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Łagów, 2nd November 2026

To the Chairs of the AGRI, REGI, BUDG, EMPL and PECH Committees of the European Parliament

- Ms Veronika Vrecionová, Chair of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI)
- Mr Adrian-Dragoș Benea, Chair of the Committee on Regional Development (REGI)
- Mr Johan Van Overtveldt, Chair of the Committee on Budgets (BUDG)
- Ms Li Andersson, Chair of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL)
- Ms Carmen Crespo Díaz, Chair of the Committee on Fisheries (PECH)

Cc:

- European Commission – DG AGRI, DG REGIO, DG EMPL, DG MARE and DG BUDG
- European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)
- European Committee of the Regions (CoR)

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

Dear Ms Veronika Vrecionová, Mr Adrian-Dragoș Benea, Mr Johan Van Overtveldt, Ms Li Andersson and Ms Carmen Crespo Díaz,

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.**

This is why Europe's municipalities are calling for LEADER-CLLD to be secured in the next EU budget.

On behalf of the European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD), we welcome the provisions proposed in the European Parliament's ongoing legislative work that strengthen rural development, territorial cohesion and the LEADER-CLLD approach.

The recent discussions on the need for legally binding financial guarantees for the CAP and rural development underline the importance of securing predictable funding in the next programming period. For ELARD, these guarantees must explicitly include LEADER and community-led local development.

However, further safeguards are needed, particularly within Cohesion Policy.

LEADER-CLLD is more than a funding instrument. It is a European model of local democracy and development.

For more than 30 years, LEADER has enabled local communities to take responsibility for their own development. Through Local Action Groups, public authorities, businesses and civil society work together to identify priorities, develop strategies and decide which projects should receive support.

This distinguishes LEADER-CLLD from other territorial instruments. Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) play an important role in territorial development, with local and regional authorities taking primary responsibility for their implementation. LEADER-CLLD goes a step further by placing decision-making in partnerships representing the wider community, where no single interest group can exercise control.

Both approaches are valuable and complementary. However, if the European Union wants to strengthen democracy, competitiveness, resilience and local ownership, community-led development must receive equally strong recognition and financial support.

We therefore call on the European Parliament to defend and further strengthen the following provisions in the ongoing negotiations:

1. Secure ring-fenced funding for LEADER under the CAP.

We strongly support the Parliament's proposal to reserve at least 5% of the rural development allocation for LEADER. This minimum allocation must be maintained in the final legislation to provide Local Action Groups with predictable resources throughout the programming period.

2. Give LEADER-CLLD equivalent support within Cohesion Policy.

We welcome the Parliament's proposal to strengthen integrated territorial development and to provide dedicated resources for territorial and urban strategies. We ask that comparable provisions be introduced for community-led local development, ensuring that Member States provide meaningful support for LEADER-CLLD within Cohesion Policy, rather than leaving its implementation entirely to national discretion.

3. Ensure that the rural target includes dedicated funding 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. This would ensure that the rural target supports not only investment in rural areas, but also local communities' ability to identify priorities and make funding decisions through their Local Action Groups.

4. Ensure that LEADER-CLLD remains accessible 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.

Europe's municipalities have made their position clear. They recognise that LEADER-CLLD provides more than access to European funding. It gives them partners, local capacity and a way to involve their communities in addressing Europe's challenges.

At a time when the EU needs to strengthen its competitiveness, resilience and democratic foundations, it cannot afford to weaken the local partnerships that help turn European policies into action.

Europe has ambitious goals for its future. Through LEADER-CLLD, it already has thousands of local partnerships and committed people ready to help deliver them.

We count on the European Parliament's continued leadership in securing their role in the next programming period.

Yours sincerely,



Piotr Sadłocha

President
European LEADER Association for Rural Development

