



European Rural Parliament

Message to the European Institutions, governments and rural citizens of Europe March 2019

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 protecting and 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 across Europe face many problems, including narrow rural economies, lack of opportunities for varied and well-paid work, loss of population as young people move away, demographic imbalance, decline in services, poor infrastructure, poverty and social exclusion, and the impacts of climate change. However, rural communities are 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.

This message is based on consultation with rural people throughout Europe and on the ideas generated through initiatives by our European and national partners. In the debate on future policies in the European Union, we call to EU and national governments for:

A closer and open connection to European rural citizens:

- Good dialogue and information exchange between EU, European rural citizens and NGO's for better policies and development programs
- Address the disconnection/ disaffection between citizens and EU institutions, and work with national governments to address the causes of populism and find solutions to the existing challenges
- Future EU policies to be policies for all of the EU people and areas, also to enable increasing awareness and support for the EU from rural areas.
- Europe is more than just EU - funds permitting easier exchange and cooperation between EU and non-EU actors on capacity building, networking and partnership
- The EU to respect and support the desire of non-EU rural communities in the UK (post-Brexit), pre-accession, NEAR and wider European countries, many of which are ERP Partners, for close connection consideration, and complementarity between future EU and national policies and programmes
- An accelerated progress of accession or formal support for the countries of South East Europe, with strengthened programs of rural development including LEADER.



Supportive policies and funds for villages and rural citizens:

- A real policy and programme for local rural development and villages - giving real opportunities for local development and place-based actions through supporting integrative local (economic and social) solutions in all Europe. Place-based policies.
- A (smart) villages and small towns policy in a bottom-up spirit with adequate and simplified implementation tools, prepared in partnership with grass-roots actors. Smart Villages policy is to be a tool to better reach smart and active villages/communities, benefiting also areas with greatest needs. The delivery of Smart Villages be at the closest practical level. A 'Villages Pact' could be prepared in the spirit of the cities 'Amsterdam Pact'.
- The role of LEADER, national rural citizens' NGOs and National Rural Parliaments could be re-thought as crucial links between government support systems and citizen-led local development in rural, coastal and urban areas.
- Ensuring continuation and possible extension of the LEADER/CLLD in the upcoming programming period including a minimum earmarking across the different funds for CLLD, and with adequate transition mechanism between the current and the next programming period.
- Welcoming EAFRD to be reintegrated in the Common Provision Regulation together with ERDF, ESF and EMFF combining CAP and Cohesion Policy and enabling a simplified procedure for LEADER/CLLD using a common framework, a "common basket" and one lead-fund.
- Defining the CLLD added value including the seven specific features/ principles on the EU regulations.
- 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 considering the risk of excluding non-agricultural rural development from the future CAP.
- A wider programme of capacity-building and exchanges between rural stakeholders and governments in all European countries, including the extension of the Erasmus+ programme.
- Ensuring funds permitting easier exchange and cooperation between EU and non-EU actors on capacity building, networking and partnership.
- Recognize a clear trend towards multi-location living, in both urban and rural areas, and integrate this into policy and funding delivery

To meet existential rural challenges and exodus

- 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. We welcome any action or programme where communities and people are given the opportunities to participate in climate and environmental actions. We call also for a rural climate/environmental pact between rural communities and EU.
- Ensuring public funding for broadband network extension in the 2021-27 period to deliver modern, fast digital infrastructure access across rural Europe, essential for rural services, business and 5G. Further development of initiatives as WIFI4U are welcomed.
- Increased focus on the needs of young people in rural areas, so that they can play their full part as drivers of economic and social rural development
- Pursue efforts in social inclusion issues in rural areas, especially taking into account the issues caused by aging and gender problems.

The European Rural Parliament is jointly initiated by three European rural networks - European Rural Community Alliance (ERCA); PREPARE Partnership for Rural Europe (PREPARE); and the European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD) in association with national rural movements or networks in 40 European countries, and 3 Pan-European networks. Its activities have been part-funded by the European Union through the Europe for Citizens programme.

