

FOCUS ON THE FUTURE OF EU REGIONS AND CITIES

During European Week of Regions and Cities in Brussels, discussions mainly focused on the future roles for EU regions and cities in developing a greener, more socially integrated and smarter Europe, and fundamentally a more connected Europe. The event also saw the official launch in Belgium of Galway 2020's programme of cultural events for the year ahead.

More than 6,000 people from all over Europe and beyond gathered in Brussels in early October to discuss and debate the most important issues facing the European Regions and Cities under the banner 'Regions and Cities: Pillars of the EU's Future'.

During this annual 'European Week of Regions and Cities', cities and regions showcase their capacity to create growth and jobs, implement the EU's Cohesion Policy, and prove the importance of the local and regional level for good European governance.

This year the 17th edition of the four-day event (7-10 October) offered more than 300 sessions including workshops, participatory labs, talks on the regions, Q&As on presented themes, 'Agora Village' exhibitions and tastings from regions and cities.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The European Week of Regions and Cities is always a great opportunity for both Irish local and regional authorities to meet colleagues from other European regions. During this year's event a group of councillors from the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA), as well as the Southern Regional Assembly (SRA), attended a series of meetings and sessions in Brussels to focus on regional development.

As part of their visit the delegation met with European Commissioner for Trade Phil Hogan to take stock of ongoing negotiations around the CAP Budget and the future of European trade policy.

A meeting between county councillors and Irish MEPs also provided the delegates an opportunity to discuss matters of common interest, with a particular focus on the continuing Cohesion Policy negotiations. Panels were also held by Irish stakeholders, around solidarity and volunteering, healthy aging, sustainable energy transition and circular economy.

GALWAY 2020 SHOWCASED IN BRUSSELS

An Irish cultural element was also very evident on the second day of the event on 8 October.

Following a panel debate on the impact of the Capitals of Culture on regional development, a reception was hosted by Galway 2020 and the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA), to launch the Galway 2020 official programme of cultural events, scheduled to take place throughout next year.



Councillors from the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA), and the Southern Regional Assembly (SRA) met with Phil Hogan, European Commissioner for Trade, to discuss ongoing negotiations around the CAP Budget and the future of European trade policy.



Pictured at the official launch of Galway 2020 programme in Brussels (l-r): Cllr Mike Cubbard, Mayor of Galway City; Danielle Neyts; Tourism Ireland in Belgium, Patricia Philbin, CEO of 'Galway 2020'; Cllr Declan McDonnell, Galway City Council; Helena Nolan, Ambassador of Ireland to Belgium; Phil Hogan, European Commissioner for Trade; and Cllr Jimmy McClearn, Cathaoirleach of Galway County Council. ©Bernard De Keyzer

Galway 2020 will be the largest and most complex cultural event to be undertaken on the island of Ireland. Over 1,900 events will take place across 154 projects and 170 partnerships, in addition to collaborations with local, national, European and international artists and cultural organisations from over 30 different countries .

Special guest of honour, European Commissioner for Trade Phil Hogan and Irish Ambassador to Belgium, Helena Nolan, joined Galway 2020 in celebrating the year ahead. Commissioner Phil Hogan said, “Galway is a county of music, languages and festivals where arts and culture are considered the most valuable currency of all. So, I am certain Galway 2020 will be a great success and that every visitor to the City of Tribes will have a wonderful experience in the year ahead.”

RICHNESS AND DIVERSITY OF CULTURE

Patricia Philbin, Chief Executive of Galway 2020, thanked the Commissioner and the NWRA, adding, “The European Capital of Culture designation will reflect the richness and diversity of Galway’s culture and history while strengthening Galway and Ireland’s connection with Europe and the European family. We look forward to welcoming people to Galway during 2020 and assure them of a Céad Míle Fáilte.”

The Vice-President of the European Parliament and representatives from former European Capitals of Culture shared their thoughts with Galway 2020’s Head of Programme, Marilyn Gaughan Reddan, on culture as a force for collaboration among regions and cities.

The launch of Galway 2020 in Brussels was supported by Tourism Ireland as part of its programme of promotions to highlight the island of Ireland to its ‘culturally curious’ audience in Belgium. Tourism Ireland’s message is that Galway 2020 will offer Belgian holidaymakers a unique cultural and artistic experience.

Danielle Neyts, Tourism Ireland Belgium, said: “We’re delighted to announce Galway 2020 here in Belgium and to highlight the city as European Capital of Culture next year. Tourism Ireland’s message for our ‘culturally curious’ audience is that the island of Ireland offers world-class festivals and cultural experiences.”

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

The European Week of the Regions and Cities also marked the 136th Plenary Session of the Committee of the Regions, during which the opinion of Cllr Eamon Dooley from Offaly County Council, entitled ‘Research Infrastructures – the Future of the European Research Area (ERA) from a Regional and Cross-border Perspective’, was adopted.

Having received the unanimous vote at the Plenary, Cllr Dooley’s opinion outlined that research infrastructures are critical for regional development and competitiveness, extending from scientific output to the impact on educational ecosystems, as well as for combating global challenges linked to climate and the environment.

He pointed out that specific funding models are required across the whole Research and Innovation (R&I) lifecycle to



The opinion of Cllr Eamon Dooley from Offaly County Council – ‘Research Infrastructures: the Future of the European Research Area (ERA) from a Regional and Cross-border Perspective’ – was adopted at the 136th Plenary Session of the Committee of the Regions.

address funding gaps where European, national or other funding sources are insufficient.

SPECIFIC FUNDING MODELS NEEDED

“This could include more creative use of funds from structural funds, Horizon Europe and loans from the European Investment Bank, as well as Erasmus, Digital Europe, COSME, the Connecting Europe Facility, LIFE and other instruments, potentially using a co-funding model with national research funds,” he added

“To address grand challenges such as climate change, research infrastructures must be capable of integrating with those of neighbouring regions, thus creating greater knowledge-sharing and contributing to interdisciplinary research,” he noted.

“R&I policy must be linked with the development and implementation of smart specialisation strategies, as these are innovative approaches to boosting economic growth, job creation based on identified regional needs, linking and involving regions in R&I activities. ”



Pictured at the official launch of Galway 2020 programme in Brussels (l-r): NWRA’s David Minton and Brendan Mooney; Cllr Donal Gilroy, Sligo County Council; Cllr Orla Leydon, Roscommon County Council; Gerry Doyle, NWRA; Cllr Donal Lyons, Galway City Council; Cllr Mike Cubbard, Mayor of Galway City; Patricia Philbin; Cllr David Maxwell, Monaghan County Council; Cllr Joe Sheridan, Galway County Council; Cllr Jimmy McClearn, Galway County Council; and Cllr Jack Murray, Donegal County Council. ©Bernard De Keyzer