

## **The Alliance for the European Rural Voice has been founded!**



For some time now a number of European rural development organisations have been discussing the need to provide a common voice for European rural policy. Despite the differences between countries, there are many uniting factors, and rural development policy is an innovative area of work. The European Union is developing consistently better “tools”. In some Member States rural policy is already systematically implemented, in others this is just about to begin.

ERA will bring together European civil organisations which implement integrated and multisectoral rural development. ERA will also create and facilitate more discussion with those in the Commission as well as in the Member States.

Village and community movements have already been formed in more than ten European countries. Village activity is developing rapidly in these countries and similar movements are beginning in many others. One of ERA's tasks will be to found a European Rural Community Association - ERCA. Village action has, and will have its individual characteristics everywhere, but despite some major differences there are a lot of common features in development work in small rural communities, and so this work can be developed together.

Clear experience shows that better results are achieved by strengthening participative, direct democracy. It increases the number of active people and the amount of private funding and the voluntary effort needed in development work. Also, whilst there are significant historical and national differences, the direction is clear - participative democracy will increase and it has to be encouraged and strengthened.

In European Union rural policy, the LEADER approach is a cross-sectoral and functional tool. Because of this, it is very suitable for rural development. It also increases effectively working and earning possibilities in rural areas. That is why both the European Union and all civil societies working in rural development should aim at broadening and strengthening this way of working.

The European Rural Alliance (ERA) was founded in Finland in September 2005 by rural movements from 16 countries. It will be guided by a working group consisting of nine people from different countries. Finland has promised to be responsible for the administration until the end of 2007. The first Chairman of ERA is the Chairman of the Village Action Association of Finland, Eero Uusitalo.

### **The working group consists of :**

Staffan Bond, Sweden

Urszula Budzich-Szukala, Poland

Vanessa Halhead, Scotland

Hannes Lorenzen, Belgium, European Parliament

Panagiotis Patras, Greece

Goran Soster, Slovenia

Henny Stroes, the Netherlands

Jela Tvrdonova, Slovakia

Eero Uusitalo, Finland, (Chairman)

**Additional information:** Liisa Häme, tel. +358 40 5403707, email: [liisa.hame@kylatoiminta.fi](mailto:liisa.hame@kylatoiminta.fi)