

DRAFT: Cllr Michael Murphy Speech for Committee on European Affairs

Dear members of the Joint Committee on EU Affairs,

Dear fellow members of the European Committee of the Regions,

Dear President Tzitzikostas,

I would like to thank my colleague, Chair Joe McHugh and the Committee for facilitating and hosting us this morning. It is a pleasure and a privilege to be here.

As Head of the Irish Delegation to the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), I am delighted to give a 'Cead Mile Failte' to my dear friend President Tzitzikostas and to thank him for taking the time to visit Ireland.

Dear Apostolos, I want to from the outset reiterate your call for a reformed Europe built from the bottom-up on a model of a European House of Democracy. Thank you President Tzitzikostas for your words of solidarity on this week's worrying developments regarding the Northern Ireland Protocol.

I want to state, on the record, on behalf of the Irish Delegation to the CoR, our complete opposition to the decision taken by the UK to table legislation disapplying core elements of the Protocol. As stated by Vice President Sefcovic, unilateral action damages mutual trust. I am calling for a calm and measured joint approach to addressing any outstanding issues with the protocol. Protecting peace on this island is paramount.

[Note: The President's speech will in principle have four distinctive policy areas: 1) Russian aggression against Ukraine and EU responses including the formal launch during the June plenary session of the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine 2) Conference and the Future of Europe and the delegation of CoR and LRA affiliates 3) European House of Democracy and three-dimensional vision 4) EU-UK relations and the impact of Brexit on Ireland in particular]

In the CoR, I sit, along with President Tzitzikostas, in the European People's Party Group, the largest political group in the CoR.

President Tzitzikostas often reminds us of the following and I must reiterate it here now - local and regional authorities implement 70% of all EU legislation and they

represent **half of public employment, more than a half of public investment and a third of public spending**. The CoR is the EU institution which is closest to European citizens. Sometimes it is forgotten that we are the second of only two EU institutions with elected members so with a clear democratic legitimacy!

Since the start of this mandate in February 2020, I have had the privilege to lead the work of one of the legislative committees of the CoR – as the Chair of the Economic Policy commission.

ECON has examined legislative proposals from the European Commission on the implementation of Free Trade Agreements, the Brexit Adjustment Reserve, the Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act to only mention a few of our reports and sent on to the co-legislators – to influence, colleagues, to impact laws that take account of regional and local assets and challenges.

I would like to take as an example the work of my recently adopted opinion for which I was Rapporteur entitled **“Strengthening the EU-UK relationship at subnational level and remedying the territorial impact of the UK's withdrawal from the EU”**.

There was much concern from local authorities across Europe how the UK exit from the EU would impact their regions. On the UK side, what I found wasn't the same, tired political rhetoric we are hearing day and night from Westminster, rather the opposite. I heard stories of genuine concern about the future relationship and also a real desire to work with Irish and EU local and regional authorities to ensure the smoothest and safest transition for their regions.

I have copies of this opinion with me and would be delighted to take you through it bilaterally (note: raise hard copies of the opinion printed around the time of the first PPA meeting).

I raise this example, not only to illustrate what is being done at a local level, but what can be done.

There are huge opportunities for Ireland, for our communities, for our citizens. But we need support. Support for Local Authorities.

We are very lucky to have the Irish Regions European Office in Brussels, which acts as a bridge between Irish local and regional government and the EU, explaining and guiding its stakeholders through the Brussels scene and promoting Irish interests and best practices at the European level. This includes strong networks, place-based networks with regional offices representing large swathes of Europe, that often have legislative powers and fiscal autonomy for certain areas of competence.

So, I believe more can be done at local level. We all know the benefits which having a European officer in each Local and Regional authority would have. An example of what can happen when supports are given is Chair Joe McHugh's own constituency of Donegal.

Donegal County Council has installed a full time European Office. The same can be said for Cork City Council and Limerick City and County Council.

So, I'm here today to call on the Committee to support the allocation of funding for European officers in Local and Regional authorities across the country and ensure that Ireland is not only shaping and engaging in Europe, not only at a national level, but at a local level!

Before handing over to my colleague Cllr Kate Feeney, who will outline in more detail the work of the Irish Delegation, I wish to conclude by paying tribute to my CoR colleagues – the Members and Alternates in the Irish Delegation to the CoR. It is a genuine pleasure to lead this group of dedicated public representatives, who are working tirelessly in Brussels on behalf of local communities of Ireland.

And I invite the Joint Committee to Brussels to see, first hand, the work of the Irish Delegation in the Committee of the Regions.

Go raibh mile a maith agat.

(964 words in total approximately)

Notes

Dear colleagues, across our European Union, there are **41 national chambers of parliament, 74 regional legislative assemblies, and 280 regions and 80 000 local authorities.**

On the SDGs, the OECD estimates that local and regional authorities are essential for the realization of 65% of the SDGs. Only a collective effort of all these actors will ensure the successful implementation of the Agenda 2030.