

# Message to the European institutions, governments and rural citizens of Europe December 2017



The European Rural Parliament seeks to express the voice of rural Europe; to articulate the concerns of rural people; and to promote self-help and action by the rural people, in partnership with civil society and governments.

We are committed to promoting the well-being of over 250 million people who live in the rural regions of Europe. We are acutely aware of the economic and political challenges which affect the whole of Europe, and the urgent need for solidarity and cooperation between governments and citizens in addressing these challenges. Rural communities throughout the continent are increasingly willing and able to take initiative in strengthening their own local economies and social structures. They can thereby contribute to the EU goals of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. But they need the effective support of governments and of civil society organisations.

## In the current debate on future policies in the European Union, we call for:

- Continued commitment to **Cohesion Funds**, in support of regions with fragile economies.
- Continued **regional and rural development programmes**, focused on strengthening rural economies and sustaining rural services and infrastructure.
- Increased focus on the needs of **young people in rural areas**, so that they can play their full part as drivers of rural development.
- Recognition of the key role of **small towns and smart villages**, as focal points for innovation in rural regions.
- Increased investment in measures to combat **climate change** and to mitigate its impact on rural regions, and to realise the strong contribution which rural areas can make to generate renewable energy, promote circular and eco-economies and provide long-term protection for natural resources.
- Support for **citizen-led local development** and the action of civil society organisations in all areas – rural, coastal and urban – which need development.
- A rethinking and expansion of the role of **LEADER**, as the crucial link between government support systems and citizen-led local development in rural, coastal and urban areas.
- A combined **EU Reserve Fund for Community Led Local Development**, to be earmarked for the objectives set by local development strategies defined and implemented by local action groups in rural, coastal and urban areas. We propose that this Fund should receive 15% of all EAFRD, ERDF, ESF and EMFF money in the new programme period starting in 2021 and be matched by national and regional programmes in member states on a mandatory basis.
- An accelerated process of rural development in the countries of **South East Europe**, supported by the EU, involving civil society and making formal use of LEADER.
- A wider programme of **capacity-building and exchanges** between rural stakeholders and governments in all European countries, including extension of the Erasmus+ programme.

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The European Rural Parliament is jointly initiated by three European rural networks – ERCA, PREPARE and ELARD (see full names below) – in association with national rural movements or networks in 40 European countries, within and beyond the EU. It organises biennial Rural Parliaments. This Message is the outcome of widespread consultation among rural communities throughout Europe, and debate at the 3<sup>rd</sup> European Rural Parliament held in October 2017. A fuller version of the message will be on the European Rural Parliament website – see below.

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