

Opening Speech by Commissioner Phil Hogan at Cork 2.0 Conference on Rural Development

5th September 2016, Cork

- Check Against Delivery –

- Commissioners, public representatives, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,
- It is my great pleasure to welcome you to Cork. Céad míle fáilte go Chathair Corcaigh.
- This city holds a special place in my memories. I was a student here, and I served as the Chairman of the university branch of Macra na Feirme, Ireland's Young Farmers' Organisation. I am, therefore, particularly pleased to return here as European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development.

- Cork also holds a special place in the history of European policy. It was in this city, 20 years ago, that a group of committed rural stakeholders and policymakers drafted the Cork Declaration on European Rural Development.
- This document, developed with the input of a broad spectrum of experts and passionate rural advocates, formed the blueprint for a policy that has done so much to support farmers and rural communities across the European Union. We are fortunate to have some of the participants from 20 years ago with us here today, not least Heino von Meyer, our chair for today. Of course, he was also present in the last Cork conference and he has the difficult task ahead to distil our upcoming discussions and insights into a declaration.
- In this context I would also like to extend a special warm welcome to Dr. Franz Fischler who hosted the first Cork conference and joins us here again. It is a great pleasure to have you here.
- Since the first Cork declaration, Rural Development has become an indispensable part of the CAP over the last 20 years and its essential role for supporting rural areas is undeniable. The value and vision of the original Cork Declaration is highlighted in the

fact that many aspects included in the first declaration remain valid.

- However, after 20 years it is appropriate that we should reflect on a very different social, environmental and economic landscape. So, what are the questions on which we should reflect?
- What has changed since Cork I? Which new challenges do we have to tackle and how can we do better?
- Today and tomorrow we have the unique opportunity to take stock, to analyse and to develop a common vision for the future of European agriculture and rural communities.
- Over the last fifty years, the CAP has constantly evolved and it must continue to do so to remain relevant and fit for purpose. Today and tomorrow, I hope that we can work together to see what we want our agricultural and rural policies to deliver and how to ensure that we make the best use of public money and meet the needs of our citizens.
- We should demonstrate the indispensable contribution that rural areas can make towards solving global as well as local

challenges. For example, when we look at climate change, farming and forestry provide essential solutions through carbon storage and better use of nutrients.

- A new Cork Declaration can raise awareness for empowering rural areas and make people understand that a sustainable urban development depends on the prosperity of rural areas. We have to explain that matters of rural and agricultural policy correspond to societal interests that concern all citizens.
- That, ladies and gentlemen, is why we are gathered here today. You are here as active participants and the authors of a new Cork Declaration, one that addresses the new challenges of the 21st century.
- It is essential that you bring your expertise and views to the process. It is wonderful to have people from so many diverse and different backgrounds present today. Notwithstanding those differences, the one thing we all share is a firm belief that rural development matters!
- Despite the passage of time, many of the challenges we faced 20 years ago at the first Cork conference remain relevant today.

- There are still disparities between urban and rural areas in terms of GDP, employment, and access to services. To bridge this gap, we need to make a strong case that rural areas have a lot to offer as partners to urban areas. Urban and rural areas are mutually dependent on each other.
- Rural areas are still lagging behind when it comes to employment opportunities and the provision of infrastructure. People, especially younger people, tend to leave rural areas which puts the economic viability of rural areas at risk. We need to make sure that rural areas are attractive places to live and work in if we want to reduce the youth drain.
- Agriculture and forestry are crucial for keeping rural areas socially, economically and environmentally viable and attractive. Even though there are fewer jobs in the primary sector, the importance of the related value chain for the rural economy remains essential with 44 million people employed in this sector.
- Farmers and foresters are the stewards of the countryside. This aspect was also confirmed in the first Cork declaration! Roughly 85% of our land is managed by farmers and foresters. Land management is the interface between citizens and the

environment. We need to sustain the quality and amenity of Europe's rural landscapes, thereby providing indispensable assets for rural tourism and marketing.

- Many rural areas still suffer from an undersupply of essential services such as schools and medical services. These basic services provide the very basis for the liveability of rural areas thereby promoting rural prosperity.
- Just by flagging these few points, it becomes obvious that we made progress over the last 20 years but more needs to be done. And of course we have to adapt our policies and strategies to the new challenges of the 21st century.
- The world in which we are living has changed. The digital transformation and the globalisation have changed our daily life as well as it has changed the life in rural areas. We must make use of the potential that this transformation offers for rural areas.
- In this context, it is essential that we overcome the digital divide between rural and urban areas. Despite the fact that 300 million EU citizens live in rural areas, only 25% are covered by fast or ultra-fast broadband, compared to around 70% coverage

in urban areas. This situation needs to change and change rapidly in order to allow rural areas to seize the opportunities of a digital society.

- There are new opportunities emerging from green, circular, and bio economies: When it comes to food production and food waste, the development of biomaterials, or renewable energy, there are new high-quality jobs available to the rural areas best positioned to seize them.
- In this context the need for more resource efficiency is of utmost importance. Overall, we need to produce more with less. Innovative approaches and new technologies should help to develop the right tools to make it happen.
- This will be a win-win situation since most often resource efficiency works hand in hand with economic efficiency.
- We know this is possible, but we also know it will be costly. The vital role of farmers and foresters in delivering solutions therefore needs to be supported through investment in research, technology and innovation.

- Ensuring linkages between research and innovation and the sharing of best practice must be accelerated. Making technology and connectivity available is just the first step. To be successful we must also focus on training, and developing skills and knowledge in rural areas.
- I could continue with numerous other examples of what we need to look at. But this is your conference; I want to hear what you have to say.
- So the task is clear: we need to update our vision for rural areas in Europe, taking all these important factors into account. But we also have to look at solutions and the best way for policy delivery in this context. Tomorrow you will be charged with identifying the most appropriate policy delivery mechanism and governance questions.
- I would like to recall that the partnership principle for rural development has proven to be an essential ingredient in successful Rural Development actions. Shared management and involvement of stakeholders will continue to be important for a proper policy implementation adapted to local needs.

- Appropriate solutions can only be found while listening carefully to the ideas and concerns of rural citizens and by involving people on the ground in policy design and implementation
- Bottom up initiative, mobilising local potentials, and building on local decision making is what the delegates at the first Cork conference had in mind when calling for strengthening the LEADER approach. This has proven its value in thousands of creative and successful LEADER projects.
- Going forward anything that strengthens local involvement in EU policy making would be a good thing. Therefore we need to invest in governance. This was a key point in the first Cork Declaration which remains valid today.
- You all know my commitment to work towards simplification. I am convinced that there are ways of reducing the complexity of the policy.
- Policy has to deliver results in a most cost-efficient way by targeting operations to local needs, while ensuring ambitious contributions to EU objectives. Strategic programming, based

on common objectives, is essential elements for success in this respect.

- As you can see, the amount of work ahead of us is huge and highly important. I am therefore calling on you all, with your immense expertise and experience, to draft a second Cork Declaration elaborating a Rural Development blueprint for the 21st Century.
- I urge you to work with clarity of purpose and unity of spirit.
- Ladies and gentlemen, I have absolute faith in your abilities to rise to this challenge. Once we have finalised this manifesto, we must then build a "rural coalition of the willing" to ensure its implementation.
- My colleagues and I will be with you every step of the way. Let's put our shoulders to the wheel and produce a declaration worthy of our proud European rural areas. Their future is at stake. Thank you.