

PRESS RELEASE

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Rural Europe at the Heart of EU Priorities: CERSTE and ELARD Convene a High-Level Conference at the European Parliament

The event highlighted the strategic importance of rural areas and Local Action Groups (LAGs) within the forthcoming EU Multiannual Financial Framework 2028–2034.

On **30 September 2025**, the European Parliament hosted the international conference *“Bringing Rural Areas and LAGs Back to the centre of European Attention”*, promoted by **CERSTE** (Centre Européen des Recherches Socio-Économiques, Technologiques et Environnementales) and co-organised with **ELARD** (European LEADER Association for Rural Development), with the **financial support of FederEdilizia**.

The event brought together **representatives of the European Commission, academics, and experts** to discuss the future of rural development in Europe and the evolving role of the **LEADER programme** in shaping resilient, inclusive, and innovative communities.

Distinguished Speakers

- **Mihail Dumitru**, Deputy Director-General, DG AGRI
- **Nicola De Michelis**, Director, DG REGIO
- **Mauro Agnoletti**, Director, UNESCO Chair on Agricultural Heritage Landscapes – University of Florence and President of the National Association of Historical Rural Landscapes
- **Sabrina Lucatelli**, Director of Riabitare l'Italia and Vice-President, OECD Group on Rural Policies
- **Piotr Sadłocha**, President, ELARD
- **Domenico Passarella**, Vice President, FederEdilizia
- **Armando Pugno**, CERSTE Delegate for Rural Areas and LAGs

The discussion was **moderated by Alfonso Scarano**, Vice President of CERSTE.

Key Takeaways

- The upcoming **EU Budget 2028–2034** promises greater flexibility but also raises concerns about a potential weakening of cohesion policy — underscoring the need for **strong political leadership** to keep rural territories central to the European agenda.
- The **LEADER programme** remains a **pillar of local governance and community empowerment**, building social capital and driving innovation in rural areas.
- **LAGs must preserve their decision-making autonomy and dedicated funding**, to avoid being confined to agricultural functions and to maintain their role as catalysts of cross-sectoral rural development.
- Europe should move **beyond agricultural homogenisation**, recognising **territorial diversity and rural landscapes** as key assets for sustainable growth.
- **Rural building renovation** can evolve into a true **industrial and social policy**, countering depopulation and fostering community revitalisation.
- The **Italian National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI)** offers a **successful place-based model**, grounded in multi-level governance, co-design, and fund integration—showing how coordinated rural policy can inspire European innovation.

Acknowledgements

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- The **technical teams** who managed logistics and coordination;
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About CERSTE

CERSTE (Centre Européen des Recherches Socio-Économiques, Technologiques et Environnementales) promotes research, dialogue, and collaboration among institutions, academia, and civil society on the major socio-economic, technological, and environmental challenges shaping Europe's future.

Contacts

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LINK Conference Recordings

Italian Version <https://youtu.be/aq2ZOY3XHzs>

English Version <https://youtu.be/QwmZYlgschk>

Original Version <https://youtu.be/4NaRgswVhFE>