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Łagów, 2nd November 2026

To: The Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union

H.E. Aingeal O'Donoghue
Permanent Representative of Ireland to the European Union
Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Thomas Byrne TD
Minister of State for European Affairs
Government of Ireland

Cc:

- Simon Harris TD, Minister for Finance
- Dara Calleary TD, Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht
- Martin Heydon TD, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine

Subject: Europe's municipalities call for safeguarding LEADER-CLLD in the 2028–2034 EU budget

Dear Ambassador O'Donoghue and Minister Byrne,

More than 4 500 municipalities from European countries have already expressed their support for safeguarding and strengthening LEADER-CLLD in the next EU programming period, and further letters of support continue to arrive.

These municipalities support LEADER-CLLD because they see what it delivers in their communities. Through Local Action Groups (LAGs), LEADER brings together municipalities, businesses, civil society organisations and citizens to create local development opportunities, strengthen competitiveness, support entrepreneurship and build resilience. It mobilises local knowledge, initiative and cooperation to address challenges that public authorities cannot solve alone.

Europe faces major demographic, economic, environmental and social transformations. Meeting these challenges requires more than investment and legislation. **Every transformation depends on people who are willing and able to make it happen. Through LEADER-CLLD, Europe already has these people, organised in local partnerships across its territories.**

On behalf of the European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD), we therefore call on the Irish Presidency to safeguard LEADER-CLLD in the negotiations on the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework for 2028–2034.

The Council's recent agreement is an important step, but financial guarantees are still missing.

We welcome the Council's partial general approach on the future Common Agricultural Policy, agreed on 26 October 2026. In particular, we welcome the broader recognition of LEADER's contribution to the social, environmental, digital and economic development of rural communities, as well as the strengthening of territorial development and local cooperation.

However, the financial and horizontal provisions remain unresolved. Recognising LEADER's role without securing the resources needed to fulfil it would leave a significant gap in the future framework.

We also welcome the European Parliament's proposals to strengthen rural development, including dedicated funding for LEADER and a rural development allocation within Cohesion Policy. These proposals provide an important basis for the Council's continued negotiations.

We therefore ask the Irish Presidency to work with Member States towards four commitments:

1. Secure dedicated funding for LEADER under the CAP.

Maintain a minimum allocation of 5% of the rural development budget for LEADER, ensuring predictable funding for Local Action Groups throughout the programming period.

2. Give LEADER-CLLD a stronger position within Cohesion Policy.

Ensure that community-led local development receives financial support comparable to other territorial instruments, including Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI).

ITI and LEADER-CLLD are complementary approaches. While ITI is generally led by public authorities, LEADER brings municipalities, businesses and civil society together in partnerships where no single interest group can exercise control. This participatory decision-making structure deserves equal recognition in the EU's territorial development framework.

3. Reserve 50% of the rural development allocation from Cohesion Policy funds for LEADER-CLLD.

We welcome the efforts to establish binding rural development targets in the next EU budget, including the European Parliament's proposal to allocate at least 10% of ERDF and, where applicable, Cohesion Fund resources to rural development.

However, a rural target alone does not guarantee community-led development. Funding may reach rural territories without giving local communities any influence over how it is used.

We therefore call for **at least 50% of the proposed rural development allocation under Cohesion Policy to be ring-fenced for LEADER-CLLD**, ensuring that local communities can identify priorities and make funding decisions through their Local Action Groups.

4. Enable LEADER-CLLD to operate across EU policy areas.

Rural and coastal communities face challenges that cannot be addressed through agricultural policy alone. Local development strategies must also be able to support entrepreneurship, employment, social inclusion, essential services, environmental transition and community resilience.

We therefore call for LEADER-CLLD to be supported across agricultural, cohesion, social and fisheries policies, while preserving the integrated, bottom-up approach and the decision-making responsibilities of Local Action Groups.

Local communities must be involved before the main decisions are taken.

As Member States begin preparing their National and Regional Partnership Plans, there is a risk that important decisions on priorities and funding allocations will be taken before the European

negotiations are concluded. Local Action Groups and their representative networks must be involved while these decisions are being shaped, not merely consulted after the main choices have already been made.

We ask the Irish Presidency to ensure that the Council's continued work reflects these concerns and that they are carried forward to the incoming Lithuanian Presidency.

The municipalities supporting our call recognise LEADER-CLLD as a practical instrument for local development, competitiveness and resilience. Europe already has the partnerships and committed people needed to turn its policy ambitions into action. **The next EU budget must give them the resources and the opportunity to do so.**

Yours sincerely,

Piotr Sadłocha
President
European LEADER Association for Rural Development