



## Partnership for Rural Europe

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### PREPARE response to the CAP Health Check proposal

1. PREPARE Partnership for Rural Europe is a partnership of two pan-European NGOs and ten national rural movements or networks committed to the well-being of rural communities, particularly in the new member states and accession countries of Central and Eastern Europe.
2. We welcome the Health Check of the CAP, while noting its limited scope vis-à-vis rural development.
3. **Purposes of rural development.** We note the statement in the Explanatory Memorandum of the Health Check that:

“The strengthened rural development policy supports the protection of the environment and rural landscapes and creates growth, jobs and innovation in rural areas, especially those which are remote, depopulated or heavily dependent on agriculture.”

We strongly support this statement of purposes. However, we believe that the current Health Check proposals will not assist the strengthening of national efforts to achieve these purposes.

4. **Funding of rural development.** We welcome the proposals for increased modulation from Pillar 1 to Pillar 2, as part of the trend towards a true Rural Development Policy in which agriculture plays its important role in partnership with all players of an integrated rural economy. However, we note with discontent that modulation as suggested now will bring no benefits to the New Member States until at least 2012. These new member states need increased rural development funding from other sources if they are indeed to achieve the purposes quoted at paragraph 3 above.
5. **Maintenance of farming throughout the EU.** We welcome the commitment expressed in the Health Check to maintain farming throughout the EU, including the less productive lands and the smaller producers. We note and welcome the exceptions which are proposed in order to help farmers in marginal areas, or small producers generally, such as retention of coupled payments for suckler cows, sheep and goatmeat, as well as retention of direct payments to small farmers in member states whose agricultural sector is mainly composed of very small holdings.

However, we believe that these measures alone will not ensure the long-term viability of the rural communities in these areas. We urge Member States to commit themselves to support strong local development strategies in such areas, implemented through measures which may include:

- direct payments, using the exceptions mentioned above;
- agri-environment payments, recognising the high quality of ecosystems biodiversity and landscapes that have been created, and are maintained, by traditional farming systems;

- support to semi-subsistence farmers, focused on supporting their economic viability, rather than their competitiveness in a pan-European sense;
- exceptions, where appropriate, from the application of EU hygiene and other standards for the production and processing of local products;
- support, through Rural Development Programmes, but also through other public programmes such as those co-funded through the ERDF and the ESF, for the strengthening and diversification of rural economies, social facilities and infrastructure, and for improving the quality of life of the whole rural community.

We believe that such an integrated approach at local level is essential in order to prevent a vicious cycle of out-migration, depopulation, further loss of services, decline in biodiversity and landscape quality, and the adverse impact upon the cities of mass migration from rural to urban areas. Local development of this kind can contribute to all three of Europe's prime missions – competitiveness, cohesion and sustainability.

6. **The 'new' challenges.** We note the emphasis in the Health Check upon the 'new' challenges of climate change, renewable energy, water management and biodiversity. We accept that these are indeed among the priorities of the EU, although they are not really 'new' and are partly the result of unsustainable farming practices. We accept the potential, stated in the Explanatory Memorandum, for action through the RD programmes to address these priorities. However, we would like to point out that these challenges need to be addressed across the whole range of EU programmes, notably the Regional and Social Funds, research and development, as well as programmes and capacity building specific to energy, climate, water management and biodiversity. In this wide policy context, rural development policy is indeed (as stated in the Explanatory Memorandum to the Health Check) only 'one of the possibilities to deal with these challenges'.
7. **Maintaining the rural populations.** We are gravely disappointed that the crucial challenge of maintaining the rural populations has not been mentioned in the Health Check. We believe that sustainable development of rural areas needs, above all, policies that would support the maintenance or creation of new sources of income for the rural people, both within the agricultural sector and outside it.

We are convinced that the people living in rural communities, who have to meet these challenges in their daily life, need much better support through capacity building and specific education, as well as opportunity to truly participate in the planning and implementation of RD programmes and projects. We believe that the LEADER method is in this context the best practice and needs to be used to strengthen rural communities in shaping their own future.

Thus, we urge for a stronger coordination and complementarity (not limited to 'demarcation') between measures and activities aiming at rural development and those linked to the cohesion policy, which can significantly contribute to improved livelihoods of the rural populations.