



Updated position of European LEADER Association for Rural Development, ELARD

Renewing LEADER/CLLD for 2021-2027 programming period

Approved in ELARD General Assembly, Brussels, 10th April 2019)

The European LEADER Association for Rural Development, ELARD agreed and issued the [Tartu declaration](#) at the end of 2016. This was followed late 2017 with the [position paper for LEADER post-2020](#). In September 2018 ELARD organised the conference ["Conference "LEADER Reloaded"](#) in Évora, Portugal with more than 280 participants from 28 countries to take stock on the achievements of LEADER/CLLD in the light of the legal proposals for the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) which were issued earlier 2018.

For the next generation of European funding the European Commission has proposed that a part of the ESIF should be used to get **"Europe closer to citizens"**. The achievements of LEADER/CLLD have shown that Local Action Groups (LAGs) are able to defend the European values, if recognised as local drivers for change and development and enabled to innovate in their areas. In consequence, LEADER/CLLD is a powerful tool to implement the **UN 2030 Agenda in rural areas**.

Now that the negotiation process within the European institutions is more advanced and the elections for the European Parliament are very close, ELARD would like to state the following:

- **ELARD calls for the reintegration of the EAFRD into the Common Provision Regulations**, and therefore supports the European Parliament and many other rural stakeholder organisations in the wish to keep rural development within the "ESIF family". A greater inter-relationship between these funds is vital for the financing of territorial instruments, in particular CLLD/LEADER Local Development Strategies;
- ELARD raises the concern that the joint programming of the 1st and the 2nd pillar of the Common Agriculture Policy entails the **risk that non-agricultural rural development will become a minor issue** in the CAP;
- **ELARD welcomes that LEADER is mandatory in EAFRD. However, the earmarking of 5%**, with the proposed cut of the second pillar, will result in **substantially less funding** compared to the current period. Therefore, **ELARD requests to ensure at least the same budget for LEADER**. Moreover, ELARD strongly regrets that **ERDF, ESF and EMFF do not foresee a minimum percentage for CLLD**. ELARD asks the Commission to ensure that **LEADER is mandatory in every region in Europe**;
- **ELARD welcomes the efforts for simplification and de-regulation** in the legislation and have faith that these will materialise on all levels. Regarding the difficulties which LEADER is experiencing due to the application of State Aid provisions, it would be useful to consider a **block exemption for LEADER/CLLD projects** in the framework of this simplification;
- ELARD welcomes that Member States can create a "common basket" of dedicated **funding for CLLD from the different Funds**. **ELARD encourages MS to operate under a common framework, with a lead fund and coordinated by a dedicated Management**



Authority/Intermediate Body. Still, ELARD considers it crucial to **create and support incentives for Member States to design and implement efficient solutions, especially to encourage the use of “one-stop-shop” solutions**, based on the good examples for the implementation of multi-funded CLLD in rural areas, in the current period;

- ELARD points at the risks of letting the **networking for LEADER** take place in a CAP Network, with a stronger focus on agricultural and environmental issues, neglecting territorial approaches and therefore propose to the Commission to create a **pilot CLLD Support Unit at EU level** to support networking, transnational cooperation and capacity building of all LAGs in all Funds, similar to the FARNET Support Unit;
- **ELARD embraces the Smart Villages approach into the LEADER methodology** and defend that LAGs are the most suitable platform to bring Europe closer to citizens – as multi-stakeholder partnerships – and to implement the Smart Village approach;
- ELARD is convinced that LEADER/CLLD and **LAGs are the right instrument to localize, implement, follow-up and review the Sustainable Development Goals** in rural areas. Involvement of rural areas is essential for the achievement of the SDGs;
- ELARD asks for clarity on the technical measures to **allow a smooth transition between the current funding period and the next, including LEADER/CLLD**, since the new CAP framework will need more time to enter into force.

ELARD is an international non-profit association set up to contribute to the LEADER/CLLD implementation in Europe. The European LEADER Association joins together almost 2.500 Local Action Groups from 26 countries, including from countries that are not members of the European Union but have adopted and are implementing the LEADER methodology: Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Republic of North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.