

Text of the intervention of Gérard Peltre on the occasion of the 4th edition of
European Rural Parliament
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**‘The French Rural Agenda, a first step towards
a European Rural Agenda?’**

France supported the proposal for a European Rural Agenda at the European Council of Ministers in November 2018. Last September, the country formalized the first measures of its Rural Agenda for France.

As stated the French Prime Minister in his communication, **the President of the French Republic had thus responded favorably to a request formulated by the National Association of Rural Mayors (administrator of RED), the International association Rurality Environment Development (RED) and the National Association New Rurality.**

He also notes, in his communication, that this proposal echoes the **Resolution**, in favor of a European Rural Agenda, voted by the **European Parliament on 3 October 2018** and that the search for a better consideration of the needs of rural territories had already been expressed in the **1996 Cork Declaration** and then recently recalled in the **2016 CORK 2.0 declaration**.

The proposed measures were based on the report of a mission that the government had installed. The measures, already announced, are expected to be completed in the coming months. Among the key measures: **the pledge to defend to the European institutions the maintenance of a high-level political commitment to rural development (in particular within the framework of the EAFRD) and to encourage the territorialization of European funds towards the most fragile rural territories by focusing on a generalization of integrated territorial development approaches;** measures in favor of the younger generation, of small enterprises, of access to digital technologies; the recognition (with strong financial support) of the determining role of rural territories and of farmers, and also foresters, in the ecological transition; support for education, training, and employment in rural areas; access to healthcare and fight against medical desertion; access to public services; measures for the elderly; the consideration of the specificity of schools in rural areas; measures to strengthen mobility in

rural areas; measures to support locally elected representatives and territorial cooperation; strengthening of engineering resources in rural areas; support for culture and cultural initiatives, etc.

The Summit of the Greater Transborder Region "Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, Lorraine, Rhineland-Palatinate, Wallonia" is also part of this dynamic. The Walloon Minister of Rurality, together with RED, committed to the **establishment of a reference center of rurality**.

These are **interesting, important signals** that both these governments and the European Parliament are sending to our civil society organizations. The commitment of the European Committee of Regions, alongside RED, in the promotion of a European Rural Agenda since 2015, is another important constructive signal. But nothing is won yet!

Today, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, **we are facing an important challenge which will be echoed, I am sure, by the European Rural Parliament**. We need to include in the **political and regulatory body of the EU**, but also of the Member States and their regions, the orientations of the Resolution of the European Parliament. Even more, this inclusion is decisive for their attractiveness and crucial for the mobilization of the rural communities. And **the recognition of the diversity of rural territories as poles of development and innovation** is crucial. I speak of experience when I emphasize this need of inclusion and recognition!

RED has been defending the issue for many years. We even presented the concept at the EU open days in 2005 and had the definition of "innovation poles" included in the European glossary in 2006.

For this recognition, we need to act together. I like this motto of the Kingdom of Belgium "Unity makes strength". It expresses a universal truth!

We must all make it live in our territories with rural communities. Without this, no cohesion is possible!

We must set it up as a mantra to guide our collective action by sharing a common ambition and some structuring goals.

There can be no question of existing at the expense of others but rather with others in order to build ourselves a common destiny! This is how we will be actors who matter!

What is true for each and every one of us, for the organizations in which we advocate, is also true for the territories, be they urban, peri-urban or rural, but also for the decision-makers, the States. In particular from the European Union!

These are the values that RED carries and drives.

This is the reason why we are here in Candás in Asturias, at the European Rural Parliament: because it has the vocation to bring out the voices of the rural communities.

Let us take advantage of the aforementioned progress towards a European rural agenda while expressing an even stronger ambition. It is our role.

Of course, this is about the need of rural territories to be beneficiaries of support measures for their sustainable development and for the quality of life of their inhabitants. But this is not enough, as we have noticed. Rural territories must be recognized and sought after for the true value of their potential and for their own ingenuity that they mobilize to meet the major social, environmental, digital challenges, etc. which are European and global, in a world in profound transformation. Through their votes, the citizens of rural and periurban region express this need of recognition. The exiled, who we still call migrants, remind us of this necessity as well, migrating now for the reasons that we know, and soon for environmental causes.

During the last mandate at the European Parliament, the 19 organizations of the European Countryside Movement were initiators of the RUMRA intergroup (Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas). They worked together in favor of a Resolution for a European rural agenda by the European Parliament. And that Resolution on addressing the specific needs of rural territories passed. They are now mobilized alongside MEPs Eric Andrieu and Franc Bogovic in the creation of a new intergroup "RUMRA and Smart Villages" whose official request for constitution was filed. Two new organizations, CEJA and SSPA have joined this dynamic.

As for RED, we have been mobilized already since last March for the sake of the inscription in the European policies post-2020.

We are convinced that there is a need to:

- **Instigate a more collaborative and mobilizing approach in the definition and implementation of the European project by:**
 - Inspiring commitment to Europe and promoting the European project by building on a **« Charter of Fundamental Principles and Rights »** which will be based on Article 174 of the Treaty on European Union and the Charter of Fundamental Rights.
 - **building on a proactive approach** between the Member States, the European Commission, the European Parliament and also the regions and their territories, as well as with the European Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social

Committee ... **The announced strengthening of the subsidiarity principle does not carry the answer.**

- mobilizing these different bodies and local actors on a **shared agenda**
- guaranteeing the positioning of **citizens as the backbones of the community action** and its project. **It will thus be its responsibility to ensure, and not only to suggest, that citizens be involved in its definition and implementation. The partnership agreements are opportunities to seize!**
- **by providing Europe with a budget structured by its own resources.**

By focusing on this **multi-level collaborative governance**, **Europe will be more agile and its added value, its potential, will be more visible!** We will then be better able to **overcome the inward-looking nationalisms and populism.**

- **Break free from the trickle-down theory**, whose efficiency never was proven, which produces an annihilating **hierarchy between territories and projects and hinders innovation processes. To ponder: the runoff carries away the soil when it is not alive!**

Our proposals:

- **Claim the recognition of rural territories as poles of development and innovation.** This recognition relies on the entrepreneurial nature and on the resilience capacity of rural areas, and builds on networks of exchange between actors and territories. It will have to assert itself as framework for the « **Smart Villages** » or « **Smart Rural Territories** », as well as for rural proofing. The aim is:
 - To propose and finance, within the framework of territorial development devices and of ESIF, **measures to support training and innovation.**
 - To propose, within the framework of CLLD territorial strategies, measures to support the emergence of « **Smart Villages** » at the scale of villages or territories, and the development of « **Smart Villages** » by including them in territorial development strategies. Access to very high speed broadband and the consideration of digital, ecological, climatic, societal ... transitions must imperatively be taken into account.
- **Incorporate the CLLD/LEADER approach and integrated territorial development into a regulatory reference framework** (partnership agreement) **for the implementation of European policies and of European regionalized programs** (the greening CAP as a reference) by:
 - **Building on territories that know how to stimulate and federate the citizens' engagement**, provided with comprehensive territorial strategies and integrated sustainable development strategies.

- **Capitalizing on the innovation and the inter-territorial networks of exchange between actors and territories**, to overcome the demographic, geographical and natural handicaps as well as to jointly construct smart solutions to the social and economic mutations.
 - **Supporting the definition and implementation of cultural strategies at the scale of project territories**: they are vectors of social mediation, attractiveness and territorial anticipation to the changes of a world in transformation;
 - **encouraging the implementation of integrated strategies on « biodiversity, energy and climate »**, which must be inscribed in sustainable development projects in territories;
 - **mobilizing**, in a convergent and proactive way, all the **European Union's budgetary resources to finance project territories strategies. R.E.D.'s proposal** in favor of a **European « Interfund »** as a reference;
 - **encouraging intelligent cooperation between rural, urban, as well as peri-urban centers**. The potential and the added value of each village, entity and territory, taken into consideration and promoted.
- **Overcome the Rural/Agriculture amalgam and rather combine their energies** for a better consideration of the development potential of rural territories' diversity, but also of the potentialities and stakes of agriculture; and for the stimulation of the cooperation between family farming and territories. The co-financing options for the EAFRD call for this approach.
 - **Mobilize**, by recognizing their European added value, **the distant maritime and continental territories**. These are also **lands of innovation** in strategic regions for Europe.
 - **Make the most** of the European multi-level organization to **boost the attractiveness of territories with natural and geographical handicaps and those impacted by depopulation**. The characteristic of **Europe is to be inhabited everywhere**. The Charter of Fundamental Rights and Article 174 of the Treaty as a reference.

The European Union is a singular adventure, soothing and energizing, for the continent and the world that must grow with the diversity of its citizens and territories to meet the challenges of a changing world!



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