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Position paper of the international organisations partner of the European Countryside Movement

Building on the resilience of rural territories for the post-Covid-19 period

International Association Rurality-Environment-Development - RED / European Association for Rural Development Institutions - AEIAR / International Association for Family Movements for Rural Training - AIMFR / Association of European Regions for Products of Origin - AREPO / Assembly of European Regions - AER / European Committee of Property Owners - CEDIP / European Confederation of Independent Winegrowers - CEVI / European Greenways Association - EGA / European Leader Association for Rural Development - ELARD / European Network of Outdoor Sports - ENOS / European association of mountain areas - EUROMONTANA / European Federation of Rural Tourism - EUROGITES / European Network of rural communities of energetic neutrality - RURENER / European Rural University - URE

The organisations of the European Countryside Movement stress the importance of rural territories for the recovery.

Europe is facing an unprecedented health crisis throughout its territory- whether urban, peri-urban or rural. Its social, economic and financial consequences will greatly influence the European societies and policies of tomorrow.

In this context, the European Countryside Movement recalls the added value of rural territories for the European project and in facing extreme situations. They carry innovative solutions and meet essential European health and food safety needs. The Resolution voted on 3 October 2018 in the European Parliament, based on a proposal from the RUMRA Intergroup, already expresses the need for recognition of rural territories and of their potential. Driven by the ECM organizations, following the call by Rurality-Environment-Development, this text recalls:

- the European objective of territorial, social and economic cohesion (art. 174 TFEU) and the necessity of a balanced territorial development;
- the diversity of rural and peri-urban areas, whose potential and added value are underestimated : they represent 57% of the population and provide 46% of the gross value of the Union;
- the incentive to mobilize resources and innovations from rural areas to meet the European challenges of transitions (social, climate, digital, etc.).

The ECM organizations restate today these objectives, which structure their engagement. They address the President of the Commission who has expressed the will to preserve rural areas in her “Program for Europe”, and they reaffirm the urgent need to ambitiously take rural areas into account. What will be Europe’s vision for the future of rural areas?

Observations :

- The consequences of the COVID-19 emergency affect the agricultural and touristic sectors, the economy and the services as a whole, SMEs, and NGOs that build the social bonds. They are all vital to the development of rural areas.
- The CAP reform post 2020 proposes a more sectoral approach to meet the environmental and food challenges, and limits its interrelation with the cohesion policy. The potential impact of this approach is to jeopardize the stakes of the integrated development of rural areas, while they require increased resources and collaboration.
- The CLLD/LEADER and integrated territorial development approaches facilitate citizen involvement and the effectiveness of local development strategies.
- Rural development must be integrated with other EU policies in order to achieve its objectives. However, by removing the EAFRD from the common strategic framework, transversality and cooperation with other funds are obstructed.

Accordingly, the organizations of the European Countryside Movement collaborative platform await the establishment of a European Rural Agenda and recommend:

- Recognizing the resilience of rural territories in the face of large-scale crises-which are bound to reoccur-as illustrated by many rural solidarity initiatives during the COVID-19 emergency.
- Highlighting the multifunctional dimension of the integrated development of rural areas in the post-2020 CAP, as well as its confirmed anchoring in the cohesion policy. The objective is to promote economic recovery, plural agriculture, and the legitimate mobilization of rural and peri-urban areas.
- Establishing, within the framework of the future European CAP Network, a sub-committee on the «Integrated development of rural areas».
- Maintaining the Civil Dialogue Group on Rural Development, while allowing organizations with only one representative to invite an observer.
- Reintegrating the EAFRD into the Common Strategic Framework, at least for LEADER/CLLD, and the strengthening of this approach, with the prospect of a greater interrelation between the funds for the financing of local strategies.
- Installing, as recommended by R.E.D., an Interfund for the implementation and financing of integrated strategies for the development of rural and peri-urban areas.

The current emergency also calls for a change in the social, economic and territorial paradigm. Strengthened by their capacity for innovation and their resilience, rural territories organize solidarity and mutual aid. Integrated territorial development is a factor of success in that regard. This added value has to be at the center of European rural policies, placing the human at the heart of concerns, in a constructive relationship with the urban centers.

Therefore the organizations of the ECM call for the establishment of a real European Rural Agenda, in response to the statement by the President of the European Commission in favor of a «Long-term vision for rural areas». This Agenda would provide a framework for rural proofing and would express ambitious political guidelines, leading to better territorial cohesion as well as to the crucial involvement of the citizens of the territories.