

FAIB New Year Reception – Thursday 28 January 2016



*Alain Hutchinson, Danièle Vranken, FAIB SG,
Daniel Van Espen, FAIB President*

As is the tradition, the FAIB Board had the pleasure of inviting its members to a pleasant get-together that took place in a beautiful hall of the Brussels Information Place (BIP), put at our disposal by Visit.Brussels.

Daniel Van Espen presented his best wishes to all colleagues, full and associate members, FAIB sponsors and the whole community of international associations, hoping for the best in 2016. This year will – once again - be an important milestone on the way to improved working conditions in a troubled environment.

FAIB is ready to contribute to any progress in the field of its statutory purposes. In particular the recent discussions on synergies explored with Brussels authorities / institutions are very promising.

In this respect, Daniel was very pleased to present the guest of honour, **Mr Alain Hutchinson**, Brussels Commissioner for Europe & International Organizations, who shared with us the perspectives of his Office.

Mr Hutchinson' CV is characterized by a great number of political activities: missions and mandates he undertook and carried out in the name of the Socialist Party.

In particular, he was State Secretary in charge of housing and energy issues, of budget and of social affairs. This window gave him a wide view on the special situation of Brussels Capital. From 2004 to 2009, he was a member of the European Parliament in which he expressed special interest for housing and democracy in developing countries. Later on, he became a member of the Committee of Regions. This second facet is also very useful in the perspective of the international place of Brussels.

Mr Hutchinson did not deny this “political” presentation as he considered his experience as crucial for the success of his present function. In a complex institutional context, the recently created Committee that he is chairing, aims at multiplying the points of contact between Brussels and international bodies, maintaining good terms and solving numerous problems. The speaker noted that EU authorities, used to speak to member states, neglected to enter into closer contacts with the Brussels Region, despite their location here. Though, many competences - accessibility, welcome policy, town planning, office renting ... - are in the remits of the Region. Mr Hutchinson succeeded in having a common agenda with Commissioner K. Giurgeva who leads the project team “Budget and Human Resources”. Henceforth, two meetings / year are planned that will help reaching a consensus on various aspects, in particular, the extension of the office surfaces of the EU Commission.

Another angle is the relationship between international associations and the administration that needs further improvements. Brussels counts more than 8500 registered lobbyists, 1000 media correspondents and 5400 accredited diplomats. They are all contributing to the Regional Gross Product, to job creations. In this respect, FAIB is a pillar of the construction.

Mr Hutchinson concluded that a Regional Commission for Europe and International Organizations is a key of prosperity and well-being in Brussels. The mission will take time but the first year brings confidence.