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Łagów, 2nd November 2026

To: The Incoming Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Łagów, xx November 2026

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

Dear Prime Minister and Minister Valys,

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 are writing ahead of Lithuania's Presidency of the Council of the European Union, beginning on 1 January 2027, to highlight the importance of safeguarding LEADER-CLLD in the negotiations on the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework for 2028–2034.

The Council has recognised LEADER's broader role. The next step is to secure its future.

The Council's partial general approach of 26 October 2026 provides an important starting point for Lithuania's upcoming Presidency. We welcome the Council's recognition of LEADER's broader contribution to the social, environmental, digital and economic development of rural communities, together with its stronger emphasis on territorial development and local cooperation.

However, the most important questions for LEADER-CLLD remain unresolved: predictable financing, its position within Cohesion Policy and the guarantees needed to ensure that local communities can participate meaningfully in the preparation and implementation of National and Regional Partnership Plans.

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 incoming Lithuanian Presidency to prioritise four commitments:

1. Secure dedicated funding for LEADER under the CAP.

Maintain a minimum allocation of 5% of the rural development budget for LEADER, providing Local Action Groups with predictable resources 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).

Both approaches are valuable, but they serve different purposes. 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 democratic and participatory approach must have a secure place in the future Cohesion Policy.

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.

Local development cannot be separated into agricultural, economic, social or environmental challenges. The future framework should enable Member States to support integrated community-led strategies across agricultural, cohesion, social and fisheries policies, while maintaining the bottom-up approach and 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 funding priorities and allocations will be taken before the European legislative framework is finalised.

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

We therefore ask the incoming Lithuanian Presidency to ensure that meaningful participation and binding financial guarantees for LEADER-CLLD remain central to the negotiations on the MFF and its related legislation.

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.**

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these proposals with the incoming Lithuanian Presidency and the relevant national and Council representatives.

Yours sincerely,



Piotr Sadłocha

President
European LEADER Association for Rural Development