



## ERP Action Programme 2018 - 2019

### Introduction

The purpose of the European Rural Parliament is to express the voice of rural people in Europe; and to promote self-help and action by the rural people, in partnership with civil society and governments. It is an initiative of 3 pan-European networks: The European Rural Community Alliance ERCA; PREPARE Partnership for Rural Europe; and the European LEADER Association for Rural Development ELARD and is a partnership of national civil society rural organisations in 40 European countries and 5 pan-European rural networks. This gives the ERP strong connection into the heart of rural Europe.

This Programme sets out the proposed activities for the period 2018-2019. It was prepared on the basis of the ERP2017 Gathering key outputs, materials and evaluation results. This revealed a strong emphasis on increasing the participation of rural people, building an effective network and collaboration with the whole family of European and national partners. We recognise the need to sharpen the processes of networking and communication to build our own collective capacity to enhance beneficial action, promote the rural areas and to play an effective part in political processes. The ideas that have gone into shaping this Action Programme are the result of the consultation, involvement and agreement of the ERP partnership. It will serve as basis for future activities and to fundraising related to it.

The Programme sets out the aims, objectives and activities for the work in 2018 and 2019. It will be the guiding document for the actions, activities and fundraising efforts of the ERP.

***The realisation and implementation of this programme relies on available funding and voluntary resources of the ERP partners.***

The work of the European Rural Parliament in 2018-2019 will focus on six main objectives:

1. Sustain, strengthen and extend the ERP partnership
2. Undertake effective advocacy and contribute to debate at European and national levels
3. Enable a strong communications platform across the ERP Partnership and rural communities
4. Develop links to research and relevant expertise to support our work
5. Undertake a programme of events, exchange and thematic work
6. Prepare for, fund, organise and implement the 4<sup>th</sup> European Rural Parliament in 2019

The 2018-2019 Programme is set out under the following headings:

1. The ERP Partnership
2. Advocacy
3. Communications
4. Research and expertise

5. Projects and events
6. The 4<sup>th</sup> European Rural Parliament

## 1. The ERP Partnership

The ERP is an informal, ongoing and developing partnership initiative based on co-operation between partner organisations. The biennial Programme is overseen at European level by a Steering Group comprising representatives from each of the co-initiating European organisations – ERCA, PREPARE and ELARD. Partner organisations in the initiative include two other European bodies, The European Council for Village and Small Town ECOVAST and Forum Synergies; and currently national organisations from 40 European countries, which vary in title and character but which can all claim to represent a significant part of the rural populations in their country. Most of the national partners are members of one or more of ERCA, PREPARE and ELARD.

**Aim** To sustain, strengthen and extend the ERP partnership.

### Activities

The activities are coordinated by the Coordination Team supported by the Steering Group. National Partners are to take an active role in the work and in enabling communication with the local level.

1. Extend ERP National Partners to include all countries in the wider Europe and extend ERP European Partners to include key European NGO partners sharing the ERP aims.
2. Offer all partners the opportunity to participate in ERP activities listed in this Programme and to share in the development of the ERP Partnership.
3. Improve communications with ERP Partners and exchange of information on national events, reports etc. in relation to the wider ERP interest, Manifesto development etc.
4. Take steps, in co-operation with ERP Partners, to strengthen co-operation between European, national and local levels.
5. Support the development of new rural movements and rural parliaments in cooperation with ELARD, ERCA and PREPARE.
6. Work with ELARD and ERP Partners to strengthen links between LEADER and rural movements at national and local levels.

## 2. Advocacy

Advocacy for the well-being of rural people and communities is our core activity. Our advocacy focus for this period is based on the information collected from our partners between and during the ERP-Gatherings, as documented in the 2017 European Rural Manifesto, Venhorst Declaration and Message to European Institutions (all available on our website: [www.europeanruralparliament.com](http://www.europeanruralparliament.com) ). These set the framework and objectives for advocacy at European and national levels during the 2018-2019 period. All ERP-partners have an advocative role. In undertaking advocacy, the ERP is non-party political.

*“ERP should not hesitate to engage in raising the voice of rural people in the public and political field; to articulate policies which will serve the well-being of rural people; and to demand that governments recognise the rights, capabilities and needs of rural people and the merits of strong partnership between government, civil society and the people”.*

In December 2017, the ERP Steering Group organised and participated in meetings in Brussels, including with representatives of the Estonian and new Bulgarian Presidencies; Cabinet of Commissioner Hogan (Agri), Cabinet of Commissioner Cretu (Regio), Cabinet of Commissioner Gabriel (Digi), to promote our Message from our civil society partners in relation to development of the next EU Financial and Policy Framework. The outcomes of these meetings will shape the first period of advocacy.

### **Aims**

Undertake effective advocacy and contribute to debate at European and national levels  
Support a stronger partnership between the EU and the rural citizens.

### **Objectives**

The objective is to find in partnership working policies, tools, methods and funding mechanisms for rural local and place-based development as well as ensure information flow between the EU and local level. All ERP Partners have a role in advocacy.

### **Activities**

1. Promote the development of bottom-up partnership initiatives like LEADER/CLLD, which support local, place-based rural development, including in relation to pre-accession and non-EU countries.
2. Promote, and support the creation of national rural networks and parliaments: There is capacity to develop national rural parliaments in the Balkan and Black Sea areas.
3. Support the creation of thematic advocacy voices: ERP is open for thematic networks and can serve as a platform for thematic advocacy activities. A youth network is developed with its own European Rural Youth Parliament event.
4. Create more evidence-based advocacy material by connecting to research. ERP is networking with research units for information, project and research partnerships.
5. Explore further possibilities to establish a Citizens Initiative, possibly with the EESC. Any draft initiative(s) will be prepared and discussed with ERP Partners.
6. Establish sustainable partnerships and/or working relations with EU institutions, comprising 2-way communication of information and inclusive of the local community level.
7. Develop working relations with EU Presidencies, EC Directorates, the EESC and ENRD and investigate possibilities for cooperation, information exchange and common actions with the European Parliament.

## **3. Communications**

During 2018-2019, the ERP aims to improve the use of its communications tools and extend communications and involvement, through the medium of our partners, to rural communities and people at local level across Europe. We will also aim to involve key players in the EU.

### **Aim**

To enable a strong communications platform across the ERP Partnership and rural communities

### **Objectives**

Improve the ERP visibility and information reach  
Improve the local engagement in the ERP

## Activities

### 1. Communication and Animation team

ERP will investigate the options for involving more people in the animation and communications work, including people with social media and campaigning skills.

### 2. Website: [www.europeanruralparliament.com](http://www.europeanruralparliament.com)

The Website was updated and re-launched in April 2018. It will continue to be updated on a regular basis and interactive elements will be added. Specific information pages for our partners will be created.

### 3. Social media

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/europeanruralparliament>

The main activity is to increase the following and engage them through efficient posts and campaigns.

**Facebook:** Friends of the ERP: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/244707725945624/?fref=ts>

This is open to our Partners and friends to join and to share information on their activities and news.

**Twitter:** #EuropeanRuralParliament

ERP aims to make more regular and strategic use of this to activate exchange and link to information on our website and elsewhere

### 4. Newsletter:

The ERP will send an electronic newsletter 6 times a year and newsflashes when needed.

### 5. Publications:

Update the ERP information leaflet and booklet for use of our Partners and at events

### 6. Press:

Press should be more efficiently used by ERP and national partners to make ERP more visible and understood.

### 7. Increase local reach:

Partners are asked to inform about EU and ERP in their networks and events. The use of local media is encouraged. Easy-to-read information, surveys and animation activities (voting, competitions) will make ERP more visible and approachable.

## 4. Research and Expertise

The participants of the ERP 2017 Gathering agreed that the ERP should promote and support awareness, debate, research, publication and training on themes of importance to rural people, at both national and multinational level. To this end, it should cooperate where appropriate with research institutes, universities and think tanks; and be ready to engage, through its partners, in multinational research and action projects. Enlarging the network of (thematic) expertise is also important.

### Aims

Connect research and local stakeholders for stronger evidence-based advocacy, networking and partnerships in rural development

### Objectives

1. Build a research and expertise network
2. Develop evidence based advocacy
3. Extend cooperation with research within the ERP-network

### Activities

The level of activities will be related to the success of funding applications, and may include:

- Contact universities and relevant experts to build a network and invite interested researchers to contribute to thematic actions
- Work with universities, research institutes and experts (NGO's) to get more evidence based material for rural development and advocacy
- Look for and compile supportive research: partners look for place-based local development supportive research. Results will support the advocacy work
- Develop partnership between ERP and research: research, project and exchange opportunities and synergies to be sought. – case studies, think tanks, research, exchange
- Organise events where local stakeholders and research meet

It is hoped to create a research team to support the work. ERP partners will be encouraged to link with willing faculties, researchers or experts to the network.

## 5. Projects and events

During the period 2018-2019, we will be working together with the European and national partners to agree a programme of activities and events which will sustain the visibility and impetus of the ERP during the two-year period between Parliaments. These activities and events should fit naturally into the activities of the national partners, serving to promote their own visibility and impact as well as that of the ERP, and contribute to the dissemination and the gathering of ERP-related ideas.

### Aim

Undertake a programme of events, exchange and thematic work to implement the recommendations of the 3<sup>rd</sup> ERP and increase the visibility, activity and involvement of the ERP partnership.

### Objectives

1. Increase the visibility of the ERP through cooperation in events, projects and communications
2. Encourage and activate partners in thematic ERP-partnerships and networks
3. Create exchange mechanisms or programmes
4. Develop and implement animation activities within the ERP-family
5. Undertake at least one significant event at European level in 2018

### Activities

#### 1. A mid-term event in Brussels

We will organise a mid-term event in Brussels, to enable connection to the European Commission, increase the profile of the ERP, review mid-term progress of the ERP, and profile good practice from the local level.

#### 2. National Rural Parliaments

We will work closely with the National Rural Parliaments, and other major events to be held during this period to connect and foster stronger links and enable the outputs to be fed into the 4<sup>th</sup> ERP.

#### 3. Developing the youth network in the ERP

We will support the continued development of the youth work undertaken during 2016-2017, in co-operation with ERP Partners and European youth organisations, including opportunities for youth involvement with ERP, focussed communications, youth advocacy and the 2nd European Rural Youth Parliament

#### **4. Thematic work**

We will work with our Partners to initiate, engage, animate and develop further thematic work based on the Manifesto themes, or suggest new activities enabling pan-European exploration of the themes identified as critical for rural development and fulfilling the overall ERP objectives.

#### **5. Smart Villages**

Where appropriate, we will seek to link with and feed ideas on smart solutions and support systems into the EU Smart Villages initiative, and encourage ERP partner involvement in Smart Villages activities.

#### **6. ERP Exchange programme**

We will investigate developing exchange between ERP Partners, young professionals and thematic specialists, eg. training, job-shadowing, professional knowhow exchanges or job-opportunities within the ERP-family.

#### **7. Maintaining rural UK links with Europe**

A special project is proposed to enable ERP partners in the UK to demonstrate commitment to European relations, maintain European links and inform debate on policy and local action at national and EU level.

#### **8. Western Balkans and Black Sea initiatives**

We will work with our partners in the Western Balkans and Black Sea Regions to identify and develop partnership activities seen as most appropriate by them.

#### **9. Other activities**

We will welcome ideas for other ERP activities from all of our Partners.

### **6. 4<sup>th</sup> European Rural Parliament in 2019**

The European Rural Parliament will continue to meet every second year, as a periodic climax in the collective activity of the ERP Partners. The 4<sup>th</sup> ERP will be held in 2019. We hope to increase the number of participants, within manageable limits. The host will be selected by early autumn 2018.

The event will involve all of the ERP Partners at national and European levels, including their chosen representatives from the local level. About 300 citizens and representatives of rural organisations are expected to attend the event. It will also have a specific youth element to which we will seek to attract young participants. Within the host community it is expected that a significant number of local people will be involved as volunteers and contractors. Representatives from national and Europe government and institutions will be invited to participate to enable policy links and debate.

#### **Activities**

The ERP Gathering enables partners to draw conclusions about the ways to define, promote, strengthen, and further extend the participation of rural citizens in the shaping of policy and taking of action for the well-being of rural people. It also provides opportunity for networking and establishing lasting contacts between partners across Europe. The gathering will include field trips, workshops and plenary discussions. It will enable the full benefits of the overall project to be achieved, through reaching and disseminating a wide consensus on the means by which the participation of citizens can be promoted. It will bring together the outputs of the theme-based initiatives, national rural parliaments and other related activities of the partners. A people's Manifesto and Declaration will be prepared.

**This ERP 2018-2019 Action Programme is presented by the 3 Co-initiating organisations:**

**European Rural Community Alliance ERCA:**

*signature*

**Staffan Nilsson - President of ERCA**

**PREPARE Partnership for Rural Europe**

*signature*

**Goran Soster – President of PREPARE**

**European Leader Association for Rural Development ELARD**

*signature*

**Kristiina Tammets – Vice-President of ELARD**