REGIONS & CITIES

RUSSKIY MIR: A REPORT FROM MINI RUSSIA INSIDE THE EU

WHAT FEDERALISTS THINK OF EUROPEAN SEPARATISM

SEPARATISM
Making Europe stronger?

THE LEGACY OF JOHANNES HAHN
A CHANGE OF GUARD IN THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

SCOTLAND, CATALONIA BOOST INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENTS IN EUROPE
It is October 2014. Europe is still digesting Scotland’s recent referendum on independence.

Scots ultimately decided to remain in their 307-year union with the rest of the UK. But it sparked quite a conversation. And the promises made in the run-up to the vote could lead to change across the board; in Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The prospect that a part of the UK – a major EU member state – could simply break off and become a new country attracted headlines worldwide and inspired regionalist and separatist movements elsewhere.

But the independence question is not finished. Soon all eyes will be on Catalonia, the Spanish region up for a consultative referendum on independence on 9 November.

What does this bout of separatism mean for the European Union? Will it strengthen or weaken integration?

It will certainly give regional representatives something extra to talk about as they gather for this year’s Open Week in Brussels. EUobserver Magazine takes a look at some of the issues.

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SEPARATISM – MAKING EUROPE STRONGER?

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EUobserver is an independent online newspaper which values free thinking and plain speech. We aim to support European democracy by giving people the information they need to hold the EU establishment to account.

HIGH QUALITY JOURNALISM

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New EU regional aid rules have inbuilt ‘tensions’

New rules governing how EU is spent have already resulted in better thought-out projects, says the European Commission, but local politicians grumble that they continue to drown in red tape. By: 
Honor Mahony

how EU aid money is spent HAVE already resulted in better thought-out projects, says the European Commission, but local politicians grumble that they continue to drown in red tape.

In place for the 2014-2020 budget period, the revamped system links regional aid money (€325bn over the seven years) to sound economic governance and requires projects to slot in with the EU’s long-term economic goals.

EU regional affairs commissioner Johannes Hahn says there has been a “clear shift” in funding priorities towards energy efficiency, social inclusion and a low carbon economy.

Lithuania, for example, will see 50 percent of its €8bn programme (€6.8bn from the EU and €1.2bn from Lithuania itself) spent on achieving a low-carbon economy.

THE RULES REMAIN COMPLICATED

But discussions between Brussels and member states are slow as both the EU and regional bureaucracies adjust to focussing not on whether the money has been spent – this has led to not-always-useful roads and airports being built in the past – but on whether it has been spent well. Lithuanian finance minister Rimantas Sadzius summed the negotiations up as being “long and very difficult at times”.

And while the aims of cohesion funding have become more structured, the rules remain complicated.

Garrett Duin, North Rhine-Westphalia’s economy minister, noted that when he cut down on the number of people involved in working on EU regional aid, he fell foul of EU rules.

“We had 100 people on the administration of [cohesion policy]. It looked like a plan for a nuclear plant,” he said at a Brussels conference in September.

“We cut it to 10 people for the new programming period. The EU commission then came along and said ‘you need to provide 50 interim liaison points’. So I have just cut the number of posts and now we have to increase them again.”

Alberto Nunez-Feijoo, president of Galicia, said the simplification issue was on “everyone’s intray”.

The other issue on everyone’s intray is what so-called ‘macro-economic conditionality’ will mean in practice, with critics fearing that regions risk getting punished for bad behaviour by the central government.

Nunez-Feijoo urged “flexibility” in how the rules are interpreted but Jyrki Katainen, who is to be a powerful vice-president in the incoming EU commission, noted that “if the macro-economic situation is weak, then investments for the future don’t bear fruit”.

The two comments reflect the broader debate in Europe about the merits of constant deficit-cutting.

THERE ARE TENSIONS IN THE SYSTEM

The European Parliament has said it will keep a close eye on how they are implemented.

Iskra Mihaylova, head of the EP’s regional affairs committee, said deputies will ensure “the interests of the regions are protected”.

Meanwhile, experts are sceptical about the feasibility of tying EU aid to good economic governance.

Professor Iain Begg of the London School of Economics notes that the specific policy recommendations given by the commission as part of the EU’s budgetary semester are sometimes highly controversial - such as pension reforms in Latvia or structural reforms in Italy.

“I see real difficulty in translating the macro-economic governance and sound economic governance into the application of cohesion policy. There are tensions in the system.”
"e-Skills for Jobs 2014" is a cross sector, multi-stakeholder pan-European campaign, promoted by the European Commission and the Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs. The campaign comprises hundreds of national and European events, concerted rallying of political and business leader support and widespread social media marketing and PR aiming at reaching more than 60 million people in Europe.

Making young people aware of the link between having and maintaining digital skills and accessing jobs is essential to address the shortage of information and communication technology professionals.

Despite stagnating economic growth and high unemployment rates, the demand for digital jobs in Europe is continuously growing. Researchers estimate that, in 2015, about 509,000 vacancies for digital jobs will not be filled due to lack of suitable candidates. And this figure may reach almost a million by 2020.

DIGITALEUROPE and European Schoolnet are running the campaign. More than 600 private sector companies, NGOs and government bodies across 30 European countries are engaged in “e-Skills for Jobs 2014”.
EU regional projects see ‘encouraging’ shift in focus after rules change

As he finishes up his mandate as EU regional affairs commissioner, Johannes Hahn reckons his “legacy” is getting member states to spend money on the real economy rather than hulking infrastructure projects. By: Honor Mahony

As he finishes up his mandate as EU regional affairs commissioner, Johannes Hahn says his “legacy” is getting member states to spend money on the real economy rather than hulking infrastructure projects.

Under his watch, rules governing how regional aid money - running to €325 billion between 2014-2020 - is spent were given a shake-up to encourage projects in line with the EU’s long-term economic goals.

Adopted in December, the new rules have already resulted in a big decrease in spending on traditional infrastructure - such as roads - and a leap in spending on green and ICT projects.

“We see a clear shift from investment in infrastructure towards stimulation of the “real” economy,” Hahn told EUobserver, adding that this is “encouraging”.

“I like to think [of this] as a legacy of my time as commissioner for this policy.”

Analysis by late September of the plans of various regions has showed that there was a 22 percent rise in spending (to €125bn) on projects dedicated to research & development, innovation, ICT, small businesses, and low-carbon economy compared to the last budget cycle (2007-2013).

Spending on transport and other major infrastructure has sunk by 21 percent, to €60bn, while member states such as Belgium, Croatia, Italy, Portugal, and the UK have made helping small companies a priority.

On energy security and green projects specifically, the chunk of aid money has more than doubled to €38 billion.

RED TAPE ALSO IN THE MEMBER STATES

Hahn notes that while the more stringent rules mean that getting spending programmes agreed is more time-consuming, the “insistence” on focussing on what results will be achieved rather than just whether money will be spent is “very valuable”.

“Member states will have to spell out what they want to achieve and by when, and be monitored whether those results are there,” he says.

And while he admits that the rules are still complicated - or not simplified “as much as we might have wished” - leading to grumbling by some local authorities, he says member states themselves are just as much to blame.

“Many layers of red tape come from member states themselves – what we call ‘gold-plating’, and it is too easy to blame this on the so-called “Brussels bureaucracy”.

On tying funds to good economic governance - a controversial innovation to the rules - Hahn said stopping EU aid because a member state is fiscally misbehaving would be a “last resort”, but underlines that “investments will deliver more in the context of budgetary discipline”.

“We are not talking about punishment but rather about an incentive to maintain financial and budgetary discipline so that funds can deliver for citizens.”

The Austrian politician, who is due to take over the European neighbourhood policy dossier from November, declines to give advice to his successor candidate, Romania’s Corina Crețu.

But he does suggest that, in future, GDP - or how rich a region is - should not be the only criteria for determining whether it should qualify for EU money.

“Other measures such as innovation performance could be taken into account,” he says, indicating that being a forward-looking region with clever ideas should be enough for a shot at EU aid.
Regarded & Cities 2014

SCOTLAND, CAT. INDEPENDENCE MOV

The energetic pro-independence campaigns in Scotland and Catalonia are an inspiration for other pro-independence movements in Europe.

By Valentin

The pro-independence referendum in Scotland might have failed and the upcoming public consultation in Catalonia may be illegal under Spanish law, but their energetic campaigns have inspired movements elsewhere, says Gunther Fritz Dauwen, director of the European Free Alliance.

Dauwen said the mood around separatism has evolved since his organisation was established over 30 years ago.

“What we see is certainly a boost in the self-confidence of more and more movements and parties. There is also a surge in press attention, so that’s a good thing for us.”

While some independence parties - like the ones in Scotland and Catalonia - may be left-wing, other parties, like the Bayernpartei in Bavaria or the N-VA in Flanders are right-wing. Getting along is not always a given, but it works as long as certain principles are upheld.

“We are civic nationalists, inclusive nationalists, we draw a red line when it comes to violence, racism and xenophobia,” Dauwen said.

The far-right Italian party Lega Nord, which unilaterally declared the independence of Padania, was expelled from EFA in the 1980s “because they turned towards a racist xenophobe discourse and there we drew a clear line”.

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Meanwhile, not all parties want their part of the country to become an independent state. “We have more or less three clusters. We have one cluster of parties who only want to be recognised as a minority. The Macedonian minority in Greece and Bulgaria are claiming that. They are not asking for autonomy or independence. Then you have the Breton and the Occitans who claim autonomy, but not independence. And the third category is that of parties who want independence - the Catalan, the Scots, the Basque party, N-VA, the Sardinians,” Dauwen said.

He noted that in the recent EU elections, EFA’s ranks swelled from seven to 12 MEPs, reflecting the rising popularity of these movements. The EFA group sits together with Green MEPs in the European Parliament.

“The group’s current priority is to have meetings with the incoming presidents of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, and the European Council, Donald Tusk. “We did so in 2005 with [commission chief Jose Manuel] Barroso and with [council chief Herman] Van Rompuy in 2010. We explained to them that if they continue to ignore regions and stateless nations, then it’s actually the European institutions themselves who are promoting independentism,” Dauwen said.

He gave the example of Catalonia which wants to have Catalan recognised as an official EU language, something not possible because the EU only accepts official languages of states.

“If Andorra tomorrow becomes a member of the EU, with 200,000 inhabitants, they will be a state, with an official language, which is Catalan. That motivates them [the Catalans] to become a state,” Dauwen said.

But overall, the EFA does not necessarily stand for regions breaking away from bigger states, so much as for power being acted out at the most local level possible. “What we are pushing for is subsidiarity, which is an EU principle. And a federal approach,” Dauwen said.
Better together – a new hope for a federal Europe

The Scottish referendum presents a new hope for a better, united, federal Europe.

By Peter Oomsels
Vice-president of the Young European Federalists

The victory of the No in the referendum on Scotland’s independence has saved the United Kingdom. However, It is clear that post-referendum UK will be different from pre-referendum UK.

This is because, after promises of further devolution of competences made by Westminster, the Scottish No to independence can only be interpreted as a choice for more subsidiarity and more autonomy.

In other words, the Scots were presented with, and have chosen, a more federal United Kingdom.

The path of federalism in the UK brings hope for the discussion on future integration in the European Union.

Contrary to how it is often portrayed, especially by British euroseptics, (European) federalism combines two principles of governance.

On the one hand it stresses the democratic legitimacy of European decision-making in its conviction that central governments should only exert those powers which cannot be exerted effectively by local governments (subsidiarity).

On the other hand, federalists believe that strength lies in union, and that every government of that union - thus also the central one - should be efficient, effective and endowed with full democratic legitimacy.

FORCES OF GLOBALISATION

The forces of globalisation oblige traditional nation states to constantly search for the right balance between those two principles of subsidiarity and stronger union.

For federalists, European integration is therefore not necessarily about ‘more Europe’, but about ‘better Europe’, which means ensuring that democracy and government work well on all levels.

So it is not paradoxical to claim that independence movements can be drivers for a better European Union. It is only when existing state structures fail to acknowledge legitimate demands for such autonomy that problems may arise.

Indeed, much wariness (rightly) exists about independence movements as they are all too often driven by populism or used as a pretext for nationalism or thinly veiled racism.

As such, the UK did well in its choice for federalism: it is acknowledging the Scottish demand for more regional autonomy while maintaining the strength that lies in their union.

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Now Scots must make sure that they get the autonomy that they were promised; while at the same time ensuring that they stay within the even bigger union (EU).

UK leaders who made the case for a federal Britain should now have the intellectual honesty to make the case for a federal European Union as well.

The Scottish experience has shown two things: it has demonstrated that the case for federalism is much stronger than the case for secession, and that the case for federalism is much stronger than the case for centralism. The same logic applies to the EU.

Much like the UK, the EU is ‘better together’ because it draws strength from its ‘unity in diversity’, necessitating a strong European government (especially for the eurozone).

At the same time, such unity cannot and should not exist without democratically legitimate and strong local, regional, national and European governments.

This is exactly what federalism offers to Europe today, and the newly found understanding of that perspective is precisely why the Scottish referendum presents a new hope for a better, united, federal Europe.
YES, IT IS TIME!
PEOPLES ARE DECIDING

YES, Peoples decide

We, the European Free Alliance (EFA), live in historic times. Across Europe ancient nations, peoples and regions, currently under the jurisdiction of various states, are increasingly calling for either enhanced autonomy or outright independence, and all the benefits that go with bringing decision-making power back home.

Scotland and Catalonia, because of the success of their pro-independence parties and most importantly the overwhelming support of their people, now have the opportunity to decide on their future and whether they want to become sovereign, independent states.

YES, EFA is on YOUR side

We fully support the SNP and ERC and the restoration of Scotland’s and Catalonia’s independence.

EFA is the only European Political party that strives for the right of self-determination.

YES for Self-determination

EFA has always advocated self-determination, and the right to speak and protect native and historic languages. Nations in the EFA family are advancing on the road to full independence and a place at the EU top table. They currently lack the normal status and representation that member states automatically enjoy in Europe.

That is why EFA highlights the benefits of proper representation for the stateless nations and peoples of Europe, and fully supports the vision for Scotland and Catalonia as a normal, independent, Member State of the EU.

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Russkiy Mir in the EU

Autonomy is not interesting to Russians in Latvia because it won’t solve their poverty: A report on mini-Russia inside the European Union.

By: Andrew Rettman

Welcome to Latgale in south-east Latvia: If there is any EU region which looks like a soft target for Russian-manufactured separatism, this is it.

The street names may be in Latvian, but most people - more than 70 percent in the regional capital Daugavpils - are of Russian origin. They lived here for generations or they were shipped in by Stalin. Older residents speak only Russian. Old and young consume only Russian media, read Russian history books, go to see Russian plays, and celebrate Russian holidays.

But they cannot get a Latvian passport, or vote, unless they learn Latvian. Their children can do only half their classes in their mother tongue and their MPs are locked out of ruling coalitions. Meanwhile, the countryside is littered with skeletons of Soviet-era factories.

Miroslav Mitrofanov - who was born in Latgale and who co-chairs Latvia’s second biggest Russian-Latvian party, the PCTVL - says neglect by Riga and the EU means 20 percent have left in search of jobs.

We feel like “second-class people”

We feel like “second-class people” Russian media was never kind to Latvia. But since the Ukraine war, Latgalens hear on TV that EU-backed “neo-Nazis” are slaughtering Russians in east Ukraine and that Latvia is sponsoring “a rebirth of fascism”.

They also hear that Russian leader Vladimir Putin is ready to protect the “Russkiy Mir”. The phrase, which means “Russian World”, refers to ethnic Russians inside or outside Russia, but it also refers to a resurgent myth: that the Russian civilisation is unique and destined for greatness.

For his part, Konstantin Dolgov, a senior Russian diplomat, in a speech in Riga in September claimed Latvia will shortly “liquidate” Russian language schools.

At the same time, Latvian security police says Moscow is working with at least 12 NGOs or fringe parties in Latvia - some of which have demanded Latgalen autonomy - in what it calls the “most significant threat to [Latvia’s] constitutional order”.

Protesters have four times in recent months marched round Riga with Russian and Ukrainian rebel flags.

Latgalen residents have also told Latvian TV the Russian embassy in Riga is helping people go to Ukraine to fight for Russia.
The police is investigating three men, two from Latgale, who did go. They raided homes in connection with the case and found small arms. Mitrofanov himself went to observe the Crimea “referendum” on independence in March.

He says he saw no signs of Russian coercion, adding: “We sympathise with those who are close to us in language and culture ... If Ukraine develops the same way that Latvia has been developing since its independence in 1991, Russian speakers in Ukraine will be marginalised the same way we’ve been marginalised”.

**UKRAINE SCENARIO IMPOSSIBLE**

But even if Latgale looks like a soft target, Latvian authorities say it is not. “We live in times when any provocation cannot be excluded, but a ‘Ukrainian’ scenario for Latvia is impossible”, its foreign minister, Edgars Rinkevics, says.

“We have witnessed some pro-Russian organisations trying to provoke Latvian society. Those attempts were not successful”, she says.

If they are right, then why does the Russkiy Mir hold so little appeal?

Andis Kudors, a Latvian academic who specialises in Russian soft power, says the reasons are mostly economic.

In Ukraine, public institutions were dysfunctional and insolvent. Elderly people in Crimea, for instance, had lousy pensions compared to Russia. But Latvia is better governed and offers more opportunities.

“I was born in Latgale and this idea of autonomy is impossible”, Kudors says.

“Even with the social problems in the region, there are no radicals who would fight to be part of Russia because people know that Russian living conditions, especially outside St Petersburg or Moscow, are much worse”.

His spokesman, Karlis Eihenbaums, notes that some Russian-Latvian activists have a new air of menace: “They don’t say it openly, but you can feel it: ‘If you don’t fulfill our dreams than Crimea-type things can happen here’.”

But he points out the pro-Russia protests got almost no support. “If you can gather 40 or 50 people in a city of 1 million, that’s nothing”, he says, referring to Riga, also a majority Russian-Latvian town.

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Nils Usakovs, the mayor of Riga and the head of Latvia’s largest Russian-Latvian party, Saskanas Centrs, says the same.

Asked if any Russian-Latvians would like to live under Putin, he replies: “No. I don’t think so”.

His main concern about the Ukraine war is not that it will deepen divisions in Latvia, but that EU-Russia sanctions will hurt local businesses.

“As in any country, the unhappy ones are people with low income, with lack of social security and healthcare, with insecurity about tomorrow. That doesn’t depend on their nationality”, he says.

Even Mitrofanov agrees.

He warned that if incomes or language rights erode in the coming years then “people’s mood might change”.

But he distanced himself from Dolgov, saying the Russian diplomat’s claim about liquidation of Russian schools is “not true.”

“Autonomy is not interesting to Russians in Latgale because it won’t solve their problems, the poverty”, he adds.

**MORAL DIMENSION**

The economy is not everything, however.

For Kudors, one side of life in Latgale’s mini-Russia is that Russian-Latvians there feel “happy, confident” in their identity despite the horror stories on Russian TV.

Mitrofanov noted that after 23 years of living together, there is a “moral” dimension to Russian-Latvian society in the country.

“We feel that we are Latvians, even if in our native language and culture we feel that we are Russians”, he says.

“We see our future in the next 50 years as coming closer together. In Finland there is a Swedish minority, but Swedish is an official language and Swedish people have the same opportunities as Finns at all levels of society. We want to build Finland in Latvia”, he adds.

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London’s forgotten city siblings

Will English cities gain new powers from a new UK devolution settlement? That is one question following the Scottish referendum. By: Benjamin Fox

Will English cities gain new powers from a new UK devolution settlement? That is one question following the Scottish referendum.

A popular line among independence campaigners was that Scotland had been getting poorer as its neighbours in the south got richer. That similar claims could also be made by England’s northern cities has thrust the idea of English devolution into the political mainstream.

Across the rest of Europe, France is the only country whose economic fortunes are as tied to the success of its capital as the UK.

In previous generations, England’s northern cities such as Manchester, Leeds, and Sheffield or Birmingham in the midlands, were industrial powerhouses. Now they are poorer in per capita terms than the country’s average, and have higher unemployment rates than the average.

The financial crisis and subsequent recession also had a markedly different impact on London and the
rest of the UK. Despite being the country’s financial services hub, employment in London actually increased, albeit by a mere 0.2 percent, between 2008 and 2010, compared to a 2.5 percent reduction across the UK.

Elsewhere, 80 percent of the new private sector jobs created between 2010 and 2012 were in London, while the UK’s next nine largest cities accounted for just 10 percent of net private sector jobs created.

For a country whose population is so heavily concentrated in its cities, this disparity seems hard to justify. In the north of England, less than 65 kilometres covers Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, Liverpool and Bradford and around 10 million people.

FROM WHITEHALL TO TOWN HALLS

Researchers say that the answer is to beef up the powers of local authorities and regions and loosen the grip of central government. A report by the Institute for Public Policy Research (“Decentralising Decade”), identifies 40 different functions of government that it says should be devolved from London’s Whitehall to town halls.

For example, local governments do not have powers to set local property or business tax rates and have little control over planning policy or local infrastructure projects. Most infrastructure projects are directed from Westminster.

Business and political leaders at city and county level – including in London – argue that excessive centralisation is holding them back, particularly in promoting skills, infrastructure and economic development.

But some are starting to realise that working together will make them stronger.

In 2011 the 10 local councils covering the area in and around Manchester created a combined authority which took over transport and planning policy.

UK POLITICS IN A STATE OF FLUX

The crucial difference between the demands of regions and cities and those of Scotland and Wales is that they are demanding economic rather than political devolution. Tony Blair’s Labour government abandoned the idea of creating regional assemblies in the early 2000s because of low public support.

Local government in the UK, particularly in England, has been gradually stripped of its powers over the past generation. It will take a decade to see the effects of any policy changes.

But the Scottish referendum has thrown UK politics into a state of flux, creating an opportunity to reshape the relationship between its regions, cities and the centre.
AER Business Community

The AER Business Community aims at placing companies in connection with the regional authorities, while business can lend their expertise and share their vision in their field of knowledge. This Assembly acts as a hub for companies within the wide regional network.

AER is proud to welcome the company "Innovator LLC" as a new co-founder of its Business Community. "Innovator LLC" is an experienced systems integrator in the broadcasting and telecommunication industry. All projects designed in "Innovator LLC" are on a tailor made basis, from single equipment for small school studio to complex broadcasting system installation for public television or governments.

Innovator became an AER Business Partner in September 2014

Interested in joining companies such as Brussels Airlines, Accor, Volvo, Unicap and BNP Paribas Fortis in the AER Business Community? Check out the AER website!

The Assembly of European Regions is the largest independent network of regions in wider Europe. Bringing together regions from 35 countries and 15 interregional organisations, AER is the political voice of its members and a forum for interregional cooperation.
GLASGOW: Ahead on Roma inclusion

Glasgow is often held up as an example of how to integrate Roma communities, but social workers say this has nothing to do with an EU-funded project active there. By: Valentina Pop

Compared to Edinburgh with its pretty castles and open golf courses, Glasgow is a whole different story. Spread out along the river Clyde, Scotland’s second largest city has a distinctly working-class feel to it.

In the southern area of Govanhill, you can shop for fruit in Arab shops, listen to Roma accords on the street and get your car washed in a Pakistani-run garage. Over 50 languages are spoken in the roughly 15,000 strong community. Some 4,000 of its residents are Roma, mostly from Slovakia and the Czech Republic, but increasingly also from Romania.

It is a melting pot. But sometimes it “feels like a doomed place for vulnerable people, exposing them to exploitation,” says Katarina Zborovianova, a social worker who tells of women sorting potatoes for 12 hours at a time, leaving their hands numb and swollen.

Zborovianova, a Slovak national who works for a local charity in Glasgow, the Crossroads Youth and Community Association, says that economic exploitation underpinned the first mass arrivals of Czech and Slovak Roma in Govanhill, back in 2005.

“They paid overpriced rents and were taken to factories by bus for which they also had to pay. They were charged even for uniforms. So there was a vicious circle of dependence, because they were not earning enough and had all these debts accumulating,” Zborovianova says.

ROMANET PROJECT TWINNING TEN EU CITIES

In the meantime, however, the situation has improved. Over 40 organisations work with the local community in Govanhill to provide counselling, English courses, and training so that people can find jobs, send their kids to school and integrate.

Glasgow is now held up as an example for how to integrate Roma communities. It is part of the RomaNet project, which twins 10 EU cities also working on integrating Europe’s largest minority.

“There are lots of activities in Govanhill, different organisations have different ways of interacting, but local authorities are now connected to these grassroots activities through RomaNet,” says Ann Hyde, the lead expert for the project.

She admits that it will “take a long time” to change mentalities and get all the recommendations implemented by local authorities.

But she notes that the network helps because it shows municipalities in Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic how inclusive policies work in Spanish or Scottish cities.

Other social workers, however, grumble that more money should be allowed to trickle down to where it is most needed rather than being spent on local officials travelling to meetings to exchange good practices.

“There are a lot of good projects at local level, charities and organisations do co-operate. But this has nothing to do with RomaNet,” says Eva Kourova, a Roma youth project leader for the West of Scotland Regional Equality Council.

Her colleague from Slovakia, Marcela Adamova, who founded Friends of Romano Lav (Roma Voice), a charity fighting discrimination, added that participation in RomaNet meetings was restricted to Glasgow council members, while local officials from other countries did bring along social workers.

They both agreed, however, that life for Roma in Glasgow is better than in the villages back home, where local authorities have been known to build walls and put Roma children in schools for the mentally disabled.
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European climate action needs a better label

On 23 and 24 October 2014, the EU's Heads of State will determine Europe's future action to avoid dangerous global temperature rise. At this important hour, it is expected that they will decide to reduce Europe's domestic greenhouse gas emissions by 40% below 1990 levels by 2030. Yet, a gigantic amount of surplus emission allowances in the current climate policy casts a dark shadow over this target. Without immediate and urgent action, the surplus could be directly transformed into future rights to pollute and cause that the actual emissions reductions under a 40% target may be as low as 26%.

The loopholes have been largely caused by a giant amount of excess allowances that has accumulated in both of Europe's existing climate instruments. In total, weak targets and international offsets will lead to a surplus of 4 billion emission allowances equivalent to 14% of the EU's reduction effort by 2030.

To drive Europe's regions on a sustainable economic pathway that delivers transformational change requires our emission reductions to reach 80 to 95% by 2050. To achieve this our leaders need to protect the 40% target and prevent the surplus emission allowances from slowing Europe's future ambition.

For more information visit: www.carbonmarketwatch.org/eu2030-loopholes

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2030 CO$_2$ reduction target 40%
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Question marks over the future of Spain

The day after Scotland voted to stay in the UK, Catalan leader Artur Mas promised to hold a similar referendum on 9 November. But despite the forward momentum, questions remain over the future of Catalonia and Spain. By: Andrew Rettman

The day after Scotland voted to stay in the UK, Catalan leader Artur Mas promised to hold a similar referendum on 9 November. But despite the forward momentum, questions remain over the future of Catalonia and Spain.

What happens if the Spanish constitutional court says it is illegal? Would Catalans vote Yes or No? If they vote to split from Spain in a non-binding “consultation”, so what? And what about the Basques?

Answer is clear: If the Catalans vote, they are likely to say Yes to independence. Polls put the Yes at 59 percent versus 32 percent. Earlier in September, 1.8 million out of the 7.5 million Catalans marched in Barcelona chanting “independencia!”

Catalan taxpayers are sick of their money going to poor regions in the south and want control of fiscal policy after Madrid brought Spain to near bankruptcy in 2012. They also have historical pride - their language is more widely spoken than those of 15 EU countries but has no official status.

The other questions are less easy, however. Mas gave wishy-washy replies to press after the Scottish vote. He said: “If in Madrid they think that only using the legal framework they can stop the political will of the majority of Catalonian people, they are wrong”. Then he added: “Is it possible to block a referendum? Maybe”. If he defies the court, he could cause a security crisis: In 2012 some MPs in Madrid said it should prepare the
Civil Guard to go to the “rebellious region”.

He would be defying some EU leaders. “The [German] chancellor … shares the legal opinion of the Spanish government”, Angela Merkel’s spokesman said after Mas’ press briefing.

He would also be defying the 45 percent of Catalans who want to respect the court. But if he tries a referendum-lite, such as snap local elections, he risks alienating the 23 percent who want the referendum no matter what.

With no guarantee that all EU states would recognise Catalonia, let alone allow it into the EU or Nato, Mas was equally unclear on what happens if there is a Yes. “We would not have independence the next day. We would have to speak, to negotiate with Spanish institutions and with the EU … it’s all about negotiations, finding compromises”, he said.

Meanwhile, whatever happens in Catalonia will be keenly watched by people in the Basque region in north-west Spain.

The Basque region is even wealthier than Catalonia in GDP per capita and even further culturally from Spanish society. The region’s Eta group gave up armed resistance to Madrid as recently as 2011.

But since then Madrid has given nothing in return.

Nobody wants or expects a return to violence - when activists set fire to five busses in August they were roundly condemned. But if Catalonia is next after Scotland, then the Basques are also waiting in line: In June 150,000 of them formed a 23km human chain calling for a vote on independence. In recent polls, 59 percent said they want the chance to say Yes or No to Spain.
With the beginning of the new period of the EU’s 2014-2020 budget implementation, numerous EU programmes are launched and public administrations at all levels of government will have to work together to ensure their efficient management. At the heart of EU funding, there will be some 400 cohesion policy programmes worth EUR 351.8 billion, which aim at ensuring smart, sustainable and inclusive development in all regions and cities. The OPEN DAYS in Brussels bring officials at EU, national, regional and local level together in order to exchange experiences and new ideas and to make sure that public money is well spent.

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- The annual meeting place for practitioners in the field of regional policy, fostering exchange of know-how and good practice amongst experts, EU policy officers and management authorities.
- Other initiatives in 2014 include a Master Class for 30 PhD students and associate professors, who will discuss future regional and urban research and the OPEN DAYS Cinema - a selection of video-clips, showcasing excellent projects funded by European Structural and Investment Funds and good practices in regional and urban development from around Europe.
- Between September and November, the OPEN DAYS come to your region/city with over 300 local events.