



EUROPEAN ALLIANCE Group seminar
**DEVELOPING EU POLICY
FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY OF RURAL AREAS**



Monday 30 September 2013
Bistrampolis Manor • Panevėžys • Lithuania

Panevėžys declaration

The European Alliance group (EA Group) in the Committee of the Regions, at its meeting in Panevėžys, Lithuania, on 30 September 2013, called for decisive action to achieve competitive, viable and sustainable rural communities.

The European Alliance group:

1. recognises the huge social, cultural, environmental and economic potential of rural areas and regretfully notes that their level of development still remains significantly below the EU average;
2. highlights that ensuring sustainability of rural areas is a burning issue for society as a whole, as their decline would have devastating long-term consequences;
3. notes the high diversity among rural areas in Europe and significant contrasts among challenges they face; suggests flexible, tailored and coordinated approaches to these problems with greater involvement of local and regional authorities ;
4. underlines that a bottom up approach and exchanges of experiences at local level are the key for a successful rural development
5. points out the problem of depopulation and ageing population ; considers it vital to reduce the flow of young people out of the countryside through diversification of employment opportunities and better provision of services;
6. draws attention to the threats caused by urban sprawl, which reduces countryside and agricultural land; calls for action to ensure that the development of peri-urban areas would not damage its rural surrounds ;
7. considers that all measures taken with the goal of invigorating rural areas need to be sustainable and integrate economic, social and environmental concerns in a harmonious manner;
8. recognises the intrinsic links of agriculture and the rural economy and the crucial importance of equal competition conditions in the agricultural sector for all Member States and regions; in this regard, calls for the elimination of all market distortions and creation of a level playing field necessary for a balanced development of rural areas across Europe;
9. Likewise, stresses that rural development policy must insist on diversification, modernisation and investments in all economic activities located in rural areas;
10. stresses the importance of research and innovation strategies and investments in order to promote smart growth in rural areas thus enhancing their specific competitive advantages; calls for greater synergies between policies at the European, national, regional and local level for a successful smart specialisation strategy;

11. believes it is of utmost importance to allocate appropriate resources for rural development at the European level, as part of the Common Agricultural Policy and Cohesion Policy; in this context, regrets the reduction of resources for rural development in the 2014 – 2020 financial perspective;
12. emphasises the need to preserve and rekindle the cultural heritage and values of rural areas; in this light, stresses the importance of education in developing the 'sense of belonging' among young rural population;
13. stresses the need for rural and urban municipalities to cooperate closely through territorial partnerships at the level of functional areas; highlights, however, that such interrelations need to respect the principle of balanced development and take into account strategic objectives, as well as economic, social and environmental interests of all parties involved;
14. urges for action to maintain and increase quantity, accessibility and quality of public and private services and infrastructures, particularly in those rural areas facing depopulation; underlines that a lack of services, including transport, healthcare, education and broadband infrastructure amongst others, affects more than the immediate recipients and that it requires a major political, civic and financial effort
15. Instructs its president to forward the declaration to the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council.