

DELEGATION MEETS WITH IRISH AMBASSADOR TO THE EU



Ambassador Bobby McDonagh accompanied by Ms. Geraldine Byrne-Nason of the Irish Permanent Representation meeting with the Irish Delegation.

During 2007, the Irish Delegation enhanced its linkages with the Irish Permanent Representation to the EU and in November met with Mr. Bobby McDonagh, Irish Ambassador to the EU. Ambassador McDonagh gave an overview of the latest Irish thinking on topical EU policy issues and discussed the EU institutions' work programmes for 2008. The meeting gave members the opportunity to highlight particular issues of interest and concern and to promote the work of the CoR. Issues discussed with the Ambassador included:

- The Reform Treaty and Referendum in Ireland
- Connecting with citizens and how to better Communicate Europe
- Consultations by the Commission ahead of the mid-term review of the EU budget in 2008-2009 particularly in relation to the CAP and Regional Policy
- Priorities in the energy efficiency and renewable energy fields

The meeting proved to be very productive and it is now planned that the Delegation will meet annually in Brussels with the Ambassador as well as continuing to receive occasional technical policy briefings from Permanent Representation personnel.

IRISH MEMBER ACTIVITY UPDATE

President of the Delegation, **Cllr. Seamus Murray** (Meath Co. Council) was rapporteur on the opinion on the Health Check on the Common Agricultural Policy and represented the CoR at multiparty conferences on this theme. Cllr. Murray, a member of the CoR Bureau is also the Admin. and Budgetary Committee rapporteur for CoR Buildings Policy and is the Delegation representative to the National Forum on Europe.

Offaly County Council member **Cllr. Connie Hanniffy** is President of ECOS commission and represents the CoR at the inter-institutional Territorial Dialogue. Cllr. Hanniffy has addressed seminars on behalf of the CoR on the Transfer of Enterprises and The Role of the Regions in the 1st European Congress on Corporate Social Responsibility. Cllr. Hanniffy is also a member of the working group on CoR communication measures.

Cllr. Denis Landy (South Tipperary County Council) is a member of the COTER (Territorial Cohesion) and RELEX (External Relations) commissions and is a Bureau member of the PES political group. Cllr. Landy also represents his political group on the National Forum on Europe.

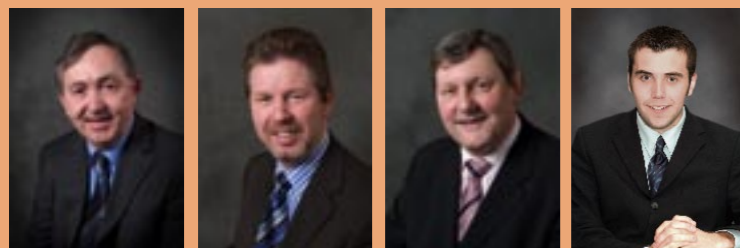
Kerry County **Councillor Paul O' Donoghue** is the President of the UEN-EA political group in the CoR is also a Vice-President of RELEX (the External Relations) commission and a member of the CoR Bureau.

Cllr. Patrick McGowan (Donegal Co. Council) is a member of the Sustainable Development (DEVE) and Territorial Cohesion (COTER) commissions and is active in policies relating to cross-border activities and fisheries. Turkey CG

Cllr. Declan McDonnell (Galway City Council) is a member of the Constitutional Affairs Commission and the Economic and Social Policy commissions. Cllr. McDonnell, a member of the CoR's governing Bureau, was the CoR rapporteur on the opinion on Volunteering – its role in economic and social cohesion. CoR-CLRAE Contact Group

Cllr. Michael Fitzgerald is also a member of South Tipperary Co. Council and is a member of the Sustainable Development (DEVE) and External Relations (RELEX) commissions.

Cllr. Cathal Crowe of Clare Co. Council; with a particular interest in education, young people and active citizenship. Cllr. Crowe is a member of the Education & Culture (EDUC) and Territorial Cohesion (COTER) commissions.



Cllr. Paul O'Donoghue Cllr. Denis Landy Cllr. Michael Fitzgerald Cllr. Cathal Crowe

IRISH DELEGATION SECRETARIAT

Patricia Potter, Director of the Dublin Regional Authority is Secretary to the Irish Delegation.

Visit the Committee of the Regions website at: www.cor.europa.eu

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CLLR. JOHN LAHART NEWLY-APPOINTED COR MEMBER FOR DUBLIN REGION



Lives - Orlagh Grange, Scholarstown Road, Rathfarnham
Age - 43

Member of South Dublin County Council and Dublin Regional Authority – Elected in 1999

Member of UEN-EA political group in the CoR
Former Special Adviser in the Department of An Taoiseach and formerly Political Adviser to
Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Labour, Trade & Consumer Affairs

Director of Potentia, a Training & Communications Company.
John also practices as a Psychotherapist/Counsellor

Political and Community Interests

Former Director of South Dublin County Enterprise Board.
Former Chairman of the Arts and Culture Strategic Policy Group of South Dublin County Council.
Former Member of County Dublin Vocational Education Committee

Political Highlight

Topping the Poll in his re-election campaign with almost 4,000 votes & post of Special Adviser in Department of An Taoiseach

Life outside of politics

Golf, Squash, Walking, Reading, Gardening

Political Priorities in the CoR

Representing priorities of the Dublin people and the region across the range of EU policy areas
Member of the COTER (Territorial Cohesion) and CONST (Constitutional Affairs Committee).

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Delegation

D i a r y

EUROPEAN UNION

COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

IRISH DELEGATION

Newsletter of the Irish Delegation to the Committee of the Regions

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ECOS COMMISSION TO MEET IN ATHLONE Seminar on Supporting Enterprise Development



Cllr. Connie Hanniffy

The Economic and Social Policy (ECOS) commission of the CoR has accepted an invitation from commission President Cllr. Connie Hanniffy and the BMW Regional Assembly to meet in Athlone on September 29-30. Planning is well underway to host ECOS members from across the 27 EU Member States in the new Sheraton Hotel. An Taoiseach Brian Cowen T.D. will officially open the accompanying seminar **on Supporting SMEs Overcome Barrier to their Development – Local and Regional Perspectives** which will include a debate on the proposed new Small Business Act for Europe. This Act will aim to unlock the growth and jobs potential of SME's and make full use of their innovative capacities. It is anticipated that speakers will include representatives from local business, Enterprise Ireland, Athlone Institute of Technology, the European

Commission, European Business representative groups etc.

Cllr. Hanniffy (Offaly Co. Council) considers it an excellent opportunity both to showcase the region to the EU visitors while at the same time providing the opportunity for exchange on issues relevant to the development of the region's enterprise potential.

Cllr. Hanniffy is very thankful for the excellent support she is receiving from the Athlone Institute of Technology, Athlone Town Council and the County Councils of the region, the Association of Irish Regions, the Athlone Chamber of Commerce and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. For the latest information on the seminar please contact the Delegation secretariat, details on back page.

DELEGATION URGES SUPPORT FOR LISBON TREATY REFERENDUM



European Commission Vice President Margot Wallstrom pictured with Irish members of the CoR and Mr. Martin Teritt – Director of the Commission's Dublin office

With the referendum set for Thursday, June 12 the Irish Delegation has urged voters to come out and support ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. In recent months the Delegation has met with Commissioner Margot Wallstrom and Minister for Europe Dick Roche T.D. amongst others to discuss aspects of the Treaty.

Cllr. Seamus Murray, President of the Irish Delegation to the CoR is all the more convinced of the need for Ireland to maintain its influence at the heart of EU and of the merits of this Treaty. While the Treaty is a long document and achieved after much negotiation, Cllr. Murray believes that the review of the EU's 'rulebook' is necessary and that it strikes the right balance from an Irish perspective.

Cllr. Murray adds that 'in essence it will in effect make the EU more efficient, more democratic and more transparent and better able to address current policy challenges like cross-border crime, climate change and energy security. At the same time, Ireland's vital interests in areas like taxation and defence are secure as they remain subject to national vetoes'.

The Treaty will have some implications for the Committee of the Regions and the local and regional authority level. Respect for regional and local self-government becomes a fundamental principle and the new protocol on services of general interest recognises the role of local and regional authorities. The CoR will have the right to bring an action to the Court of Justice of the EU in case of breaches of the subsidiarity principle. In addition, the term of the CoR will mirror that of the European Parliament.

COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS (CoR)

The CoR, established in 1994 is the advisory body in the EU legislative process that represents the views of local and regional authorities across the range of EU policy issues.

the other EU institutions, representatives of Member States and other interested parties. Opinions are developed in the six committees (or commissions) and each CoR member participates in two commissions.

The 344 CoR members from 27 Member States meet 5 times a year in plenary session in Brussels to adopt opinions and to exchange views with representatives of

Ireland has nine full members in the CoR and an equal number of alternate members with all Regional Authorities represented.

Irish Impact on EU Policy Making

CLLR. SEAMUS MURRAY STRONGLY DEFENDS IRISH INTERESTS ON CAP HEALTH CHECK

The *Health Check* is a mid-term review of the CAP from 2007-2013, a *Communication* was issued by the European Commission last November and legislative proposals are imminent. The Council of Agriculture Ministers is due to adopt proposals by the end of 2008.

In the *Communication on the Health Check*, the Commission made specific proposals in some areas, in others it suggests issues for debate. Specifically it proposes: increasing modulation by 9% with funds to go to environmental projects to deal with climate change, water management, bio-energy and biodiversity; abolishing most remaining market supports and interventions; tapering the Single Farm Payment at the higher levels and instituting a minimum level of payment.

Cllr. Seamus Murray (Meath Co. Council and Mid-East Regional Authority) was the CoR rapporteur and his opinion, as well as responding to the *Communication*, gave some perspectives on the future of the CAP post 2013. The draft opinion was developed following extensive consultations and eight meetings of the Committee. **Commissioner Mariann Fischer-Boel** attended the February plenary session when the CoR opinion was adopted and responded directly to the points emphasised by Cllr. Murray, which included:



Decisions on issues such as modulation must be made in the Member States to reflect actual needs 'on the ground'

- Need to expand milk quotas to prepare for their abolition
- CAP income supports should be focused on practising, family-farm units
- Uniform food health and safety standards for food imports as well as EU-produced food
- Need to cut unnecessary red tape for farmers, processors and authorities

- Recent reforms need to be assimilated and their effects, particularly on food quality and food security and the numbers employed in farming and food need to be assessed
- Need for a competitive EU farming sector now and into future
- Lack of knowledge by public of CAP and food issues
- The need to promote locally-grown produce and to better inform consumers, especially children about the benefits of healthy eating
- The importance of retaining a level of regional food self-sufficiency
- Clearer definition of 'rural development', now being considered a 'catch-all' for a range of environmental issues

Ireland has been a significant beneficiary under the CAP and the *Health Check* deals with issues of fundamental importance to Ireland's biggest indigenous industry. The issue is a priority in the Delegation work programme where Cllr. Murray and the other Irish members will closely monitor developments in the *Health Check*, the CAP generally and the WTO negotiations to ensure that the Irish regional viewpoint is clearly articulated and taken into consideration in Brussels.

ADULT LEARNING



Cllr. Mary Shields (Cork City Council) is the CoR rapporteur on the Action Plan on Adult Learning – with her draft opinion scheduled for adoption at the June plenary session in Brussels. One key element of the Lisbon Strategy goal for Europe to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world by 2010, is the promotion of employability and social inclusion through investment in citizens' knowledge and competence at all stages of their lives.

In the context of the Lisbon Strategy, the Commission has adopted a number of communications on adult and lifelong learning. The Action Plan on Adult Learning focuses on those who are disadvantaged because of their low literacy levels, inadequate work skills and/or skills for successful integration into society. The general objective of the Action Plan is to implement five established messages: to remove barriers to participation; to increase the quality and efficiency of the sector; to speed up the process of validation and

recognition; to ensure sufficient investment; and to monitor the sector.

The draft opinion prepared by Cllr. Shields welcomes the Action Plan, in particular the sensitive and inclusive manner in which the Commission has addressed the concept of adult learning. In terms of the non-participation in adult learning and recognition of informal learning for disadvantaged groups Cllr. Shields makes a number of suggestions on the need to use appropriate learning opportunities and learning materials and cautions against the over-reliance on new technologies. The opinion also underlines that the adult learning sector needs to recognise the diverse range of abilities and learning experiences of learners. Cllr. Shields also calls for greater financial commitment to adult learning both from the private and public sectors.

VOLUNTEERING

Cllr. Declan McDonnell (Galway City Council & West Regional Authority) is the CoR rapporteur on the opinion on Volunteering – its Contribution to Economic and Social Cohesion adopted at the February plenary session in Brussels. The request to prepare the opinion came from the European Parliament and was used as part of the preparations for a report on the issue by **Ms. Marian Harkin** MEP the Parliament rapporteur.

Volunteering covers a very wide range of activities and the draft opinion enumerates the contributions made to economies at all levels and the social benefits particularly to the most vulnerable as well as the benefits accruing to the volunteers themselves. The theme is considered under the headings of: the importance of volunteering, the lack of research and statistical data, its legal status, supporting volunteer infrastructure, its role in social cohesion, involving employers, and developing an EU dimension.

- The draft opinion made a number of specific proposals including:
- Better recognition of the value and benefit of volunteering both to society and the economy
- Removing obstacles to volunteering (such as insurance, loss of state benefits)
- Supporting volunteer infrastructure
- Better recognition for volunteering as equivalent to matching funds for EU-funded projects
- Encouraging older people to volunteer
- Support for employees doing voluntary work from within the workplace
- More comparable data needed on volunteering
- Establishing a European Year of Active Citizenship through Volunteering in 2012.

Since adoption of the opinion, Cllr. McDonnell who was assisted in drafting the opinion by Mr. Donncha Foley of the Galway Volunteering Centre, has been invited to Madrid to present his report at an international conference.



OPEN DAYS OCTOBER 2008

Partnership of Celtic Regions

OPEN DAYS – the European Week of Regions and Cities organised by the CoR and European Commission is the biggest annual gathering of EU and regional policy-makers, with over 5,000 participants expected in Brussels over October 6-9. The Brussels-based Irish Regions Office will again participate in 2008 as part of a partnership of Celtic regions, including other partners from Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, South West England, Brittany in France, Asturias and Galicia in Spain and Norte in Portugal. The four themes of this year's Open Days are:

- Innovating regions: Promoting research, technological development and innovation
- Sustainable development: Regional responses to climate change
- Cooperation and networking: Exchange of best practice in regional development
- Looking forward: A European cohesion policy for tomorrow.

For further information on attending or participating please visit the Open Days website

www.opendays.europa.eu

