



European Rural Community Alliance PREPARE Partnership for Rural Europe
European LEADER Association for Rural Development

Press Release

29 October 2015

A fair deal for rural communities throughout Europe

Rural people from 40 nations will gather in Austria 4-6 November to demand a fair deal for rural communities throughout Europe.

The second European Rural Parliament, to be held at Schärding in Austria, is the climax of a year-long campaign in 40 European countries to find out what rural people think about their living conditions. The aim of the campaign, launched by three leading European rural networks, is to strengthen the voice of rural people, to ensure that their interests are reflected in national and European policies, and to promote self-help and cooperation among rural communities.

The three-day Parliament, attended by 250 people from 40 countries, will debate the main themes arising from the campaign, and will adopt a European Rural Manifesto setting out an ambitious agenda of policy and action to be pursued over the next few years.

Advance papers for the Rural Parliament record:

- The high concern of people in many rural region about the narrowness of rural economies, the lack of good jobs, loss of population as young people move away, decline in rural services, the suffering of older people, poverty and social exclusion among disadvantaged people and ethnic minorities.
- The right of rural communities to a quality of life and standard of living equal to that of urban populations, and to full participation in political processes
- A vision for the future of vibrant, inclusive and sustainable rural communities, supported by diversified rural economies and by effective stewardship of landscapes and cultural heritage.

The Rural Parliament will call for a new, innovative partnership between rural people and governments, in order to reverse the spiral of decline in many rural areas; to enable young people to find a good life in the countryside; to tackle poverty and exclusion; and to build a positive future for millions of small and family farms and rural enterprises.

Two issues to be addressed by the Rural Parliament – climate change and refugees – are highly topical.

In the run-up to the United Nations Conference on Climate Change, rural areas can play a major role in combatting climate change and sustaining environmental resources. Over 40 percent of Europe's land is in forests, which can capture carbon and yield renewable resources of raw material. Rural areas are well placed to meet the growing demand for renewable energy from wind, hydro, solar, heat exchange and woodfuel sources.



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The current wave of desperate people from Africa and the Middle East, seeking refuge and new lives in Europe, is provoking thought and action within rural communities. Many rural areas, particularly those with declining population, may be well placed to welcome refugees and other newcomers. But the welcoming process must include the necessary investment in housing, services, infrastructure and job creation.

Notes for Editors

1. The European Rural Parliament is jointly initiated by three pan-European rural networks - European Rural Community Alliance (ERCA); PREPARE Partnership for Rural Europe; and European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD). Members of these networks are found throughout the EU and in the Western Balkan and Black Sea countries.
2. The ERP Campaign is under the auspices of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr Thorbjørn Jagland; and is co-funded by the European Commission through the Europe for Citizens programme.
3. The ERP 2015 Gathering will be held in the beautiful small town of Schärding in Upper Austria. It is hosted by Sauwald-Pramtal Local Action Group and Schärding Town Council, organised by the Projects4 company, and grant-aided by the governments of Austria and Upper Austria.
4. The Gathering will be attended by people from rural communities in almost all the EU countries, plus Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo, Iceland, Norway, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine.
5. Press representatives will be welcome at the Gathering (see programme attached)
6. More information can be found at www.europeanruralparliament.com

Contacts

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**European Rural Parliament 2015 Gathering
to be held at Schärding, Upper Austria, 4 to 6 November 2015**

Programme

(as at 29 October 2015)

Tuesday

3 November Afternoon/evening Arrivals of participants who opt for field visits
Reception/registration + dispersal to accommodation
No communal catering

Wednesday

4 November 08.30 Formal greeting to field visit participants in Schärding town square
09.00-18.00 7 different Field Visits to see rural enterprises, farms and Local Action Groups and meet rural communities in Upper Austria, Bavaria (Germany) and southern Bohemia (Czech Republic) (total of 200 participants expected)
Afternoon/evening Arrival of other participants
Opportunity to mount displays in the 'Ideas market' in the Big Tent
19.00 shared supper in the Big Tent, Marquee, Schärding town square

Thursday

5 November from 08.00 Registration
09.00 Plenary session
- Formal welcome by co-initiators, Austrian hosts, and government representatives from Austria, Upper Austria and Czech Republic
- Self introduction by national delegations
- Explanation of programme for the Gathering
10.30-11.00 Coffee break
11.00-12.30 First session of Thematic Workshops
(focused on the draft Manifesto and Report)
12.30-14.00 Lunch break and 'Ideas market'
14.00-15.30 Second session of Thematic Workshops
15.45 -17.30 Tea and 'Market of Initiatives' in the Big Tent
Rapporteurs gather to improve the Manifesto and report
18.30 Buses leave to take participants to the Danube harbour
19.00 to 23.00 Danube cruise, with Gala Dinner, music and entertainment

Friday

6 November 09.00 Plenary session :
Presentation of case studies
1. Anahit Ghazanchyan, Country Director for Armenia of Heifer International, a dynamic leader of rural development in Armenia
2. Boban Ilic, Secretary General of the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group for South East Europe, which represents the governments of the Western Balkans and is a leading organisation in rural development in that region
3. Luis Chavez, Coordinator, MINHA TERRA, the Portuguese Federation of Local Development Association, whose national campaign for ERP 2015 included 170



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local and regional meetings with a total of 3,800 rural people participating.

Explanation of Manifesto and of post-Gathering action proposed by co-initiators

10.30-11.00 Coffee break

11.00-12.30 General discussion

12.30-14.00 Lunch break and 'Ideas market'

14.00-17.00 Plenary session :

Line-by-line discussion and finalisation of the Manifesto

Reactions by representatives of :

- Government of Upper Austria
- European Economic and Social Committee
- European Network for Rural Development
- Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, USA

Commitments and closure

18.00-20.00 Informal gathering in the Big Tent

Departures

Saturday

7 November

09.00-17.00 Optional Field Visits in the county of Schärding and historic town Passau
(90 participants expected)

Departures



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