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*Brussels,
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Dear Ms Eckardt,

Thank you for your letter on behalf of ELARD and the interesting report from your survey among rural actors on the future they wish for rural areas. I have pleasure in responding to you also on behalf of Vice-President Timmermans, to whom you also addressed this letter.

This is a very welcome initiative, which represents an important addition to the work on the Long-term Vision for Rural Areas led by DG Agriculture and Rural Development. On this occasion, let me thank you for your engagement in its development, in particular for the position paper on the roadmap for the vision. I would encourage you to send your reply to the public consultation open until 30 November 2020 so that you can present your views and suggestions in greater detail. I also appreciate your participation in the Thematic Group on the Vision in the European Network for Rural Development, which develops ideas and approaches that can contribute to the Vision.

You are enquiring about the framework, which would enable the Member States to make use of the opportunities that LEADER/CLLD offers in the recovery work at the local level. The immediate response is continuation of the LAG activities under the current Rural Development Programmes (RDP), providing responses tailored to the local needs and building upon the assets of their area. In this respect, the Member States are encouraged to provide the required flexibility under the LEADER measure to enable bottom-up responses to the various challenges related to crisis and recovery, including climate action.

To ensure a smooth transition between the programming periods, the co-legislators foresee an extension implementation of the current RDP by one or two years, with additional resources to be added to the programmes from the new multi-annual financial framework. At least 5% of the total RDP budget allocation for the extended implementation period would continue to be reserved for LEADER. I trust this should allow the LAGs to continue their development work whilst preparing new strategies in view of their implementation under the future CAP Strategic Plans.

In July the European Council found principal agreement also on the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), a new instrument proposed by the Commission under its 'Next Generation EU' recovery initiative.. The Facility's general objective will be, in the aftermath of the Covid-19 crisis, to promote economic, social and territorial cohesion. For this purpose

it will support reforms and investments improving the resilience, growth potential and adjustment capacity of the Member States, mitigating the social and economic impact of the crisis, and supporting the green transition towards achieving the most recent Union's 2030 climate targets and complying with the objective of EU climate neutrality by 2050 and the digital transition. The Facility will provide large-scale financial support for the implementation of public investments and reforms by Member States. Member States will propose recovery and resilience plans for public investments and reforms they intend to implement until 2026. These will also need to be consistent, among others, with the partnership agreements and operational programmes, i.e. covering also the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

In addition, the European Recovery Instrument include a specific allocation to support operations preparing the recovery and resilience of the economy in rural areas, with a focus on green and digital recovery. Since the negotiations are still underway, it is not possible at this stage to clearly indicate what would be the scope and modalities to use those resources nor whether the LAGs would have a specific role in this regard.

Yours sincerely,



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