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*Under the auspices of  
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Mr Thorbjørn Jagland*



# 2015 European Rural Manifesto

## Amendments proposed by the European Rural Youth Parliament

In this document we concluded the results of the European Rural Youth Parliament in Ratnieki in Latvia, August, 2017 that gathered almost 90 participants from 16 countries.

Through the dialogues, workshops, plenary session and other activities in a framework of ERYP we recognize that in the process of ERP youth should not be as separated unit, but involved in a common dialogue. Youth has proven that the most important issues for them are same as for any other rural inhabitants, such as infrastructure, job opportunities, rural services and other that you can recognize in the following chapters. Instead of placing youth as the separate group, we call three leading pan-European organizations, national partners and others to recognize rural youth as equal partners the same as elderly, women, men or any other group. As equals partners and involvement on the regular bases youth can provide their opinion, knowledge and skills, possibly adding fresh viewpoint and offering their different skills for new solutions as well as gain and grow as professionals by cooperation with experienced experts and practices supplementing the process of ERP.

We call pan-European rural youth organizations, who have proved their serious goals and works, showed interest and wish for cooperation – Rural Youth Europe and Mijarc, to create consortium and to get involved in the movement of European Rural Parliament as forth equal partner to three existing pan-European networks – PREPARE, ELARD and ERCA, working on the program of advocacy and actions based on this Manifesto working with their members and all willing partners.

Conclusions, suggestions and other agreements that youth expressed are linked with the ERP Manifesto 2015, marking with red marks addition from youth to the Manifesto and underlined when youth pointed it out as important. Points that didn't have direct links with the results of ERYP are taken out from this material.

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**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 **both ways (bottom-up and top-down) and between different sectors.** 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.

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.

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 competitive and sustainable employment, well-targeted systems of education, volunteering and vocational training programs, apprenticeships based on local needs, access to land, housing and credit, scholarships and sponsorships for the internships and trainings, social and cultural activities suited to young people, and advisors and other 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 recognize youth as one of key drivers of the rural development, so we call pan-European rural youth organizations to create consortium and to get involved in the movement of European Rural Parliament as forth equal partner to three existing networks, working on the program of advocacy and actions based on this Manifesto working with their members and all willing partners.

**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.

**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, **creating client-oriented and less bureaucratic administration and ensuring transparency in its stages**, 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. We call on governments and European Institutions to provide open data for the

**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 small farms and family farming as respectable and a viable European model, and to support the generation shifts in farms and provide possibilities for new farming opportunities.

**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 for both long-term and urgent issues, 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, volunteering and vocational training suited to the realities of rural life, providing also support in all the kinds to rise the motivation of youth from the risk groups to get involved.

**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, involving young farmers, professionals and other youth as equal partners to those exchanges . 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.

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Additional point:

Digitalization and data availability.

We call on European and National Institutions, Research Agents and others to ensure digital services, digital communication possibilities, especially for those in remote rural areas, and open data about different aspects of rural areas that anyone can access, use and share. Open data can bring diverse benefits for the National and local governments, rural businesses and civil society, including to become as a driver for the economic growth creating new markets and working places.