European Committee of the Regions

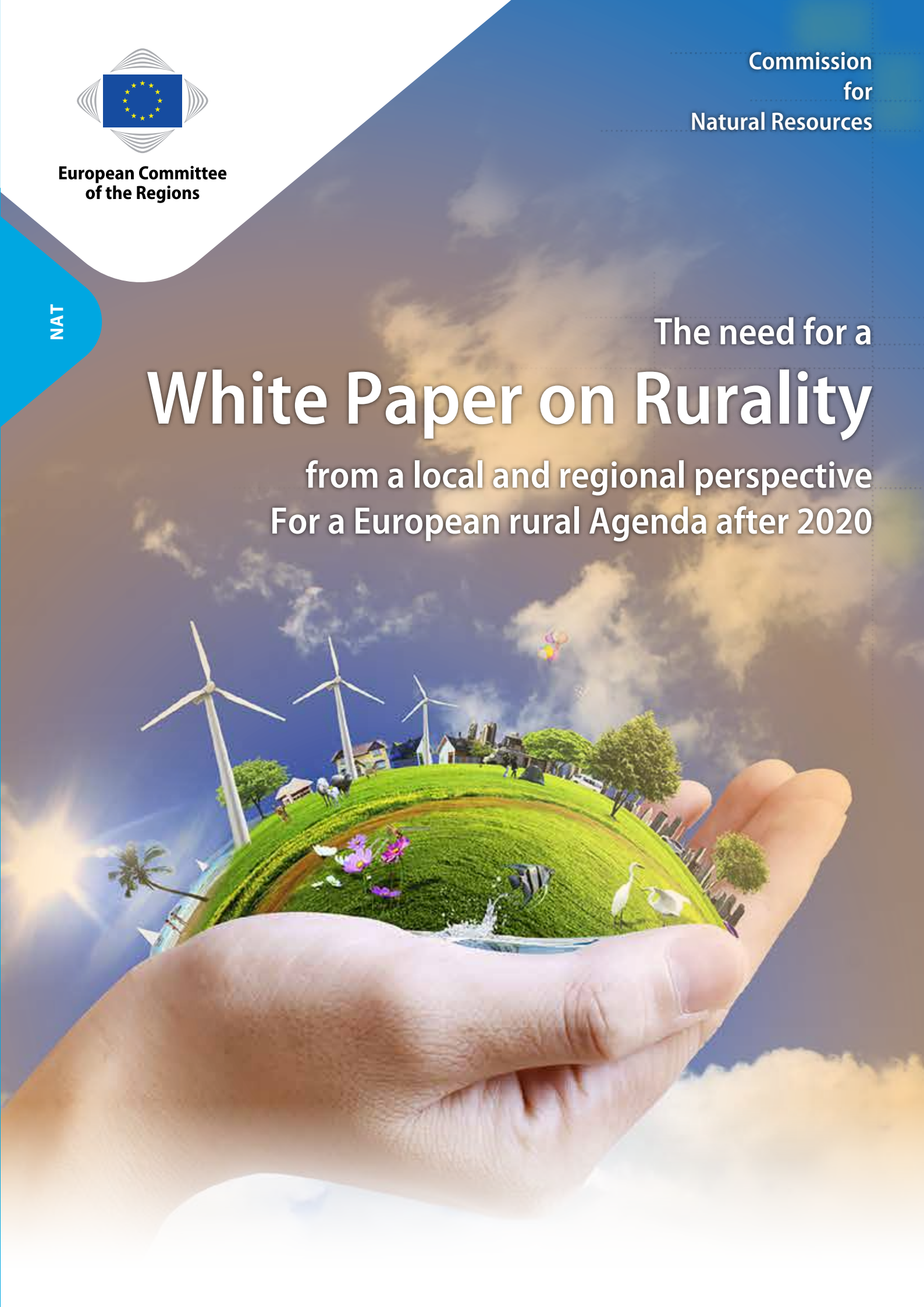
Commission for Natural Resources

NAT

The need for a

White Paper on Rurality

from a local and regional perspective
For a European rural Agenda after 2020



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European Committee of the Regions

I. Proposals of the European Committee of the Regions

Why do we need a white paper on rurality?

Francina ARMENGOL I SOCIAS,
Chair of the Commission for Natural Resources (NAT)
in the European Committee of the Regions

Rural and intermediate areas account for 91% of the EU's territory, are home to 60% of its population, generate 43% of its gross value added and play host to 56% of its jobs. Rural areas are slowing down compared with urban areas. The Sixth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion, published in July 2014, confirmed that the gap is all the more worrying given that it is still growing, partly because the development of large and capital cities has stepped up a gear.

The way the Structural Funds are being used is exacerbating these disparities:

- The first pillar of the CAP and the deregulation of agricultural markets is increasing the concentration of production in more intensive zones and causing an acceleration in the disappearance of businesses from other areas, with well-documented environmental and social consequences.
- The original objective of rural development policy was to offset the disparities brought about by subsidies granted under the first pillar of the CAP, but it has unfortunately failed to reverse the trend. The funding available under the second pillar of the CAP has been cut compared with the previous period. The bulk of the budget available is concentrated on the agricultural sector. The co-financing of rural development measures is posing problems for regions with fewer administrative and financial resources, explaining the low take-up of the funds in some Member States.
- The ERDF is focussing increasingly on the financing of urban areas. So far only 11.6 % of the resources allocated under the ERDF have

been granted to rural areas compared to 25.8% in the previous programming period.

- At a time when rural depopulation constitutes a serious problem throughout Europe – particularly the movement of young people from rural or remote areas to towns and cities –, the European Social Fund is, regrettably, struggling to deploy its vocational training resources in rural areas: only 7% of the ESF are dedicated to rural areas in the current programming period. Yet there is a direct correlation between the youth employment rate and the percentage of young people in vocational training.

Preparations for the post-2020 programming period will start very soon. It is important to have an informed debate on the countryside in order to give a stronger foundation to policy for rural areas after 2020. The added value and potential for creativity and innovation offered by rural areas is considerable, but their contribution to the inclusive, sustainable and smart growth sought by the Europe 2020 strategy is underexploited. Whereas the concept of "smart cities" has become the decision-makers' policy of choice when it comes to responding to future challenges, the NAT commission considers that, on the contrary, it will be impossible to reach the Europe 2020 targets while maintaining territorial cohesion in Europe without drawing on all sources of potential growth, including the countryside.

Proposals for the future of rural policy

Randel LÄNTS,
rapporteur for the own-initiative opinion on innovation and modernisation of the rural economy of the European Committee of the Regions

It is the belief of the European Committee of the Regions that only through an integrated approach to public policy will it be possible to tackle the economic, environmental and social challenges facing every part of Europe and rural areas in particular. It is therefore a matter of urgency to:

1. step up EU financial support for rural development: the European budget dedicated to rural development is insufficient given the importance of rural areas in Europe; even more worryingly, there is a significant decrease compared to the previous programming period. We have gone from 32.6% of the Structural Funds budget to 21.3% in the current programming period (MFF 2014-2020)
2. diversify entry points and mainstream rural issues into all EU policies: the needs of rural areas go far beyond what rural development policy can do, but what the EU has to offer is lacking in terms of both quantity and quality. All structural policies should make rural development their priority objective, in accordance with the territorial cohesion objective enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty.
3. come up with concrete measures on how to implement the "rural proofing" of all EU policies, which involves reviewing the EU structural and regional strategies: The first Cork declaration, adopted on 9 November 1996, forthrightly requested "a fairer balance" of public spending and investments between rural and urban areas. It is now clear that the first Cork declaration has not fully met its objectives due to a lack of tangible commitments. In the new Cork 2.0 Declaration adopted on 6 September 2016, there is only

one concrete proposal with the potential to have a meaningful impact: the so-called "rural proofing", the aim of which would be to "systematically review other macro and sectorial policies through a rural lens". For the Committee of the Regions, drawing up an operational action plan is essential to ensuring that the new declaration does not exist solely on paper

4. continue to harmonise the Structural Fund operating rules via the common strategic framework in order to facilitate rural development programming and management: quite apart from the budget resources made available, a place-based approach remains peripheral to the operational programmes, whereas research demonstrates that adopting such an approach and fostering greater territorial awareness are key to implementing cohesion policy more effectively and getting closer to meeting the objectives of the Europe 2020 policy.

Main findings of the study on the evolution of the European budget dedicated to rural development policy

The European Committee of the Regions has carried out a study on the evolution of the European budget dedicated to rural development policy. Its aim is to provide an overview of the European Union (EU) budget dedicated to rural development since 1993, which covers all the structural funds: the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), and the Cohesion Fund (CF).

The mains findings of the study are as follows:

- After an increase between 1993 and 2006 the budget for the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) shows a slight decrease since 2007
- The current programming period (MFF 2014-2020) has a planned total allocation for rural development which appears, overall, to be much lower than the RD allocation of the previous programming period.
- This lower contribution to RD seems to be mostly determined by a significantly lower contribution from the ERDF compared to the previous programming period.

Overview of the contribution of the funds to RD as a share of total Structural Fund appropriations (%), per MFF

MFF	EAGGF/ EAFRD	ERDF	ESF	CF	Total
2014-2020	15.9%	3.6%	1.0%	0.7%	21.3%
2007-2013	18.5%	10.8% (1) (2)	0.6%	2.7% (1) (2)	32.6%
2000-2006	19.9%	0.4%	(*)	0.0%	20.3%
1993-1999	19.4% (1)	2.2%	0.6% (1)	0.0%	22.1% (1)

(*) = not available.

(1) Payment appropriations.

(2) Includes 50% of combined contribution of ERDF/CF to RD. The 50% share between the two funds is arbitrary.

II. Questions and answers from the other European Institutions

European Parliament

The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Parliament

Czesław Siekierski,
Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

The Cork 2.0 Declaration adopted on 6 September 2016 mentions that "Rural and agricultural policies must interact with the wider context of national and regional strategies and work in complementarity and coherence with other policies". Do you think that drafting a white Paper on rurality would help meeting this goal?

Certainly yes. I think it is a good idea, since the preparation of a White Paper serves to emphasize the importance of the topic. Tackling the issue is always considered in a broader context and for that reason I am certain that it would enable us to attain a deeper understanding of the complex nature of connections between agriculture and rural areas. What is happening is that alongside the ongoing development, the growing size of farms and their scale of production, farms are turning into enterprises and their connection with rural areas is mainly through the environmental aspect and their growing need for different services. The link between farms and rural areas is stronger in the case of traditional rural areas, especially those comprising of small farms, where production is centred on vineyards and the production of wine, growing olive trees and producing olive oil or growing some types of fruits and vegetables, which often provide agro-tourism services. In these regions, rural development is more strongly connected with agricultural holdings. However, we must keep in mind that rural areas should be supported by different EU policies, in the same way that in a given country the responsibility for these areas cannot rest solely with the minister responsible for agriculture, but must also concern other ministers. Rural areas should be covered to a larger extent by the cohesion policy, which is very vocal about issues of territorial cohesion. The White Paper would set concrete goals and directions for action, but the way that these are carried out should be left mainly in the hands of national institutions with an exchange of views between countries, Member States and the Commission being of high importance here. All this is necessary to better understand the idea and complexity of the White Paper's content.

Which concrete measures could be proposed in order to implement the "rural proofing" of all EU policies as mentioned in the Cork 2.0 Declaration ?

Up to now, the Common Agricultural Policy was being extended to accommodate different activities that were connected with other policies. One can name here the climate policy, where ag-

riculture can have a negative impact on the one hand but can also have a positive effect, on the other. Through its first and second pillar, the CAP implements many measures connected with climate and environmental policy. This also touches on the issue of applying scientific research solutions and the entire field of innovation and smart growth which are, to a large extent, conducted thanks to the Horizon 2020 programme. We should also keep in mind that a programme for helping the most deprived (FEAD) operates alongside the CAP, as do the school schemes.

What are your main priorities for the future of rural development policy after 2020?

For me, the main priority is sustainable development that should target rural areas in a way more closely resembling its interest in other areas. The goal is to enable living conditions and standards to reach a similar level for people living in rural areas, irrespective of whether someone works in agriculture or services for agricultural operations, and this should be the case mainly regarding education, health care and other services. The infrastructure grid and its quality, as well as broadband Internet, play an important role in this regard. I would like the inhabitants of rural areas to have the possibility to benefit from a short food supply chain and the production carried out by their neighbours as in that way they could take advantage of the proximity of farms. What is also of importance to me is the functioning of a community in a given place, irrespective of differences in terms of type of work and occupation. These people can shape local development together by upholding traditions and customs as well as creating the sense of belonging to a community.

rumra
Intergroup on Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas

The intergroup on Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas of the European Parliament

Mercedes Bresso,
Chair of the intergroup on Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas (RUMRA)

Rural, mountainous and remote areas are home to millions of citizens in the Eu3,5olitical agenda, with the first talks and negotiations related to the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the future of Cohesion Policy coming up, it is time for stakeholders in rural and mountainous regions to come together in support of a new perspective on our issues. To this end, the RUMRA Intergroup in the European Parliament has launched a proposal for an Agenda for rural and mountainous areas. In the same vein as the Urban Agenda, we believe that these areas deserve closer attention and better targeted policy solutions.

We have organised several events in the European Parliament, in the Committee of the Regions and in cooperation with the European Commission's DG REGIO, to raise awareness and build up a political consensus around our issues. We have published a number of written declarations on topics we see as relevant to rural and mountainous areas, and we be continuing to engage in talks with relevant stakeholders and policy makers. In addition, we will soon try to add to our agenda an own-initiative report in the European Parliament's REGI Committee.

Alongside these activities, it will also be crucial to ensure the support of governments and national authorities, as well as of regional and local ones. They will be key players in future negotiations on both the MFF and cohesion policy, so coordinated action will be needed to get these authorities directly involved in the path towards achieving our Agenda.

In the next few months, we will be undertaking a variety of actions, initiatives and events, where we will try also to involve European citizens and civil society.

The need for a sustainable, innovative and efficient approach towards the challenges, as well as the opportunities, of rural and mountainous areas in the context of EU policy making is clear. At EU level, the RUMRA Intergroup will work to make sure that the voice of rural and mountainous areas is heard and given the necessary consideration.

The Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Commission

Phil Hogan,
Commissioner in charge Agriculture and Rural Development

How do you intend to implement the Cork Declaration?

I am very pleased with the Cork Declaration. On the one hand it is a strong document which is rich in content, truly reflects the needs and aspirations of our rural and agricultural communities and gives strong recommendations on the kind of policies needed to unleash rural potential. On the other hand it is also a strong declaration in the sense that it unifies rural voices. I am particularly thrilled with the broad backing the declaration has been given from across our CAP stakeholder community.

As Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, I have committed myself to the Cork Declaration and I will give it most serious consideration in the work ahead. I believe it provides important orientation for the up-coming debates on the future of our rural and agricultural policies.

If you read the Declaration carefully, it is also clear that implementing it is not a one-man job. The declaration urges all policy makers of the EU to improve awareness about and invest in rural potential. It calls for a rural-proofing mechanism which systematically reviews other macro and sectoral policies through a rural lens and considers the impact they have on rural communities. I therefore consider the implementation of the Cork declaration a matter for all policy makers of the Union, at all levels: local, regional, national and EU.

Do you think that drafting a white paper on rurality would help with implementing the Cork Declaration?

It is important that we keep considering our rural policy as an integrated part of the Common Agricultural Policy and that we strengthen the links between rural and agricultural policies rather than weakening them.

This line of thought is also reflected in the Cork declaration, which calls for a common strategic and programming framework for the CAP as a whole. I share the view that if we want a strong policy that is capable of promoting a better life in rural areas, we have to address the full potential of both agricultural and rural communities, and that is best done in a single comprehensive approach.

The Cork declaration states that "*rural and agricultural policies must interact with the wider context of national and regional strategies and work in complementarity and coherence with other policies.*" How would you raise awareness on rural issues in the other DGs and in particular DG Regio, since according to preliminary estimates only 11.5% of the ERDF is currently earmarked for rural areas?

This Commission is dedicated to working together across portfolios and policy areas to ensure we deliver concrete results for the European citizens. One good example of this is the joint venture between DG AGRI, REGIO and CONNECT to roll out high-speed broadband to rural communities.

Another is the good cooperation we enjoy with DG REGIO where we work to boost the use financial instruments in our funds through the Fi-Compass advisory hub. And of course we have the Partnership Agreements with the Member States which provide a single strategic framework for the use of the European Structural and Investment Funds in each Member State.

So the right ingredients are there in terms of opportunity and experience. I am confident that we can build on this kind of cooperation and teamwork to ensure that the needs and aspirations of rural communities are sufficiently reflected in programme design and implementation of all EU funds.

The Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy of the European Commission

Normunds POPENS,
Deputy Director-General - Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy of the European Commission

The Cork Declaration states that "rural and agricultural policies must interact with the wider context of national and regional strategies and work in complementarity and coherence with other policies". How do you intend to implement this recommendation within DG REGIO? Do you think that drafting a White Paper on rurality would help with meeting this goal?

The 2014-2020 European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds enables more synergies between the different funds and includes tools to enhance policy cooperation. For example, when an integrated territorial strategy or community-led local development strategy is established under an ERDF programme, it can link to and draw support and expertise from other ESI Funds too.

It's worth underlining that the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) promotes development in all regions and territories of Europe and helps them build on their specific assets. We have developed the Smart Specialisation concept, which is an innovative approach promoting efficient and targeted use of public investment in research and innovation

to enable countries and regions to capitalise on their strengths and create new competitive advantages.

Initial estimates show a decrease in the share of the ERDF earmarked for rural areas compared to the previous programming period. How do you explain this decline? What could be proposed to reverse this trend?

As you know we are working with estimates here and we can hardly reflect on "trends" on this basis.
By the end of 2014, the programmes 2007-2013 estimated "ex-post" that almost 26% of ERDF resources had been allocated to projects operating in a rural context. Only 10.7% was not allocated to a territorial code.
In contrast the "ex-ante" ERDF estimates for 2014-2020 show that 46.5% of investments are "not allocated" to a territorial code, with 11.5% allocated to rural areas so far.
In all likelihood, as projects are selected, the weight of investment under the rural and other territorial codes will increase and the "not allocated" will decrease.

Some experts consider that return on investment is more important in peripheral areas than in urban areas. Do you think that reorientation of European structural funds towards rural areas would enhance the effectiveness of cohesion policy?

The Commission acknowledges that infrastructure upgrade and development may still facilitate access to some remote rural areas of the EU. However, as published by the Commission at the last European Semester most development challenges and obstacles relate to horizontal issues such as debt, financial instability, labour market regulation, barriers to competition in transport and energy sectors. They have an impact on economic growth and effectiveness of investment policy in both in urban and rural areas. In addition, we believe that the effectiveness of implementation of ESIF could be improved by further simplification efforts.

III.

Proposals from associations

International association Rurality-Environment-Development: why do we need a European rural Agenda after 2020?

Gérard Peltre,
Chairman of the international association Rurality-Environment-Development and the European Countryside Movement

The situation in the rural areas of the EU makes rural life a major aspect of the European venture. Rural areas, including those qualifying as peri-urban, account for 58% of the EU's population and 56% of its jobs. Rural areas in the 21st century are most diverse. Their assets go far beyond the primary sector: agriculture still determines land use, but secondary and tertiary activities have become very important for the economy and for employment.

The diversity of rural areas brings considerable added value and potential for creativity and innovation and this can be turned to even better use. Yet their contributions to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth as targeted under the Europe 2020 Strategy are underestimated and underexploited. Recognising these areas as poles of development and innovation would enable them to become more involved in EU programmes. The strategy's aims will only be achieved by making them partners expected to contribute to European growth and innovation.

This has been made all the more necessary by reservations about the European venture, which has meant that a part of the rural population has opted for extreme political stances, as well as by major climate challenges and large-scale migration flows now and in the future.

Under the Treaty of the Union, European policies have to ensure the balanced territorial development of the EU and the well-being of all citizens. The way that these measures are implemented more often than not channels European funds in the direction of densely populated areas and major regional imbalances, particularly health, mobility and security services.

More appropriate responses must be made at the relevant local and regional levels to generate and support local development dynamics. The content of operational and rural development programmes illustrates the limits of the current community approach: new integrating tools such as CLLD and ITI have not been taken up enough by Member States or Regions.

It is clear that everywhere that local development is led by local players, rural areas regain their attractiveness for businesses and young people, amongst others. High-speed broadband internet connections are key here. Europe proposed that this be made the norm in the 2014-2020 period: a fine challenge for efforts to rally people to this cause, which the European Union should have - must - do more to advocate and go beyond its

retreat behind the subsidiarity principle.

The European timetable nowadays allows time for discussion; this must be turned to good use in order to provide a stronger, more effective framework for rural policy post 2020.

This was the thinking behind the call "**for a European rural Agenda**" at the conference with the same title, co-organised in April of this year by the Rurality-Environment-Development network and the Committee of the Regions, with support from the European Countryside Movement (ECM). The call for a White Paper on rural areas via this platform for international organisations is also part of moves towards a European rural agenda, which is a natural extension thereof. These calls are today being supported by many parties and at all levels, such as the European Parliament Intergroup on Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas.

The Cork 2.0 conference concluded with a declaration, the broad lines of which were positive, advocating a policy for the development of rural areas through integrated, participatory approaches at local and regional level. However, a lack of political commitment by the Commission to take these broad lines on board has also been noticed. The future, therefore, remains uncertain as regards the emergence of a genuine European policy for rural territories.

Adoption of a European rural Agenda would send out a strong political signal of community commitment here. It would provide the inter-sectoral framework for a policy which is necessary to achieve the Union's goal. **Yes, rural territories constitute part of the answer to Europe's challenges, and the European rural agenda is the key to freeing up all the potential in this domain.**

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purple
peri-urban regions platform Europe

PURPLE: The EU level must take account of challenges faced – and opportunities offered - by all rural areas including peri-urban ones

Mrs Helyn CLACK,
Surrey County Council, President of PURPLE,
the Peri-Urban Regions Platform Europe

The PURPLE network, the voice of peri-urban regions in EUROPE, is convinced that any traditional rural-urban dichotomy is inadequate in achieving an understanding of territorial development. New ways of living and working have served to blur the divides between urban and

rural areas, creating ever larger and ever more important peri-urban areas, with their own specific characteristics, problems and opportunities. In other words, a large and growing part of Europe is characterised by a complex web of inter-relations and interdependencies between different places. It is impossible to decouple the urban and rural in some artificial way. Where urban and rural co-exist there is peri-urban.

Whilst all the EU institutions recently committed themselves to a strong Urban Agenda for the EU, it is both obvious and widely recognised that in reality some of the main challenges which cities face (economic and social development, climate change, transport and demographic change), can only be tackled through partnerships with their surrounding peri-urban and rural areas.

To accentuate the importance of the urban whilst not doing the same for the rural is dangerous. A key balance must be struck and, on the eve of the crucial debate about the EU budget and policies post-2020, PURPLE members believe that EU investments – including those made within rural policies and programmes – must maintain a strong territorial and place-based focus, with more specific attention being paid to peri-urban areas in order to better support growth, jobs and innovation both within and beyond urban centres.

For this reason, PURPLE has been actively supporting recent calls for a White Paper on Rurality and an EU Rural Agenda that would serve as a strong signal that the challenges faced by rural areas of all kinds (including peri-urban territories) must also be taken into account at EU level. Indeed, a large proportion of the EU population lives in rural and peri-urban regions and it would be a political mistake, at exactly a time when Euroscepticism is growing, not to recognise their inhabitants as an integral part of European dynamics.

Following the Cork 2.0 conference on the future of rural development policy organised early in September 2016, PURPLE has put on record its support for the conviction expressed by the participants "that urban centres and rural areas and their populations enjoy different but complementary assets, and that improved interrelations and partnerships among them are important preconditions for economic viability, environmental performance and social cohesion of the Union as a whole". We agree that "support should strengthen rural-urban linkages and align the sustainable development of both rural and urban areas". Indeed, investment in rural viability and vitality is of the greatest importance since we believe too that "investments in business development, public and private services, essential infrastructure and capacity building should deliver towards the common EU objectives notably in relation to jobs and green and inclusive growth".

PURPLE hopes that the Cork 2.0 Declaration 2016 will shape the European Commission's rural vision for the years to come, and that, more broadly, there will emerge a genuine Rural Agenda for the EU to promote the enhancement of rural areas, through integrated territorial approaches involving all stakeholders within and beyond the farming sector. In this way, and arguably only in this way, will policy and practice be capable of supporting territorial development of universal benefit, an aim towards which PURPLE remains firmly committed and determined to play its part.

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EUROMONTANA

Euromontana: Europe's mountains offer a solid foundation for a White Paper on Rurality

Juanan Gutierrez,
President of Euromontana, the European association of mountain areas

Mountain areas cover 29% of the EU and are home to 13% of its population. They are vital sources of freshwater, biodiversity and places for recreation and inspiration. The mountains are also places of production, providing distinctive local quality foods, energy, and employment as well as many ecosystem services. These territories have strong innovation and growth potential that can contribute to achieving the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

To fully exploit this potential, we need **active, ambitious and targeted policies to overcome the mountains' topographic and increasing climatic challenges and the related extra costs** - in both time and money - of construction, production and ensuring accessibility.

During the 2007-2013 programming period, **€ 6 381 million of structural funds (ERDF, ESF)** were spent in mountain areas, according to DG REGIO. Euromontana points out however that European Regulations stipulate that the ERDF shall pay particular attention to addressing the specific difficulties'1 of areas facing geographical and natural handicaps. But obviously this is not the case when only 1.85% of the ERDF and ESF have been spent in mountain areas. So we fully support the proposals for a White Paper and an Agenda on Rurality to realise the potential of mountains. They could facilitate a better integrated policy for rural areas and a better use of all the structural and investment funds, which would be very beneficial for mountain areas.

Euromontana has worked with the Members of the European Parliament in the RUMRA (Rural, Mountain and Remote Areas) Intergroup to develop some practical proposals for the content of such an agenda. In particular, Euromontana calls upon the EU institutions to:

- **Promote mountain products**, in particular through **the European Charter for Mountain Quality Food Products** and the optional quality term "mountain products", both of which encourage quality local production that is sustainable and respectful of the environment;
- Better appreciate the precious but fragile **ecosystem services** provided by mountain farmers and forestry owners and better compensate these ecosystem services, which

[1] Article 10 of Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006

contribute to the well-being of the whole population;

- Develop new tourism products and services based on traditional activities, local products, the mountain environment and the heritage and unique culture of mountain areas in order to significantly extend the length of **the traditional tourist season** and encourage new customers, such as seniors;
- **Prioritise access to high speed broadband** by favouring remote areas where public incentives should be stronger than in densely populated areas;
- Retain young people in, and attract more to, mountain areas by encouraging distance learning and better adapting training provision to the needs of and jobs available in the region.

We believe that innovations developed in mountains can be a source of inspiration and solutions for the rest of Europe. More proposals that could feed an Agenda for Rurality can be found in Euromontana's document on Mountains 2020.

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European Committee of the Regions

Created in 1994 following the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, the European Committee of the Regions is the EU's assembly of 350 regional and local representatives from all 28 Member States, representing over 507 million Europeans. Its mission is to involve regional and local authorities and the communities they represent in the EU's decision-making process and to inform them about EU policies. The European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council are obliged to consult the Committee in policy areas affecting regions and cities. It can appeal to the Court of Justice of the European Union if its rights are infringed or it believes that EU law infringes the subsidiarity principle or fails to respect regional or local powers.

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