECR Group were delighted to welcome the Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Mr Janusz Wojciechowski, to our group meeting on 7 December in the context of the European Committee of the Regions plenary session to discuss the future of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy as well as the importance of localism in food production.



Commissioner Janusz Wojciechowski

Commissioner Wojciechowski highlighted several times during the ECR Group meeting that if "quality of life does not improve in rural areas, we will see a rapid decrease in the number of European farmers".

For the Commissioner, "European agriculture is a champion in many respects, the EU is a global standard for safe food and we

must continue to preserve this". To achieve this however, the quality of life in rural areas must be improved and further developed. Although the Commissioner recognises the many investments in rural areas such as road infrastructure, "there is still a great lack of public transport making it very difficult for farmers to get to cities and towns".

The Commissioner's reflections also included the importance of food security and how it was confirmed by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic that during the first European-wide lockdowns, without farmers, it would not have been possible to put food on supermarket shelves and on our plates. Now more than ever, "farmers must be assisted" and he insisted that "shorter food supply chains could be one of the main solutions to the current problems".

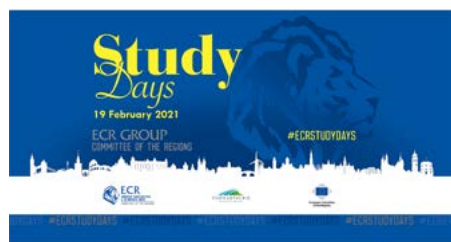
He gave the example of how every statistical portion of food has to travel an average of 170km between farm and fork and with shorter food supply chains this would drastically reduce the cost of transport and food and therefore be better for all stakeholders – farmers, animals and the consumer. In this regard, the Commissioner also called for the development of local food production, which would "create opportunities that aim at economic and food security".

Commissioner Wojciechowski concluded by recognising the many benefits of the European Green Deal and the Farm to Fork strategy but of utmost importance for him is that "these two very ambitious programmes are continually monitored to check if the financial stability of farmers is affected."



## ECR CoR Study Days focus on smart specialisation and EU budget

The second edition of ECR CoR Study Days brought together local and regional leaders from eleven EU Member States, as well as other leading thinkers from academia, government and EU institutions. The focus of this edition's Study Days, held on February 19th and hosted by Podkarpackie region, was on smart specialisation and new trends in the EU budget 2021-2027.



ECR President Marshal Władysław Ortyl welcomed the participants, underlining that “smart specialisations create competitive advantages of our regions, and the funds from the new EU financial perspective will help us to strengthen their potential and lift our economy after the pandemic”.

The Study Days were organised by Podkarpackie region in Poland as it has a unique set of smart specialisations including the automotive industry, IT and telecommunications, but above all aviation and aerospace. The region

is famous for its Aviation Valley, including over 160 businesses and employing almost 30 000 people.

In the first panel, politicians and experts discussed good practices in applying smart specialisations at local and regional level.

Among the speakers were Mayor of Ciampino Daniela Ballico, Marshal of the Małopolska region Witold Kozłowski, as well as representatives of PZL Mielec a Lockheed Martin company and the Rzeszów University of Technology.

Mayor Ballico spoke about the devastating consequences the pandemic has had on the airport sector. She called for “a new path of smart specialisations with a view to relaunching and helping the aviation sector recover from the COVID-19 pandemic”.

The second panel focused on new trends in the EU budget 2021-2027.

Speakers included the Vice Presidents of the ECR Groups in the CoR and the European Parliament Rob Jonkman and Roberts Zile.

Dr Zile highlighted the good compromise and the flexible rules of the new EU budget but expressed disappointment that “the pandemic started one year ago and we are still facing significant delays in disbursing funds for businesses and citizens”. He also emphasised the need for regional cooperation in creating national recovery plans, especially in the area of transport.

Other speakers included Dr Bogdan Rzońca MEP, Marco Marsilio, President of Abruzzo,

Dr Pavel Branda, Deputy Mayor of Rádlo and a representative of the European Commission.

The format of the event was virtual due to the worrying health situation in Europe.

## The future of Europe is localism

ECR CoR President Władysław Ortyl, Marshal of the Podkarpackie region, spoke at *The Future of Europe is Localism* debate hosted by ECR Romanian MEP Cristian Terhes, which he opened by emphasizing that the ECR Group – both in the European Parliament and in the European Committee of the Regions – “distinguishes from all other groups by their strong feeling that the decentralisation of the EU is in the common interest of the entire Community”.

For the ECR President, one of the biggest issues as a result of the constant transfer of competences from the national level to the EU level is the “very limited influence citizens have on shaping the political reality”. Although responsible for the implementation at local and regional level of more than 70% of EU legislation and most EU investment programmes, local government authorities are “de facto largely devoid of influence on its shaping”.

The ECR CoR President continued to say that one of the group's aims in the CoR is to “strive to have more influence on the EU so that it systematically prepares territorial impact assessments”. He gave the examples of the Green Deal or the mobility package as European Commission proposals that have “costs and impacts” that are not only “distributed unevenly among the Member

States but also among European regions” and require additional territorial analyses.

While Marshal Ortyl recognises the obvious positive impact of the EU on the lives of citizens such as “new sales markets have opening up for our entrepreneurs”, as well as the “improvement of infrastructure” in less developed regions, he also expressed disappointment at the attempt by the EU to impose a specific worldview – “often contrary to the traditions and culture of individual countries or even regions”.

On Friday 26 February, Bucharest, Romania, hosted the fourth event in the ECR Group in the European Parliament's conference “Europe's Future - A New Hope”.

The ECR Group in the European Parliament launched the European tour on the Future of the

EU in December 2020. The tour takes the form of a series of live broadcasts from 15 European capitals, in which citizens of European Member States are consulted. Warsaw, Sofia and Zagreb have already played host to the travelling conference.

For more information please visit:  
[www.ecrthefuture.eu](http://www.ecrthefuture.eu) #ResetEU

