

## **DECLARATION OF CÁCERES**

The participants of the **COOPERATION FORUM IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN AN ENLARGED EUROPE**, representing the administrations, organizations, experts and entities related to rural policy and rural development action in Europe, gathered in the city of Cáceres (Spain), 2 to 4 June 2004, declare the following:

1. Until now, rural development has been treated as an adjunct of agricultural policy, in the form of the Second Pillar of the CAP. This approach is no longer sufficient. It must be recognised: that agriculture is only one vital sector in rural economies and that also farmers throughout Europe, (notably in the new member states), need stronger rural economies. For these reason, a broader approach to rural development is needed which serves the social and economic needs of the majority of the rural population and protects and enhances the rural environment.
2. We therefore call for the elaboration, from 2007, of a true **European Rural Development Policy**, with a Regulation which unifies the different existing programmes. This should be financed through a European Rural Development Fund, bringing together funding currently dedicated to rural development programmes from FEOGA-Guarantee, FEOGA-Guidance and Structural Funds. This should improve on the proposal by the Commission in their Financial Perspectives proposals of March 2004.
3. The objectives of the European Rural Development Policy should be pursued through the preparation of a strategy framework by the European Commission, setting out the principles for rural development, the priorities relating the differential needs of rural areas, fixing indicators and developing a new typology of rural areas which allows their needs to be met. This framework would form the basis for the preparation by member states of national and regional rural development strategies, which should indicate clearly how the European Rural Development Fund should be complemented with the other EU Structural Funds and the financing throughout national and regional funds and the intensity according to the typology of rural areas.

4. The EU should clearly consider the social and economic cohesion of rural areas as the basis for a balanced application of the Union's Rural Development Funds. **All** rural development activity related to the third strategic objective of a "wider rural development" as described in the Third Cohesion Report of EU should be pursued through territorially-based local development programmes. These should be based directly on the LEADER method. These programmes should be open to embrace aspects of the other the other two objectives of the Cohesion Report.
  
5. The LEADER method should be continued from 2007 onwards . In order to achieve this, the following further provisions should apply:
  - a. The Initiative LEADER should be strengthened and continued immediately, with its territorial definition and its Local Action Groups (LAGs), by applying a fixed percentage of the Rural Development Fund to support local partnerships, national networking and transnational exchanges between LAGs and other RD actors
  - b. local partnerships and their programmes should be subject to quality certification according to agreed standards;
  - c. in the new member states, a further fixed percentage of that funding should be allocated to support for the creation and capacity-building of civil society and of LEADER-type territorial partnerships;
  - d. the European Local Action Groups should have representation in the Advisory Committee on Rural Development of the European Commission, through their representative organizations
  - e. a European Rural Observatory should be created in 2007, with a wide brief to collect and disseminate good practice in rural development and to promote multi-national exchange among all involved in rural development throughout Europe.
  
6. Civil society, in the sense of non government organisations and multi-sector partnerships at all geographic levels, has a vital role to play in influencing and implementing policy in rural development throughout Europe. We commit ourselves to the strengthening of civil society and to cooperation at all levels.

What we agree and sign in Cáceres (Spain), 3<sup>th</sup> of June 2004.