To: Mr. **Valeriu Tabara**, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

Cc: Mrs. **Cornelia Mihai** – General Director Managing Authority of the National Rural Development Program

Mr. **Claudiu Coada**, Coordinator of the LEADER Program

From: **see enclosed list**

Re: **Expressing the concern regarding the implementation of LEADER Programme in Romania**

Date: **25.03.2011**

Through the present letter we are aiming to express our concern regarding the implementation of the LEADER Programme in Romania and our intention in building a constructive and transparent dialogue with the public authorities.

Starting with the very early stages in 2006, LEADER Programme was received with enthusiasm and hope in the Romanian countryside. When the first call for identifying territories and training the local animators went out, people involved have done their best to answer to the requests of the Minister of Agriculture when asked to send at least one representative from each area. Rural community was finally becoming the centre of attention, the initiator and beneficiary of development strategies.

Through their own forces, human and financial (very little!!), everyone – associations, NGOs, and local councils – have tried to discover more about the LEADER program, to prepare for its best possible implementation. Some regions have established cooperation with countries such as Germany, France, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Hungary, and Poland. We have committed and established these cooperation aiming further collaborations and partnerships, designed to provide an opening for the development of the respective communities, feeling encouraged by the perspectives settled up by the ministry.

The LEADER principles are particularly important for us, the ones engaged in designing and building Romanian civil society. We do feel the urgent need for building solid and trustful public-private partnership based on this new paradigm of rural development. Therefore, after the first messages lunched by MARD and after Romania joined the European Union we all got involved in mobilization, facilitation, and support – financial, material, and human, to identify and create partnerships.

Promoting LEADER principles faced the inertia and the distrust of the population caused by both communist regime and following wrenching transition time, making very difficult to have a constructive dialogue between government, the private sector, and NGOs. Somehow, even at that time, they all managed to mobilize themselves and participate in building local partnerships.

During the period from 2007-2009 people waiting the launch of the LEADER Programme were eagerly waiting for a sign from the Ministry. Many of them became

sceptical. Others, in the absence of concrete actions, got tired to promote LEADER just as a theoretical concept.

In the second half of 2009, several actions were suddenly undertaken and launched simultaneously by the Ministry. As a result, in 2010, interested people could participate in two rounds of training while developing also Local Development Plans. Although many questions remained unanswered in all this time, we began to hope again, although the only principle of guidance was "seeing and doing".

Despite all of these shortcomings, due to a great mobilization of local leaders, approximately 150 strategies have been submitted. Hundreds of local people were involved in developing these strategies and were waiting for a response. After the deadline – 15th of February 2011, we were all waiting to hear the decisions taken on the Local Development Strategies. The only respond coming from the Ministry's side was a statement posted on the website announcing that:

> *« Some inconsistency has been identified during the process of centralizing the evaluations of the received Local Development Plans. Thus, the Ministry of Agriculture has ordered a quality control assessment on the process of evaluation of the LDPs*
>
> *Therefore, until the conclusions of the quality control report are known, the Report of Evaluation of LDPs will not be published »*

This statement has led people to doubt once again about the realistic implementation of the programme and us again under enormous pressure and confusion. We believe we deserve a more detailed response from the Managing Authority.

Given these issues and the short period remaining until the end of the current programming cycle, we are requiring the following:

- A meeting to be scheduled with representatives of potential LAGs to inform them of the current situation;
- The communication of specific terms related to the selection of LAGs;
- A timetable for implementation of the LEADER Programme for the period remained until the finalization of the current National Rural Development Program;
- The official justification for the delay in publishing the report of LDPs evaluation

Looking forward to hear your reaction.

Please find enclosed to the present letter a list of signatories.