



*Under the auspices of
the Secretary General of
the Council of Europe,
Mr Thorbjørn Jagland*



The voice of rural Europe

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 wish to enable rural people to play their full role in addressing the great economic and political challenges which are currently affecting Europe. The European institutions are struggling to face these challenges. They need to connect with the concerns, the aspirations and the energies of European citizens. We wish to help in that process.



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Background

The European Rural Parliament grew out of the work of three European networks: the European Rural Community Alliance ERCA, the PREPARE Partnership for Rural Europe and the European LEADER Association for Rural Development ELARD. The work of these networks, in different ways, is focussed on supporting and linking the rural communities of Europe and enabling them to have a stronger voice.

The ERP campaign

September 2016 saw the launch of the third phase of the European Rural Parliament campaign.

The first phase climaxed with the **1st European Rural Parliament** held in Brussels in November 2013, on the initiative of our Swedish partner Hela Sverige ska leva (HSSL), under the joint auspices of the European Rural Communities Alliance (ERCA) and the PREPARE Partnership for Rural Europe. That first event laid the foundation of a multi-national network, which has steadily expanded to embrace people and organisations in over 40 European countries.

The second phase, for which ERCA and PREPARE were joined as co-initiators by the European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD), was focused on a series of national programmes in 36 European countries, each of which gathered the voice of rural people by organising an ‘upward cascade of ideas’. These ideas were synthesised in each country into a national report, for use by the national partners in their action and advocacy on behalf of rural people. The full set of national reports was then synthesised, at European level, into the report “**ALL Europe shall live**”, which is published on the European Rural Parliament website. That report in turn provided the basis for the **European Rural Manifesto** which underwent widespread discussion in the autumn of 2015 and was finally, after intense debate, adopted at the **2nd European Rural Parliament**, held at Schärding in Austria in November 2015 and attended by 240 people from 40 European countries.

An agenda for action: The **European Rural Manifesto** has been translated into 27 European languages and widely distributed. It represents our agenda for advocacy and action at European, national regional and local level. The beliefs expressed in the European Rural Manifesto formed the starting-point for the third phase of work, climaxing in the **Third European Rural Parliament** 19-21 October 2017 to be held in the village of Venhorst in North Brabant Province, Netherlands.

The ERP 2016-17 campaign

The aim of the ERP 2016-17 campaign is to build on the widespread consensus reflected in the report “**ALL Europe shall live**” and the **European Rural Manifesto**. During 2016, we consulted our national partners about the way ahead. We secured a €150,000 grant from the European Commission’s Europe for Citizens fund. Together with our own resources, this enabled us to launch this third phase in the European Rural Parliament campaign. The main elements in this phase are a growing number of National Rural Parliaments; a series of Thematic projects; and the Third European Rural Parliament in October 2017.

National Rural Parliaments

The idea of national rural parliaments – which express the voice, the aspirations and the demands of rural people – has been with us for some time. The Swedish Rural Parliament and the Estonian ‘Maapaev’ have each been held every second year since the 1990s. The emergence of many national rural civil-society movements during the last 20 years has stimulated further events of this kind in many other countries. The European Rural Parliament campaign, launched in 2013 by our Swedish partner Hela Sverige ska leva (“ALL Sweden shall live”), is itself built on the same model as the national rural parliaments. In turn, we are now encouraging and supporting the holding of further national events.

The 12 months leading up to the 3rd European Rural Parliament in October 2017 will see a larger number of national rural parliaments than in any previous year. These include, in 2016: Scotland and Slovakia, and in 2017: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Slovenia, and we expect other countries to follow. The outputs from these events will be taken forward to the 3rd European Rural Parliament.

An updated version of the 2011 book on Rural Parliaments will be published by the 3rd ERP in October 2017, providing detailed information on all of the rural parliaments.

Multi-national thematic projects

The campaign is centred on a series of multi-national thematic streams and projects, each reflecting one major element in the European Rural Manifesto. These have a highly practical focus. The aim is to gather and disseminate practical ideas which will help rural stakeholders to take action, to build partnerships and to work with governments. Our network of European and national partners gather, exchange and synthesise practical ideas from many countries. These enable us to identify practical solutions, and to clarify the factors which enable rural communities and stakeholders to apply those solutions in a manner suited to each locality. The thematic work leads towards closer cooperation between partners on key issues.

Themes The programme of multi-national thematic streams is focussed on:

- A European Rural Youth Parliament, and provisions for youth in rural areas
- Welcoming and integrating refugees and economic migrants within rural communities
- Integrated rural development, and the role of LEADER and Community Led Local Development
- Tackling poverty and exclusion in rural areas
- The sustaining of rural services and infrastructure
- Strengthening local and sub regional economies
- The well-being of small and family farms
- The crucial role of small towns, and rural-urban cooperation
- Climate change and its implications for rural areas
- Rural development in the western Balkans and the Black Sea region
- Promotion and support for national rural Parliaments
- Leadership in rural development
- The role of civil society networks in rural areas
- Partnership between civil society and governments in rural development
- Education in rural areas.

Working groups Each theme is tackled by a separate group of European and/or national partners, led by one of those partners. Each group gathers, exchanges and synthesises practical ideas on its theme from many countries. This enables the partners to understand the scale and geographic pattern of the key issues that they are working on; to assess the challenges or problems involved; to identify practical solutions; and to clarify the factors which enable rural communities, enterprises and other stakeholders to shape and apply those solutions in a manner suited to each locality and country. The first six themes received funding to carry out their initial work during 2016-17 and report to the 3rd ERP.

Outputs The outputs of each working group are expected to include a report on its main findings; a series of illustrated case studies, to be published on the ERP website; and a presentation at the Third European Rural Parliament in October 2017. These outputs will help the national partners in their work with governments to ensure a climate of law, policy and action which enables positive solutions to be found. They will enable the European partners to draw upon proved reality in seeking to influence multi-national policies and actions.

Progress on the thematic work can be followed on our website:

www.europeanruralparliament.com

3rd European Rural Parliament

The 3rd European Rural Parliament will be held on 19-21 October 2017 at the Village of Venhorst, in North Brabant Province, the Netherlands. North Brabant is not only truly rural but also remarkable for its high-tech agro-food and other industries. Field visits enable participants to gain an insight into this successful region. Two days of working groups and plenary sessions, bring together the outputs from the series of thematic working groups and enable an updated debate about the state of rural areas in the wider Europe and the policy challenges and opportunities which must be faced in the coming decade.

Venhorst, with a population of 1,700, may seem an unlikely setting for an international gathering of 300 people from 40 European countries. But this village, founded 100 years ago as part of an ambitious programme to create fertile farmland out of former peatbogs, is a lively and outward-looking community. Its Parish Hall is the main venue for the Rural Parliament, along with meeting places in the school and church. Many residents in the village provide overnight accommodation for participants in the event, and others stay in farms and guesthouses in the surrounding area.

The Gathering is hosted by Landelijke Vereniging voor Kleine Kernen LVKK (National Association of Small Towns) and its provincial partner Vereniging Kleine Kernen Noord-Brabant VKKNB (North Brabant Association of Small Towns), supported by many provincial and local organisations and by student volunteers. Funding for the event is promised by the Netherlands Ministry of Internal Affairs, the province of North Brabant and the municipality of Boekel, alongside our own funds from the European Commission's Europe for Citizens programme.

The results of the 3rd European Rural Parliament will provide the foundation for taking the Campaign into its 4th year of activity, cementing the growing partnership of national and European partners, and raising the profile of the rural people of Europe.

Partners in the European Rural Parliament campaign

Co-initiating European organisations

European Rural Community Alliance (ERCA)
PREPARE Partnership for Rural Europe (PREPARE)
European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD)

European partners

European Council for the Village and Small Town (ECOVAST)
Forum Synergies

National Partners

Albanian Network for Rural Development
Quodev, Albania
Development Principles NGO, Armenia
LEADER-forum Austria
Network for Rural Development in Bosnia and Herzegovina
STEP, Society for Territorial and Environmental Prosperity, Bulgaria
Croatian Rural Development Network
Troodos Network of Thematic Centers, Cyprus
National Network of Local Action Groups in the Czech Republic
Landdistrikternes Fællesråd (Council of Rural Districts), Denmark
Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE)
Estonian Village Movement Kodukant
Village Action Association of Finland (Suomen kylätoiminta ry SYTY)
LEADER France (la Fédération des GAL de France)
German Federal working group of LEADER Action Groups (Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der LEADER)
Village Movement Brandenburg (Dorfbewegung Brandenburg Netzwerk)
Civil Development Agency (CiDA), Georgia
Greek LEADER Network
Rural Workshop Foundation, representing Hungarian Rural Network
Irish Rural Link
Northern Ireland Rural Community Network
Network of Organisations for Rural Development of Kosovo
Latvian Rural Forum
Lithuanian Rural Communities Union
Rural Development Network of the Republic of Macedonia
Pro Cooperare Regională NGO, Moldova
Network for Rural Development of Montenegro
Landelijke Vereniging voor Kleine Kernen (LVVK), Netherlands
Polish Rural Forum (Forum Aktywizacji Obszarów Wiejskich FAOW)
MINHA TERRA Network, Portugal
Civitas Foundation for Civil Society, Romania
Scottish Rural Action
Network for Rural Development of Serbia
Rural Parliament in Slovakia (Vidiecky parlament na Slovensku VIPA SK)
Slovenian Rural Development Network
Spanish Network for Rural Development (REDR)
Hela Sverige ska leva (HSSL), Sweden
Development Foundation of Turkey (Türkiye Kalkınma Vakfı)

PLANED (Pembrokeshire Local Action Network for Enterprise and Development), Wales

The ERP Team

The European Rural Parliament campaign involves widespread voluntary work by the European and national partners throughout Europe. The Steering Group and Co-ordinators provide their time without cost. This voluntary work is acknowledged with thanks by all who benefit from this wonderful initiative. We note with warm thanks the contributions of the following people since the campaign began in 2013.

ERP2013: Staffan Bond and the team at Hela Sverige ska leva, who were the initiators and leaders of the first ERP. Inez Abrahamzon who was contracted to organise the event. The Organising Group: Peter Backa, Staffan Bond, Bert Broekhuis, Vanessa Halhead.

ERP2015 and 2015 Campaign: The Co-ordinators: Michael Dower (PREPARE), Vanessa Halhead (ERCA) and Lena Husén (HSSL). The Austrian team; lead by Thomas Mueller and Lize Grimbeek. The Steering Group: Peter Backa, Staffan Bond, Michael Dower, Vanessa Halhead, Anneli Kana, Valdis Kudins, Hannes Lorenzen, Staffan Nilssen, Kim Smedslund, Goran Šoster, Radim Srsen, Thomas Müller.

ERP2017 and 2016-17 Campaign: The Co-ordinators: Vanessa Halhead (ERCA), Kirsten Birke Lund (ELARD), Michael Dower and Kim Smedslund (PREPARE) and Lena Husén (HSSL). The Dutch team led by Ingeborg Verschuuren with Ben van Essen, Judith Verbruggen, Rob Maessen, Bas Leenders. The Steering Group: Staffan Bond, Kirsten Birke Lund, Michael Dower, Vanessa Halhead, Anneli Kana, Staffan Nilssen, Petri Rinne, Goran Šoster, Kristiina Tammets, Pedro Brosei.

In particular, we would like to thank:

- Michael Dower - Co-ordinator from 2014- Dec. 2016. Michael's huge effort and skill was instrumental in developing the ERP as a strong European initiative with 40 national and 5 European network members, successfully raising funding for the work in 2015, 2016 and 2017, organising the survey of national members and compiling the 'All Europe shall Live' report of 2015 from which the European Rural Manifesto was developed.
- Kirsten Birke Lund - Co-ordinator from May 2016 – May 2017. Kirsten worked with the team to finalise the hosts for the 3rd ERP 2017 and to organise the work with our national partners, thematic projects and early development of the 3rd ERP.

The Co-initiating Partners

The European Rural Parliament is a project of its Co-initiating Partners:

European Rural Community Alliance (ERCA)

ERCA is the network for the rural movements of Europe. ERCA began as an informal network in 2004, and was established as an organisation in 2009. In 2013 the two networks: European Rural Community Association and European Rural Alliance ERA merged to become the European Rural Community Alliance. ERCA's mission is to support the rural communities of Europe, through their national and regional rural movements, to develop connections,

share experience and mutual learning and take collective action to strengthen their position.

PREPARE Partnership for Rural Europe (PREPARE)

The aim of the PREPARE Partnership is to strengthen civil society in rural areas; to promote co-operation between local actors, governments and all stakeholders in rural development, notably in the new member states, accession and neighbourhood counties of the European Union; and to enable multi-national exchange in rural development. The Partnership was formed in 2000 and has steadily grown over the years, as new national rural networks have been created with PREPARE's help and joined the Partnership.

European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD)

ELARD was founded in 1999. It is an international non-profit association set up to improve the quality of life in rural areas and to maintain their population through sustainable, integrated local development. In doing so ELARD campaigns to spread the philosophy of the LEADER method both at a local grassroots and at an institutional level. It has members in 24 countries and over 800 Local Action Groups are involved either through national or regional networks or as individual members.

European Rural Parliament 2017

Steering Group

ERCA: Staffan Nilsson (joint Chair), Petri Rinne, Vanessa Halhead

ELARD: Kristiina Tammetts (joint Chair), Pedro Brosei, Kirsten Birke Lund

PREPARE: Goran Šoster (joint Chair), Anneli Kana, Kim Smedslund

HSSL: Staffan Bond, Lena Husén

LVKK: Ben van Essen

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Supported by Lena Husén (HSSL)

Website: www.europeanruralparliament.com

Facebook: European Rural Parliament

Group Facebook: Friends of ERP – European Rural Parliament

Twitter: @EuRuralParl

European Rural Manifesto

Adopted at the Conclusion of the 2nd European Rural Parliament
held 4 to 6 November 2015 at Schärding, Austria
and attended by 240 delegates from 40 European countries

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 2015.

2. Diversity of rural areas. We deeply appreciate the wide diversity of areas and peoples 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 opportunity 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, mountains and forests with their local cultures, wildlife, landscapes, healthy environment and cultural heritage.

5. Concern about rural conditions. However, we are very concerned that many regions are affected by narrowness of rural economies, the lack of opportunities for satisfying and fairly-paid work, the loss of population as young people move away, the consequent demographic imbalance, the decline in services, poverty and social exclusion among disadvantaged people or ethnic minorities and environmental degradation.

6. The need for action. We believe passionately that these challenges must be addressed, for the benefit 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, enterprises and other rural actors create a common wealth for Europe. Rural areas contribute greatly to amelioration of climate change, 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.

In all aspects of policy and action related to rural communities, women and men should be afforded equal rights.

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, and to a sustainable global society.

9. Partnership. The pursuit of our vision demands in every country a refreshed and equitable partnership between people and governments. We, the rural people and organisations, know that

we have a responsibility to give leadership and to act towards our own collective well-being. **But we also fairly demand** that governments at all levels, including the European institutions, work to make this crucial partnership effective.

10. Review of the state of rural areas. **We urge** the European Union 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 30th 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. We wish to use the continuing European Rural Parliament process to enable rural communities to influence the preparation of policies for the period beyond 2020.

We ask the Council of Europe to consider launching a review of the condition and needs of rural areas in all their member countries.

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 promoting appreciation of and pride in rural ways of life rather than imposing urban norms, strengthening rural services, diversifying rural economies, and enabling young people to remain in or return to the rural areas.

12. Youth. Many young people are ready to remain 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. Young people need attractive employment, well-targeted systems of education and vocational training, apprenticeships based on local needs, access to land, housing and credit, social and cultural activities suited to young people, and specific support to young farmers and entrepreneurs. **We call on** governments and civil society to meet these needs and to enable young people to participate actively in political processes.

We support the call that has been made for rural youth to have their own Rural Youth Parliaments both at national and European level.

13. Refugees. The arrival of desperate people from areas of conflict and disaster, seeking refuge and new lives in Europe, is provoking thought and action within our networks. While urging governments and other agencies to work urgently to solve the underlying causes of this crisis, **We call for** a warm-hearted response, based on solidarity between peoples. We believe that for many rural areas, and particularly those with declining populations, this offers an opportunity to integrate refugees and other newcomers. The process of integration must include the necessary job creation, investment in housing, services and infrastructure. Successful integration efforts should be celebrated.

14. Poverty and exclusion. We recognise the progress that has been made in fighting poverty and social exclusion in Europe. But millions of people are still afflicted by poverty and social exclusion of different kinds. Social and territorial cohesion are integral to our vision of Europe. **We call for** sustained effort to promote inclusion and full participation in society. Of particular concern are the needs of Roma communities in many European countries, who are among the poorest and most excluded of all Europe's rural people. They should be recognised as people with equal rights to suitable jobs and education for their children. All people have talents and skills to offer.

15. LEADER and CLLD. We strongly advocate a territorial, integrated and partnership-based approach to rural development, pursued in a bottom-up and place-based spirit. We wish to see the widespread application of the LEADER principle, and its extension into Community Led Local Development, both within and beyond the EU. We are highly concerned by the current lack, in many countries, of a truly integrated process of regional and rural development. **We urge** institutions and

governments within the EU to demonstrate trust in Local Action Groups, to expand their funding, to adapt their rules and procedures to the needs of rural communities, and to ensure a truly integrated approach to local development and to the use of multiple funds. We urge all sectors in the Western Balkan and Black Sea countries to lay the groundwork of partnership between sectors for the use of LEADER and CLLD.

16. Rural Services and infrastructure. Basic rural services, such as shops, postal services, schools, primary health care and public transport as well as social infrastructure, are vital underpinning to the quality of life in rural areas. Adequate physical infrastructure – water supplies, sewerage systems, and electricity, energy supplies, transport systems – is also vital. But in many rural regions, rural services are already weak or being lost and infrastructure is inadequate, which can contribute to 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 enable rural communities to make decisions and take actions to secure services and infrastructure appropriate for our needs.

17. Broadband and mobile communication. Access to high-capacity telecommunications is becoming crucial to the social, cultural and economic life of all Europeans and to the provision of vital services. Because of their distance and sparse population, rural areas have particular needs for effective telecommunications. However, many rural areas, particularly in central and Eastern Europe and 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 and mobile services for all rural populations, and where necessary to enable rural communities themselves to take action to ensure this service.

18. Local and sub-regional economies. The rural regions of Europe embrace thousands of local and sub-regional economies, rich in micro, 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 enhancing 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, fishing, energy production, manufacturing including added-value enterprises, supply chains, tourism and service industries, plus businesses based on information technology. There is high scope for social enterprises. 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, especially in remote areas, mountains and islands. 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, ecosystems and cultural heritage depend. They may retain viability by forming cooperatives and social farming enterprises, adding value collectively to their products, diversifying their farm incomes and local economies and

gradually forming larger land units. **We urge** governments, donors, civil society organisations and rural communities to recognise and support family farming as a viable European model.

20. Small towns. Small towns, which number thousands in Europe, have crucial importance as social, economic and cultural centres for rural communities. They are the centres of commerce, public and social services, secondary schools and healthcare; offer major opportunities for tourism; and collectively make a major contribution to regional and national economies. 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 advocate** a mainstream European Union policy focused on

small towns, recognising all the important contributions they make in the social and economic structures of rural regions and their vitality; and for greater focus on the needs of small towns in national policies.

We call for increased cooperation between communities, organisations and authorities in rural and urban areas in order to gain the full benefit of social, cultural and economic links which such cooperation can bring; and for vigorous exchange of ideas and good practise between those involved in rural and urban areas.

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; and also recognise the need to assist rural areas to adapt to climate change. 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, tide, solar, geothermal and woodfuel sources, in ways which respect untouched nature and the environment of land and water, and which bring direct benefit and employment to rural communities. **We call for** increased use of agro-forestry, agro-ecology and bio economy approaches. **We also urge** that the conditions created by climate change should be taken into account in the definition of disadvantaged regions when assessing the allocation of financial support.

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 by governments 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 acknowledge the important role of leadership at all levels and between levels. We recognize that a prime responsibility for identifying needs and delivering solutions rests with us, the rural actors. However, leadership in rural development involves collective action from local, regional, national and European levels and is characterized by commitment, communication, cooperation and building trust. **We call upon** civil society, governments and the private sector to work in partnership to offer capacity building, resources and support to foster an environment which encourages innovative, sustainable and accountable leadership, inspiring and engaging future leaders.

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 rural actors. **We call upon** governments and the European institutions to respect the independence of NGOs and their networks and to support their activities.

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, international institutions and appropriate agencies to establish meaningful systems of consultation and collaborative decision making, in order to enable rural stakeholders to participate in shaping and implementing 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, recognising their right to self-determination; 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

and geographical levels of policy across the whole field of government action related to rural areas; rural proofing of all relevant policies and programmes; simplified design, and sensitive and flexible use, of regulatory, fiscal and financial systems to encourage initiative by individuals, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, social enterprises, cooperatives and others; and respect for the rights of rural communities in forging international laws and treaties.

27. Education. In a changing world, people everywhere need constantly to enhance their ability to adapt and innovate in social and economic activity. For this reason, education and lifelong learning – starting in early childhood - have a crucial place in enabling rural communities to thrive, with the necessary cooperation and networking, and to participate fully in developmental processes. They have particular importance in enabling young people to understand the opportunities for a rich and viable life in the countryside, to attain and constantly renew the skills which are needed, and to participate as citizens. We urge educational authorities to ensure effective access for rural communities to education services, including distance learning and vocational training suited to the realities of rural life.

28. International 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 and further afield. 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 should be made by the European Network for Rural Development and the EU-funded National Rural Networks in all EU member states.

29. 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.

30. 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!