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Modernising and Simplifying the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) - An open letter from PURPLE President, Helyn Clack

The PURPLE network, the voice of peri-urban regions in Europe, is convinced that a balanced territorial development across Europe including, of course, its rural and peri-urban areas, should be the starting point for any consideration of rural policy alongside Common Agricultural Policy.

Obviously we write from the perspective of a network whose focus and interest is on Peri-urban areas which contain a mix of rural and urban characteristics and where, farming land for example, is increasingly under threat from urban encroachment and land fragmentation. There is therefore a need to support the long term viability of peri-urban agriculture and forestry and the associated open space and countryside management which all play such an important role in the provision of food and other products as well as green and blue services that contribute to well-being and quality of life for urban and peri-urban populations. At the same time we see wider considerations and principles as being at stake.

Rural development programmes need to demonstrate coordination and harmonisation of rural development strategies and other policy areas to ensure more balanced development. Only in this way will we be able, for instance, to achieve a sensible working balance between competing urban and rural needs for resources (e.g. water, biodiversity and space) and thereby reach sustainable approaches to multi-functional land use. In other words rural policy (and resulting practice) and policy regarding other types of territory need to make sense one against the other and are ideally developed, monitored and updated in parallel.

The centrality of balanced territorial development as a core objective needs to be recognised within this exercise of looking to modernise and simplify the Common Agricultural Policy. We need to understand this as a), a balance between both different sorts of territory: urban, peri-urban, rural, remote etc. and b,) between different thematic considerations: economic, environmental, and social. From a PURPLE perspective we will want, in particular, to continue to argue for more specific attention being paid to peri-urban areas in order to better support growth, jobs and innovation; but the principle we wish to establish is much broader and applies across all territories and all sectors.



PURPLE therefore strongly echoes the point made within the Cork 2.0 Declaration that there needs to be “a strong territorial emphasis within the Common Agricultural Policy, operating in complementarity with other EU policies and focusing on delivering relevant results for rural citizens and society as a whole”. This is vital. At the same time we need to think about what sits best where – is rural policy really best positioned as an integral part of the Common Agricultural Policy? Would the opposite better apply? Much that happens in rural and peri-urban areas is not directly related to agriculture. Certainly, agriculture and rural are not synonymous. If we take agriculture to be “sectoral” does that policy not best live within a broader rural policy as opposed to vice versa?

There are, constantly, balances to be struck between different - and, on occasion, directly competing – interests, and the peri-urban is all about balance. For example, 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.

In the context of the rural and urban policy interface we believe that peri-urban stakeholders have hugely valuable experiences and expertise to share. Any traditional rural-urban dichotomy is inadequate in achieving an understanding of territorial development. A large and growing part of Europe is characterised by a complex web of inter-relations and interdependencies between different places and it is impossible to decouple the urban and rural in some artificial way. Where urban and rural co-exist there is peri-urban. This applies as much in the context of agriculture as in any other regard and serves as a reminder of a broader point that not only is European territory diverse in economic, environmental and social terms, rural territory itself is also diverse and made up of areas and places of different natures. Here is a prime example of a key balance which needs to be struck and, as we now embark on crucial debates about the EU budget and policies post-2020, PURPLE members believe that EU investments – including those made within rural and agricultural policies and programmes – must maintain a strong territorial and place-based focus.

PURPLE hopes that the Cork 2.0 Declaration 2016 will shape the Commission’s rural vision for the years to come, and that, more broadly, there will emerge a genuinely place-centred rural and agricultural policy framework 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.

Kind regards



Helyn Clack (*PURPLE President*)

