



## European Rural Manifesto

Draft for discussion at ERP 2015 Gathering

Not to be quoted as final until adopted

1. We, representatives of many people and organisations rooted in rural Europe, have adopted this European Rural Manifesto as a statement of the aspirations, commitments and demands of rural people, drawing upon meetings in many countries during the European Rural Parliament campaign.

2. Diversity of rural areas. We deeply appreciate the wide diversity of rural areas in Europe, arising from the varied geomorphology, climate and biodiversity of land and sea and from the long history of human activity across the continent. We see this variety, as expressed in human culture and natural resources, as an enormous strength for the future well-being of all peoples in Europe.

3. Common values. We acclaim the common values which bind the people of Europe – democracy, equality, the rule of law, recognition of human rights, the spirit of cooperation. We are impressed by the common themes emerging from the European Rural Parliament campaign across the face of Europe, from the Atlantic to the Black Sea and from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean.

4. Quality of life. Those who live in rural Europe value highly the quality of life which is offered by the countryside, the farms, villages and small towns, the coastal margins and islands, with their local cultures, wildlife, landscapes, healthy environment and cultural heritages.

5. Concern about rural conditions. However, in very many rural regions, residents are deeply concerned by the narrowness of rural economies, the lack of opportunities for satisfying and fairly-paid work, the loss of population as young people move away, the decline in rural services, the suffering of older people, poverty and social exclusion among disadvantaged people or ethnic minorities.

6. The need for action. We believe passionately that these challenges must be addressed, for the sake not only of the rural communities but also of the whole population of Europe. We all depend on food, timber, fibre, energy, water and minerals produced in rural areas. Farmers and rural enterprises create this common wealth. Rural areas contribute greatly to amelioration of climate, recreation, public health and social, economic and spiritual well-being.

7. Rights. **We assert** the right of rural areas and communities to full recognition by all the people and institutions of Europe, to a quality of life and standard of living equal to that of urban populations, and to full participation in political processes. **We ask** governments at all levels to endorse that right.

8. Vision. Our vision for the future of rural Europe is of vibrant, inclusive and sustainable rural communities, supported by diversified rural economies and by effective stewardship of high-quality environment and cultural heritage. **We believe** that rural communities, modelled on that vision, can be major long-term contributors to a prosperous, peaceful, just and equitable Europe.

9. Partnership. The pursuit of that vision demands in every country a refreshed, innovative partnership between people and governments. We, the rural people and organisations, know that we have a prime responsibility to give leadership and to act towards their own well-being. **But we also fairly demand** that governments at all levels, including the European institutions, provide their side of this crucial partnership.

10. Review of the state of rural areas. **We urge** the European Union, perhaps with help from one or more leading Foundations, to mount a major review of the condition of rural areas within the European Union, and of the contribution which rural areas now make, and can further make, to the well-being of the Union. The report on this review should be published in 2017, to mark the 30<sup>th</sup>

anniversary of the report 'The Future of Rural Society'. Its conclusions should be reflected in enhanced focus upon rural areas within all relevant EU programmes and funds.

11.Reversing the spiral of decline. Many regions are affected by a 'downward spiral' in the vitality of rural communities. Loss of population (particularly of young people) leads to reduced viability of rural services and weakened local economies, which prompts more loss of population. **We call for** concerted efforts by rural stakeholders, all relevant agencies and governments to 'reverse the spiral' by strengthening rural services, diversifying rural economies, and encouraging young people to stay in or return to the rural areas.

12.Youth. Many young people are ready to stay in, or move into, rural areas and to take responsibility as farmers, rural entrepreneurs or citizens for the future well-being of rural economies and communities. They see the need to innovate while building upon traditions and good practices. But they need effective education systems, vocational training, access to land, housing, credit and cultural activity, and specific support to young farmers and entrepreneurs. **We call on** governments and civil society to focus resources on this crucial issue of securing the energy of youth and promoting inter-generational cooperation for the sustainable future of Europe's rural areas.

13.Refugees. The current wave of desperate people from Africa and the Middle East, seeking refuge and new lives in Europe, is provoking thought and action within our networks. **We call for** a warm-hearted response, based on solidarity between peoples. We believe that many rural areas, and particularly those with declining population, may be well placed to welcome refugees and other newcomers. But the welcoming process must include the necessary investment in housing, services, infrastructure and job creation.

14.Poverty and exclusion. We recognise the progress that has been made in fighting poverty and social exclusion in the European Union. But there are still millions of people afflicted by poverty, physical or mental handicap, old age, loneliness or social exclusion of different kinds. **We call for** sustained effort to meet their needs. Of particular concern are the needs of Roma communities in many Central and Eastern European countries : they are among the poorest, most excluded and often territorially isolated of all Europe's rural people. They should be recognised as people with needs, and supported in seeking a civilised way of life, with suitable jobs and education for their children.

15.LEADER and CLLD. We strongly support a territorial, integrated and partnership-based approach to rural development. We wish to see the widespread application of the LEADER approach – both within and beyond the work of Local Action Groups – and its extension into Community Led Local Development, both within and beyond the EU. **We urge** institutions and governments within the EU to expand the funding of, and reduce the bureaucratic constraints upon, Local Action Groups; and to apply vigorously the multi-funded approach to rural development opened up by CLLD. We urge governments, multinational agencies and civil society in the Western Balkan and Black Sea countries to lay the groundwork of partnership between sectors for the introduction of LEADER and CLLD.

16.Rural Services and infrastructure. Basic rural services, such as shops, post offices, schools, primary health care and public transport, are vital underpinning to the quality of life in rural areas. Adequate infrastructure – water supplies, sewerage systems, electricity, gas or oil supplies, transport systems – is also vital. But in many rural regions, infrastructure is inadequate and rural services are already weak or being lost, which can start a vicious cycle of decline. **We call upon** governments and service providers to recognise the right of rural people to adequate infrastructure and reasonable access to all basic services, and to take the action that is needed to honour that right.

17.Broadband communication. Access to high-capacity telecommunications is becoming essential to the social, cultural and economic life of all Europeans. Rural areas, particularly in central and eastern Europe and many peripheral EU regions, are at present gravely disadvantaged by weakness in telecommunication systems. **We call** on governments, multi-national funders and telecommunication providers to work urgently towards access to high-speed broadband for all rural populations.

18. Local and sub-regional economies. The rural regions of Europe embrace thousands of local and sub-regional economies, rich in small and medium-sized enterprises, which form the lifeblood of communities and contribute greatly to the broader economies of European nations. **We assert** the high importance of sustaining the vitality and viability of these local and sub-regional economies throughout rural Europe. The means of doing so will vary from place to place, but can embrace initiative in many different sectors – agriculture, forestry, energy production, added-value enterprises, tourism and service industries, plus businesses based on information technology. Of high importance is the provision of versatile advisory, business support and credit services, plus vocational education and training, accurately geared to the existing and potential job opportunities.

19. Small and family farms. We recognise the major contribution that commercial farms make to the European economy. However, we are gravely concerned with the loss of the farm labour force, and for the well-being of the many millions of small and family farms, within the EU and in South East Europe and the Black Sea region. These farms give livelihood to millions of families, provide food to local markets, form the staple population of thousands of communities, and sustain traditional ways of life on which the health of the land, landscapes and ecosystems depend. They may retain viability by forming cooperatives, adding value collectively to their products, diversifying their local economies and gradually forming larger land units. **We urge** governments, donors and civil society organisations to give active and sensitive assistance to these difficult processes of change.

20. Small towns. Small towns have crucial importance as social, economic and cultural centres for rural communities. They are often the outermost ‘node’ of city-based commercial and public services, such as banks, social services, secondary schools and hospitals. However, they are not recognised as a major target of national or European policies and programmes, often being perceived as neither rural nor urban. **We call for** a mainstream European Union policy focused on small towns, aiming to sustain their vitality and enable them to play a focal role in the social and economic structures of rural regions; and for greater focus on the needs of small towns in national policies.

21. Climate change and natural resources. In the run-up to the United Nations Conference on Climate Change, **we assert** the major role which the rural areas of Europe can play in combatting climate change and sustaining environmental resources. Over 40 percent of the land surface of Europe is in forests, which can capture and sequester carbon and which contribute massively to renewable resources of raw material and energy. Rural areas are well placed to meet the growing demand for renewable energy from wind, hydro, solar, heat exchange and woodfuel sources, in ways which respect the environment and which bring direct benefit and employment to rural communities. **We call for** increased use of agro-forestry, agro-ecology and bioeconomy approaches.

22. Western Balkans and South East Europe. Rural communities and economies in the Western Balkans and South East Europe countries are deeply affected by the political instability in the region. The process of accession to the EU is on hold. This slows up the process of political reform. Rural development is seen as a low priority. **We urge** the EU to revitalise the accession process in this region, including much more effective support to rural development processes.

23. Leadership in rural development. We recognise that a prime responsibility for action rests with us, the rural people – our households, businesses and communities and the organisations through which we act, such as village-level action groups and associations. Our collective action depends upon leadership, which can come from many different sources – key individuals, associations, municipalities, entrepreneurs, cooperatives, non-government organisations, donors, NGO networks, LEADER groups, regional and national Governments. **We salute those who lead, and call for** increased awareness within civil society and governments of the vital role of leaders in rural action, and of the training and other support which they may need.

24. Civil Society Networks. The European and national networks which have led this European Rural Parliament campaign are rooted in local action and participative democracy. Their membership includes thousands of village-level action groups, local associations, cooperatives and other structures which run essential services and promote cooperation among economic actors. **We call**

**upon** governments and the European institutions to strengthen these networks, and to support their activity.

25.Partnership between civil society and governments. We believe that effective rural development demands an open-minded and innovative partnership between people and governments, side by side as equals. **We call upon** rural stakeholders to work positively with governments; and upon governments to establish better systems of consultation, in order to enable rural stakeholders to participate in shaping policies and to lay a strong foundation for fruitful partnership between rural stakeholders and governments at all levels.

26.A supportive climate. **We call on** governments to act in a spirit of trustful and open-minded partnership with rural communities, and to provide a supportive climate of law, regulation, administration and finance. This supportive climate should include a full commitment to democracy and the rule of law; coherence between different aspects of policy across the whole field of government action related to rural areas; rural proofing of all relevant policies and programmes; and sensitive and flexible use of regulatory, fiscal and financial systems to encourage initiative by individuals, small and medium-sized enterprises, cooperatives and others.

27.Transnational exchanges. We believe that the work to achieve sustainable rural development throughout the wider Europe can be greatly assisted and accelerated by exchange of good practices among rural stakeholders and governments in all European countries. East and West can equally contribute to, and gain from, such exchanges. **We call for** a truly pan-European approach to exchange programmes, through cooperation between governments, NGOs, multi-national donors and others within and beyond the EU. A leading contribution to this process can be made by the European Network for Rural Development and the National Rural Networks in all EU members states.

28.Advocacy and action. **We ask** the European NGO networks which co-initiated the Second European Rural Parliament to lead a programme of advocacy and action based on this Manifesto, working closely with their national members and all willing partners.

29.Our pledge. **We pledge** our own continued commitment to the pursuit of the vision and the actions outlined in this Manifesto. We believe that the rural communities, the governments and the multi-national institutions, working together, can achieve a renaissance of the rural regions of Europe. With that conviction, we declare that **ALL Europe Shall Live !**

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