



ECR

EUROPEAN CONSERVATIVES
& REFORMISTS GROUP

COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

Guide to the **European Conservatives and Reformists Group** in the European Committee of the Regions

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FORWARD BY MARCO MARSILIO

President of the ECR Group in the European Committee of the Regions

The ECR Group is committed to a more prosperous, secure and decentralised Europe led by local communities in partnership with national governments.

One of the most enduring challenges facing the EU today is economic recovery after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequences of Russia's unjustified aggression against Ukraine, including the need for providing humanitarian aid to millions of refugees arriving into our countries. In light of these challenges, we believe it is evident that the European Union needs significant improvements to help it weather the storm. Our Group has advocated real actions in the spirit of solidarity, such as financial assistance to struggling regions, policy proposals to help Europe achieve more energy security and more flexibility in the use of EU funds.



We underline that all new policies need to take into account local and regional realities and make sure any EU measures do not infringe the sovereignty of either the nation-state or local government. It is for that reason that we have consistently called for greater use of territorial impact assessments in EU policymaking and we always underline that what can be efficiently handled at the local or national level should be handled at these levels.

Here in the European Committee of the Regions we wish to demonstrate the viability and the vitality of our vision for Europe. Our Members, whether heads of regions, mayors, regional ministers or councillors, have been some of the most pro-active contributors to the work of the institution. They have brought their common sense perspectives of local politics to European policy, representing their constituents and belief in the importance of the free market, tradition, and democracy.

Marco Marsilio

President of the ECR Group in the European Committee of the Regions

WHO WE ARE

The European Conservatives and Reformists Group is a centre-right and euro-realist political group in the European Committee of the Regions. It is one of six political groups in the CoR. Set up in April 2013 at the 100th plenary session, it has been growing since. The Group brings together about 60 local and regional politicians from 9 countries. It is the voice of conservative and reformist local and regional politicians in the EU, working together to ensure that decisions are taken as close to the citizens as possible. We believe that less centralisation will enable us to achieve a better functioning and less burdensome EU.

The Group members are active in shaping the EU decision-making process through their leadership in drafting *opinions* (position papers) on subjects addressed in the EU that are of local and regional importance. The main findings and recommendations of the *opinions* prepared by its members are featured in official EU decisions and have facilitated reform.

The ECR Group in the CoR is a partner of the ECR Party, which continues to grow with a respectable number of MEPs, prime ministers in the European Council and a successful think tank.



ECR Group Members at the European Economic Forum and ECR Thematic Activity in Łódź, Poland in November 2022

The ECR Group members are working together within the European Committee of the Regions to achieve:

- Greater localism in the EU-decision-making process through the use of territorial impact assessments for current and future EU legislation and advocating the exercise of power at the lowest practicable level of governance, i.e. by the individual where possible and by local or national authorities in preference to the European Union;
- Greater euro-realism through a decentralised system of governance that respects the sovereignty of EU Member States and their divergences;
- An EU growth and jobs strategy based on free enterprise, free and fair trade and competition, lower taxation, and small government;
- The fair treatment of all EU Member States (new and old, large and small);
- Cost-efficient and modern public services;
- Regional policy that reflects the real needs at the local and regional level and allows for flexibility;
- A coherent and holistic approach to the sustainable development of urban and rural areas aiming to improve the quality of life;
- Increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of EU funds by ensuring coherence and coordination among the different funds and making them more user-friendly with the appropriate level of checks and balances;
- Energy supply that is not only sustainable but also affordable;
- Rational climate policy coordinated at the EU level that is based on competitiveness with non-binding indicative targets that allow Member States to determine their energy mix and enable local and regional authorities to act based on their local and regional specificities;
- Fair treatment of farmers from both old and new Member States;
- Safe and healthy food that respects cultural traditions;
- Transportation networks that enable urban, rural and remote regions to be better connected;
- A sustainable approach to immigration and integration taking into account the capacities and capabilities of local and regional authorities;
- Sharing of experiences on local and regional governance with EU neighbouring countries via the CoR's dedicated fora.

EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS



The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) is the EU's assembly of local and regional representatives. It brings together local and regional politicians from the 27 EU Member States. It is composed of 329 full members, with an equal number of alternate members.

It is an advisory body established in 1994 through the Maastricht Treaty to ensure that the authorities closest to the citizens are consulted in the EU decision-making process. The European Committee of the Regions also monitors compliance with the principle of subsidiarity and has the powers to take the EU to the Court of Justice if an EU legislation does not comply with the principle of subsidiarity.

The European Parliament, the Council and the Commission consult the CoR when drawing up legislative texts on areas affecting local and regional authorities. It receives requests for its opinion on communications and proposals for legislation. The detailed work of the CoR is carried out in six Commissions which specialise in the following areas: Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX); Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget (COTER); Economic Policy (ECON); Environment, Climate Change and Energy (ENVE); Natural Resources (NAT); Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC). A seventh ad hoc commission (CFAA) advises the Bureau on administrative and financial questions.

LOCALISM

Achieving greater localism in the EU is a key priority for the ECR Group in the CoR. Localism is about civic empowerment. It means taking decisions at the most practicable level, by the individual where possible and by local or national authorities in preference to supranational bodies. It also means formulating policies that impact local communities by taking into account their views and interests.

- Localism is based on strong local communities and free market economy.
- Local areas are best-placed to make decisions about what is best for their areas.
- Devolution of powers to local government must be coupled with a degree of fiscal devolution. Allowing local and regional authorities to keep revenues rather than collecting it all centrally and redistributing it can be an effective way not only to cut bureaucracy but also to make the system more transparent.
- Community-led development is crucial for community engagement and attracting investments. Empowering local and regional governments reinvigorates local democracy. Localism also presents an opportunity for business, particularly SMEs, to get more involved in the public service supply chain.
- Localist approach should be built on good cooperation between local and regional authorities on the one side and central governments on the other.
- Policies developed through a localism approach in various EU Member States have delivered successful results. Policies need to be developed through a localism approach for their sustainability and success.
- EU needs to adopt a new territorial vision that outlines a localist strategy whereby a place-based approach would be used to develop policies based on consultations held at the local and regional level.
- Existing EU procedures need to be simplified.



ECR Localism Summit in Drenthe in the Netherlands, November 2021

MEMBERS

Full members	Alternates	TOTAL
30	28	58*

**Group membership on 6 February 2023*



BUREAU

PRESIDENCY

Marco Marsilio | President

President of Abruzzo Region

Member of the European Committee of the Regions since 13 May 2019

Representation: Italy

Commission: COTER, ENVE



Władysław Ortyl | First Vice President

President of Podkarpackie Region

Member of the European Committee of the Regions since 08 November 2016

Representation: Poland

Commission: COTER, ENVE



Anna Magyar | Vice President

Councillor in Csongrád-Csanád County

Member of the European Committee of the Regions since 26 January 2015

Representation: Hungary

Commission: CIVEX, SEDEC



Oldřich Vlasák | Vice President

Councillor in Hradec Králové

Member of the European Committee of the Regions since 11 May 2004

Representation: Czech Republic

Commission: COTER, ENVE



Juraj Droba | Vice President

President of Bratislava Region

Member of the European Committee of the Regions since 18 September 2018

Representation: Slovakia

Commission: COTER, SEDEC



Ilpo Heltimoinen | Treasurer and Bureau Member

Lappeenranta City Councillor

Member of the European Committee of the Regions since 09 October 2017

Representation: Finland

Commission: ECON, NAT



BUREAU MEMBERS

Matteo Luigi Bianchi | Bureau Member

Councillor in Varese

Member of the European Committee of the Regions

since 26 January 2015

Representation: Italy



Pavel Branda | Bureau Member

Deputy Mayor of Rádlo

Member of the European Committee of the Regions

since 22 May 2017

Representation: Czech Republic



Roberto Ciambetti | Bureau Member

President of Veneto Regional Council

Member of the European Committee of the Regions

since 3 July 2018

Representation: Italy



Juan García-Gallardo | Bureau Member

Vice President of the Junta of Castile and León

Member of the European Committee of the Regions

since 20 July 2022

Representation: Spain



Ramūnas Godeliauskas | Bureau Member

Mayor of Rokiškis

Member of the European Committee of the Regions

since 26 January 2020

Representation: Lithuania



József Ribányi | Bureau Member

Councillor in Tolna Megye County

Member of the European Committee of the Regions

since 26 January 2010

Representation: Hungary



Grzegorz Schreiber | Bureau Member

President of Łódzkie Region

Member of the European Committee of the Regions

since 26 January 2020

Representation: Poland



Atanas Stoyanov | Bureau member

Mayor of Sandanski

Member of the European Committee of the Regions

since 26 January 2020

Representation: Bulgaria



OUR MEMBERS WHO COORDINATE THE GROUP'S WORK IN THE DIFFERENT POLICY AREAS

Commission for Economic Policy (ECON)

Coordinator: Ilpo Heltimoinen (Lappeenranta City Councilor)

Deputy Coordinator: Jarosław Stawiarski (President of Lubelskie Region)

Commission for Climate Change and Energy (ENVE)

Coordinator: Sebastian Łukaszewicz, Deputy President of the Podlaskie region

Deputy Coordinator: Witold Kozłowski (President of Małopolska Region)

Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX)

Coordinator: Matteo Bianchi (Councillor in Varese)

Deputy Coordinator: Barbara Hegedüs (Deputy Mayor of Veszprém)

Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget (COTER)

Coordinator: Pavel Branda (Deputy Mayor of Rádlo)

Deputy Coordinator: Juraj Droba (President of Bratislava Region)

Commission for Natural Resources (NAT)

Coordinator: Adam Banaszak (Councillor in Kujawsko-Pomorskie Regional Assembly)

Deputy Coordinator: Piotr Psikus (Mayor of Kępno)

Commission on Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC)

Coordinator: Ádám Karácsony (Vice-President of the County Council of Pest Megye)

Deputy Coordinator: Andrea Putzu (Regional Councillor of the Marche Region)

OUR OPINIONS

→ **The future of regional airports – Challenges and opportunities – Władysław Ortyl.**

The opinion looks at ways to expand the financial support to the airports. Indeed, in October 2020, nearly 200 airports in Europe were facing insolvency. Their bankruptcy would have a dramatic impact on employment and the economies of the regions. *“Regional airports play a crucial role for the territorial and economic cohesion of the EU – they provide connectivity for the regions they serve and are vital for economic growth. Without their presence, many companies would not invest in non-capital regions.”*



ECR First Vice Presidents Władysław Ortyl

→ **Effectively engaging local and regional authorities in the preparation of the Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes for the 2021-2027 period - Juraj Droba.**

The opinion looks at ways to improve regional participation in the cohesion policy programmes for the 2021-27 period. In order to ensure that cohesion policy successfully meets citizens' needs on the ground, the full involvement of local and regional authorities, socio-economic partners and civil society at all stages of the preparation and implementation of these key documents is of paramount importance. *“The regional dimension and solid data are often missing in the debates between governments and the European Commission. Therefore, the voice of the regions and cities must be strengthened.”*



ECR Vice-President Juraj Droba

→ **Resilience of critical entities – Mario Guarente.**

The opinion looks at ways to increase multi-level cross-sectoral collaboration which is crucial for disaster preparedness, risk reduction and reinforcing resilience. *“Critical entities must be resilient wherever and whenever disruptions appear. To this end, communication and reporting measures with regard to risk levels should be promoted vis-à-vis the local administrations and the people living in the areas concerned.”*



Mayor Mario Guarente

- **Enlargement Package 2021 - Anna Magyar.** The opinion stresses that the CoR is in favour of all Western Balkan countries joining the EU. The lack of a real and trustworthy EU perspective can lead to frustrations in these countries with EU membership aspirations. Ukraine should also be supported in pursuing its EU ascension. *“Enlargement is a strategic asset for the EU and one of its most successful policies. It should help contribute to the stability and prosperity of the countries that wish to join the EU”.*



ECR Vice President Anna Magyar

- **European Health Union: Reinforcing the EU's resilience – Roberto Ciambetti.** The opinion looks at ways to enhance local and regional authorities in a *“European health union”*. The principle of subsidiarity is referred to several times in the opinion and for the rapporteur it proves to be an essential operational principle of reference. *“We need to have more public investments in national health systems to ensure that they have the resources and means they need to emerge from the current crisis, as well as to strengthen their resilience in the long term”.*



ECR Bureau Member Roberto Ciambetti

- **People-to-people and small scale projects in cross-border cooperation programmes – Pavel Branda.** The opinion looks at ways to overcome obstacles at borders and to integrate border areas and their citizens. *“It’s not only large projects but also the small individual projects which are essential for the success of cross-border cooperation. They help to build confidence and eliminate stereotypes and prejudices”.*



ECR Bureau Member Dr Pavel Branda

- **EU Strategy on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life (2021-2030) – Adam Karácsony.** The opinion calls for preventing and combating all forms of antisemitism; protecting and fostering Jewish life in the EU; as well as promoting education, research and Holocaust remembrance. *“Local and regional authorities across Europe should promote the fight against prejudice and antisemitism. We should all commit to create a more inclusive and safe future for Jewish communities in the European Union”.*



ECR member Ádám Karácsony

- **The European Year of the Rail – Jarosław Stawiarski.** The proposals in this opinion come in light of the European Commission declaring 2021 to be *“The European Year of the Rail”*. This opinion examines how to make increased sustainable rail usage a reality throughout Europe. *“Rail is the most sustainable mode of transport, being key in reducing emissions. The COVID-19 pandemic proved its resilience and reliability. Promoting rail use among citizens is essential”.*



ECR Bureau Member Jarosław Stawiarski

- **European Solidarity Corps and the New EU Youth Strategy – Matteo Bianchi.** The opinion calls for regular meetings with the EU Youth Coordinator to be planned and for formal cooperation with the European Committee of the Regions. *“The EU’s youth volunteer scheme needs a stronger local dimension. The needs and demands of local communities should be an important quality criterion for identifying eligible projects for the European Solidarity Corps.”*



Matteo Bianchi MP

- **Investing in Europe’s youth and the European Solidarity Corps – Paweł Grzybowski.** This opinion looks at ways to build a better future for Europe’s young generation through the provision of new work and social opportunities that enhance an individual’s knowledge and skills. *“We need to make sure we can give our youth the best start in life. With 57% of the young generation feeling excluded from economic, social and democratic life, we have a big task ahead to improve youth engagement within society.”*



Mayor Paweł Grzybowski

- **Minimum requirements on water reuse - Oldřich Vlasák.** The opinion calls on the EU institutions to enlarge the scope of the proposed regulation for the irrigation of urban areas. Moreover, it proposes that responsibility for the use of treated waste water is shared among producers and users. *“We propose increasing the scope of the proposed regulation not just for agricultural irrigation, but also for the irrigation of urban green spaces, parks, gardens and grounds for public use. We need proper and standardized regulation at the EU level to help our consumers and producers.”*



ECR Vice-President Oldřich Vlasák

OUR MEMBERS WHO LEAD NATIONAL DELEGATIONS IN THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS



Juraj Droba, Head of the Slovak Delegation

Position in Slovakia: *President of Bratislava Region*

Composition of the Slovak delegation: *9 Members and 9 Alternates*



József Ribányi, Head of the Hungarian Delegation

Position in Hungary: *Councillor in Tolna Megye County*

Composition of the Hungarian delegation: *12 members and 12 alternates*



Pavel Branda, Deputy Head of the Czech Delegation

Position in Czech Republic: *Deputy Mayor of Rádlo*

Composition of the Czech delegation: *12 members, 12 alternates*



Roberto Ciambetti, Second Vice-Chair of the Italian delegation

Position in Italy: *President of Veneto Regional Council*

Compositions of the Italian delegation: *24 members and 24 alternates*



The national delegations are active in promoting local and regional interests both within their countries and on the wider stage in the European Committee of the Regions. The delegations make numerous submissions and presentations on EU and governance-related issues reflecting the local and regional perspective of their countries at international stage. They are composed of members representing all political groups.

OUR MEMBERS WHO COORDINATE INTERREGIONAL GROUPS IN THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

→ **Carpathians Interregional Group - Władysław Ortyl (Marshal of Podkarpackie region in Poland).**

The group aims to investigate the possibility of creating a Carpathian macro-regional strategy in the mountainous region, which stretches west to east from the Czech Republic to Romania, going through Slovakia, Hungary, Serbia, Poland and Ukraine. *“By sharing best practices and working together with my colleagues from across seven countries, I believe we can help the region’s economy flourish whilst still protecting its valuable ecology and environment.”*



ECR First Vice President Władysław Ortyl chairing the Carpathians Interregional Group

→ **Interregional Group on Cross-Border Cooperation - Dr Pavel Branda (Vice-Mayor of Rádlo in the Czech Republic).**

The group aims to amplify common challenges of border regions, bringing together members from different countries and political groups with the aim of exchanging knowledge and best practice. *“37% of citizens in the EU live in cross-border areas along some 38 internal borders. Cross-border cooperation is crucial for achieving economic, social and territorial cohesion in Europe.”*



Dr Pavel Branda - Chairman of the Cross-Border Cooperation Interregional Group

Interregional groups are platforms which bring together members and alternate members of the European Committee of the Regions on a voluntary basis. They promote the exchange of views and therefore the emergence of ideas likely to enrich cooperation between local and regional authorities in the Member States and beyond.



ECR Members visiting transfer hub for Ukrainian refugees in Olkusz, Poland

EXAMPLES OF OUR IMPACT

*We helped reform the **EU Solidarity Fund**, which was set up to respond to major natural disasters, such as floods. Our recommendations, based on the hands-on experiences of local and regional authorities, helped make the following improvements:*

- **Extension of deadlines so that they correspond better to the long-lasting nature of some disasters.** Changes include the extension for the deadline for the use of the Fund to 18 months and prolonging the deadline for applications to be made to 12 weeks.
- **Allowing the Fund to be used to build resilience.** The Fund can now be used to improve or relocate affected infrastructure so that it can better withstand natural disasters in the future.
- **Recognising that essential technical expertise is part of the recovery process and allowing the Fund to cover this as part of the project costs.**

*The CoR opinion on “**Territorial Vision 2050: What future?**” by our rapporteur Oldřich Vlasák helped feed into the Member States debate on the future of EU territorial policies. As a result, a stronger territorial dimension is already in the programming for the next post-2020 period.*



Floods in the Czech Republic

KEY DATES

11-12 April 2013	The ECR Group in the European Committee of the Regions is formed and officially announced during the 100 th plenary session of the CoR. The ECR Group in the CoR adopts its Brussels Declaration.
29-30 November 2013	The first two opinions by the ECR Group Members are successfully adopted by the CoR.
20 July 2015	The ECR Group Bureau meets in Kruszwica, Poland to explore how technological solutions can be best used to optimise the performance of European cities.
20 October 2015	The ECR Group meets in Turku, Finland to analyse the role of local and regional transport connections in delivering growth and jobs.
29 January 2016	The ECR Group is organising its first Localism Conference in Budapest, Hungary to address the role of local government in delivering growth and jobs in the EU.
3 June 2016	The Group meets in Groningen, The Netherlands to analyse existing situation in public procurement, including its main obstacles and challenges, and find the best way forward.
28 April 2017	The Localism Conference focusing on cohesive development in Europe took place in Vukovar, Croatia. Members together with experts analysed how to reform the EU's Cohesion Policy.
7-8 September 2017	The ECR Group holds a strategic policy debate on "EU's relations with the Eastern Neighbourhood and the future of Europe" in Rzeszów, Poland and Lviv, Ukraine.
4 June 2018	The ECR Group held its external group meeting in London to discuss areas where structured cooperation will be needed at the local and regional level after the UK leaves the EU.
19 September 2018	The ECR Group held its first Localism Summit in Milan, bringing thinkers and leaders from government and business to discuss and explore bottom-up solutions to global trends.
7 June 2019	The ECR Group held its second Localism Summit in The Netherlands, to discuss and explore the global developments and look at the current and possible future local responses.
15 November 2019	The ECR Group organised its first ECR CoR Study Days in Venice, focusing on the topics of subsidiarity and protection of cultural heritage.
20 October 2020	The ECR Group organises a conference on tackling air pollution in European cities as part of the European Week of Regions and Cities.
19 February 2021	Our Study Days in Podkarpackie focus on the role of smart specialisation in building our regions' future and new trends in the EU budget 2021-2027.
11 June 2021	ECR-organised policy debate on the "Post-Brexit Europe – local government perspective" to discuss prospects for devolution of powers in the UK and the EU post-Brexit, and vaccine rollout on both sides of the English Channel.
12 October 2021	Workshop on "Connecting European regions: Transport policy fit for XXI century". The aim was to identify the missing links in the current European transport corridors.
5 November 2021	The ECR Group held its third Localism Summit in the Drenthe province in the Netherlands to discuss new energy opportunities for local and regional authorities.
8 April 2022	The fourth edition of the ECR Group Study Days took place in the Małopolska region in Poland and focused on the organisation of sports events by local and regional governments.
10 November 2022	The ECR Group held its forth Localism Summit in L'Aquila, capitol of Abruzzo region in Italy to discuss Natural Disasters And Demographic Decline: Challenges For Local Communities.



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