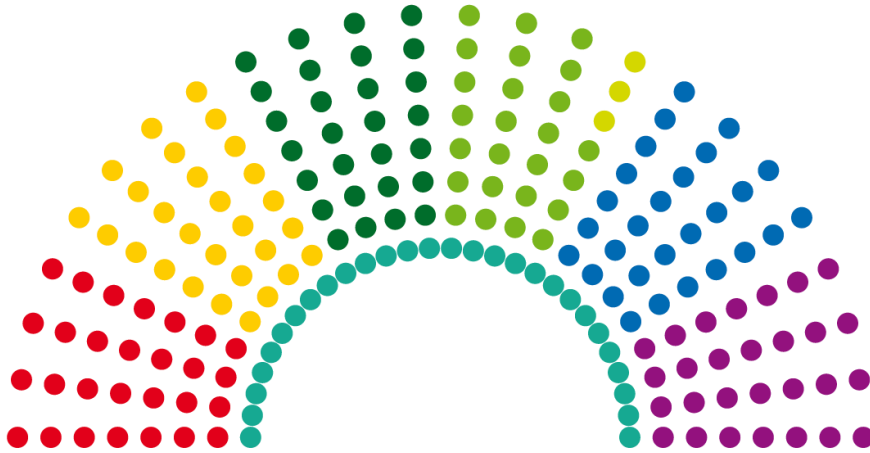




European Network for
Rural Development



eip-agri
AGRICULTURE & INNOVATION



Report of 6th Meeting European Rural Networks' Assembly

Brussels, 16 December 2019

Introduction and insights from the Commission	
<p>09.30 – 10.00</p> <p>Welcome and Introduction</p> <p>Mario Milouchev, Director, DG AGRI</p>	<p>The Chair welcomed all participants to the 6th European Rural Networks' Assembly meeting and explained that while Commissioner Janusz Wojciechowski had been invited, he unfortunately could not attend due to the ongoing Council of Agricultural Ministers. The Assembly agenda was prepared based on input from Assembly member organisations, particularly as a result of feedback given during the Rural Networks' Steering Group meetings held in May and October 2019.</p>
<p>Opening Speech</p> <p>Mihail Dumitru, Deputy Director-General, DG AGRI</p>	<p>Mihail Dumitru underlined that Assembly members come from diverse backgrounds and represent the Commission's key partners in implementing EU rural development policy. Assembly members' experience and ideas are essential in order to ensure rural development policy responds to the needs and opportunities in rural communities now and throughout the CAP post 2020.</p> <p>The networks have a unique ability to share knowledge and experience. With the introduction of the CAP Strategic Plans (CSP), which will bring together both Pillars of the CAP, there is a greater need for such sharing of knowledge, experiences and networking in general.</p> <p>Looking to the future, Article 113 of the Commission's proposals (CAP Strategic Plan Regulation) provides for a single EU CAP Network, which will be mirrored in national CAP networks. The co-legislators appear to support the broad lines of the Commission's proposals in this area. Mr Dumitru encouraged preparatory work on future networks to begin, keeping in mind the range of relevant actors from across both Pillars, and with the objective of avoiding a gap in provision of networking support at EU or national level during the transition between the two programming periods.</p> <p>Referring to the EAFRD no longer being covered by the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR), Mr Dumitru said that this does not mean that there will be no complementarity with other European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds. Member States would be required to explain their approach to ensuring such complementarity and demarcations between funds in their Partnership Agreements and CAP Strategic Plans, and he underlined that strong co-ordination and synergies would be needed as the CAP alone would not be able to meet all the needs of rural areas. He noted that for financial instruments and CLLD there would be close alignment, with legal provisions under the CPR applying also for EAFRD. In particular on LEADER, there will be a possibility for a simplified multi-fund approach for CLLD, where the rules of the lead fund would apply. Information was provided on the political priorities of the new Commission notably the European Green Deal, marking the start of Europe's journey to become the first carbon neutral continent by 2050, and the related Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies; finalising the CAP post 2020; strengthening the system of Geographical Indications, a new EU Forest Strategy and developing a long-term vision for rural</p>

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<p>Q&A</p>	<p>areas. Farmers and rural populations have a key role in achieving these ambitious objectives and the CAP will have a central role to play in their realisation.</p> <p>The representative from the German LEADER Association asked the Commission to reflect on the specific needs of their members and expressed concern that a single Network would not be effective. The representative of COPA-COGECA asked about the governance arrangements for the future CAP Network.</p> <p>Mr Dumitru replied that no substantive issues had been raised on the Commission's proposal for the future CAP Network in the co-decision process. Therefore, the Commission does not envisage major changes, although the process is now in hands of the co-legislators. He confirmed that the intention was to maintain the existing specificities in the delivery of the future Network and its governance, in order to respond to different stakeholder needs and engagement.</p>
<p>CAP Legislative Framework</p>	
<p>10.00 – 11.00</p> <p>CAP Legislative Framework – Gaëlle Marion, DG AGRI</p>	<p>Gaëlle Marion from DG AGRI presented an update on the CAP reform including recent developments in the European Parliament and Council. She reiterated that Member States will have flexibility to address their own priorities in their CAP Strategic Plans. Her presentation built on the information provided to the RN Steering Group in October 2019 and drew attention to ongoing work related to the new Green Deal, as well as the Commission's proposed transitional legislation, providing for continuity of CAP support during 2021 and facilitating the transition to the implementation of the new CAP framework.</p>
<p>Q&A</p>	<p>A Q&A session followed the presentation. Participants raised the need to maintain a 'common' framework for the CAP. They discussed expenditure eligibility periods for the current 2014-2020 programming lifecycle, including payments for rural networking arrangements and LAGs. These and other CAP payments will be supported through the remaining implementation period of the current RDPs where funds remain or via the forthcoming transitional agreements.</p> <p>The role of rural networking in helping to share CAP implementation learning experiences and success stories was underlined. The activities of the ENRD and of the EIP-AGRI network during 2020 will continue to help inform preparations for a future CAP networking framework.</p>
<p>Self-Assessment of the Rural Networks</p>	
<p>11.30 – 12.30</p> <p>Self-assessment of the Rural Networks, Sari Rannanpää, ENRD Contact Point</p>	<p>Sari Rannanpää presented an overview of emerging findings from the 2019 Self-Assessment of the Rural Networks. This reflected related information provided to the RN Steering Group in October. These findings indicate the high value of rural networking to both Member States and EU bodies.</p>

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<p>Rural Networks’ Self-assessment, ENRD Contact Point</p>	<p>Participants split into three working groups to discuss key recommendations identified by the RN Steering Group on the future EU CAP Network’s role and governance, covering: Enhancing participation; Improving policy quality; and Increasing awareness.</p>
<p>13.45 – 14:00</p> <p>Feedback from the morning workshops and discussion</p>	<p>Opportunities for realising the potential of rural networking were identified, via working group sessions. The need for knowledge networking in the new CAP delivery model was stressed, for example, by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping all stakeholders to adequately understand each other’s roles, goals and perspectives throughout the programme lifecycle. • Encouraging agricultural stakeholders who will be involved in implementing the EAGF aspects of CAP Strategic Plans to become more involved in networking activities. This includes the Member States’ advisory services, Managing Authority Desk Officers and Paying Agency staff dealing with Pillar 1. • Coordinating different aspects of CAP support that have complementary aims, particularly support for the CAP’s climate and environmental objectives. • Sharing good practices throughout the programme lifecycle for all CAP objectives, including relevant practices from other EU or national funds. The Rural Inspiration Awards were seen as a particularly successful tool for doing this. Project outcomes, programme management, policy quality, and evaluation were highlighted as relevant issues to cover. • Making best use of communication technologies and techniques to increase the outreach and positive impact of the CAP, as well as allowing improved thematic targeting. This included calls for greater use of MS languages, multimedia technology, online meetings and in-country satellite events. • Ensuring inclusive rural networking at EU and MS level by embracing all relevant socio-economic and environmental stakeholders. • Adopting flexible networking frameworks that allow Member States to react to new issues which may arise during a programming period. <p>At the end of the session the Chair declared that at the level of the Assembly the 2019 Self-Assessment is considered concluded. The results from the group sessions will be included in the Self-Assessment report and the report will be finalised and published on ENRD website in due course.</p>

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Governance of EU Networks: Reflections on experience of current RN structures and future needs post 2020	
<p>14:00 – 15:15</p> <p>Governance of EU Networks</p> <p>Giuliana Keller, DG AGRI</p> <p>Antonella Zona, DG AGRI</p>	<p>Giuliana Keller and Antonella Zona presented a review of the current EU rural networking governance arrangements covering different bodies and actors. Antonella Zona also explained the difference between the governance arrangements and the separate support structures for networking financed from EU technical assistance. The presentations highlighted suggestions proposed by the RN Steering Group in October for future networking governance structures. Assembly participants formed working groups to discuss their priorities and the parameters for the future governance structures for rural networking within the new CAP. Discussion was organised around scenarios proposed during the RN Steering Group in October.</p>
<p>15:45 – 16:00</p> <p>Feedback from the afternoon workshops and discussion</p>	<p>Feedback from the Assembly participants noted points covering the future: Steering Group; Assembly; and possible sub-groups:</p> <p>Steering Group - the role could remain centred on improving the implementation of existing and future policy. An annual meeting was considered sufficient, with a focus on identifying thematic priorities for the CAP Network at EU level. The Steering Group’s supervision of sub-group and thematic activities was seen as useful. Membership could include ‘rotating’ members representing different CAP stakeholder groups. The importance of maintaining an equal ‘balance of power’ between the needs of EAGF and EAFRD stakeholders was noted.</p> <p>Assembly - this should keep its strategic and consultative role. It could also have a more political agenda on big themes like the Green Deal or the Farm to Fork Strategy – and not only validate the RNs work but also inspire it. An annual meeting was suggested which could combine institutional information with practical insights and inspirational ideas from CAP success stories. A further suggestion was to combine the annual Assembly with a networking event providing space for more informal exchanges. A consensus highlighted the importance of ensuring that Assembly meetings always provide new ‘takeaways’ with useful added-value for the participants. Advantages could be gained through closer networking with other stakeholders involved in developing rural Europe. This could have implications for the Assembly’s membership. For example, the membership could be more open with more members nominated by the Sub-Groups.</p> <p>Sub-groups – the two current subgroups dedicated to LEADER/CLLD and Innovation are seen as relevant and needed for steering CLLD and Innovation networking activities under the future CAP Network. There was a consensus that the role of the subgroups should be to suggest topics for the work that the Network should be doing in the coming year and provide suggestions to the Assembly to validate. The governance of networking related to innovation should take into account the new crosscutting objective on CAP modernisation and</p>

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	<p>consider that innovation is relevant for all the specific CAP objectives. Many members underlined the key role of the CAP Network within the AKIS and the need for future governance to take this into account, i.e. with an appropriate inclusion of rural innovation actors in the governance body dedicated to innovation. Several concrete suggestions for thematic subgroups were made; on Rural Development and LEADER/CLLD, on Eco systems/Climate and on Innovation. The need to integrate Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 issues and stakeholders in the subgroups was also expressed.</p>
<p>RN's activities update and actions for 2020</p>	
<p>16:00 – 16:45 RNs activities for 2020 ENRD Contact Point activities, Paul Soto, ENRD Contact Point ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk activities, Hannes Wimmer, ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk EIP-AGRI Service Point activities, Véronique Rebholtz, EIP-AGRI Service Point</p>	<p>Paul Soto presented the 2020 activities of the ENRD Contact Point (CP) which reflected the CP priorities (the capacity building priorities of supporting more effective and simpler programme implementation; strengthening NRNs and NSUs; and LEADER/CLLD) and the specific thematic priorities (on smart and competitive rural areas, the transition to the greener economy and promoting social inclusion and complementary thematic priorities).</p> <p>Hannes Wimmer presented the 2020 priorities for the ENRD Evaluation Helpdesk, including: providing support for evaluation tasks, drawing lessons from evaluations in 2019 and providing practical tools for ex-post evaluation and building capacity for monitoring and evaluation post 2020.</p> <p>Véronique Rebholtz presented the main priorities of the EIP-AGRI Service Point in 2020 including: fostering a thriving Agricultural Innovation Ecosystem; promoting innovation in managing natural resources and improving farm resilience; and strengthening agricultural value chains within a circular, decarbonised bio-economy. Other priorities include thematic networking of Operational Groups, extending and consolidating the EIP Network and cooperation with Rural Networks and supporting governance.</p>

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Next steps & Closing

16:45 – 17:15

**Upcoming events
and activities**

The final session allowed the participants to inform the Assembly about their upcoming events.

Goran Šoster shared information about the most recent work of the [European Rural Parliament](#). Kirsten Birke Lund also presented the European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD) vision for LEADER/CLLD for the future and the outcomes of the 2019 ELARD conference.

Closing Remarks

Mario Milouchev

In reply to a question about the “Long term vision for rural areas”, the Chair explained that its preparation is tasked by Commission President von der Leyen to Commissioner Wojciechowski under the coordination of Vice-President Šuica, with the participation of Commissioner Ferreira. The main four challenges are access to services, depopulation, connectivity and poverty. It is expected that the preparation of the vision will be preceded by a wide consultation with rural stakeholders and by a depopulation mapping report for the end of March and ageing report in the last trimester of 2020. The development of the Rural Vision is foreseen in 2021.

Given the success of the [Rural Inspiration Awards](#) presented at the [networX](#) event, the Chair reminded participants that a new competition will be launched in 2020 with a focus on bioeconomy and climate change. NSUs will be contacted and encouraged to submit good practices and project examples.

As regards the Rural Networks’ Self-Assessment, the Chair repeated that at the level of the Assembly the SA 2019 is considered as concluded and that the report would be finalised and published on ENRD website in due course.

He welcomed the interesting reflections and ideas from Assembly members on governance arrangements for the future CAP Network, which the Commission would reflect on before coming forward with its proposals in due course.

In closing, the Chair noted the day’s discussions had focused on the future, and that there remains a need for continuity of delivery under current RDPs which will continue till end 2023 (or 2024 for MS who opt to extend). He thanked all the participants for their useful contributions, and all those who helped to organise the Assembly.

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