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9. PERSPECTIVES

ABREVIATIONS
2016 was a year in which the unexpected happened not just once, but seemingly over and over again. Against most predictions, the United Kingdom decided to leave the European Union for a destination unknown, and in America the TV star Donald Trump upended comfortable predictions that he would lose badly. If nothing else, these are times of change, and it is vital that Europe’s land managers move with them – otherwise they may be moved by them.

The 2020 reform of the Common Agricultural Policy is the best way to apply change. After decades of food security, European citizens are now demanding different priorities; halting biodiversity losses, mitigating climate change and sustainability of the rural economy. In 2016, especially at the Cork 2.0 conference, we have started to see these priorities materialise as policy. The question is whether our governance systems and stakeholders can see the need for change, and move swiftly enough to secure the CAP budget for the next 20 years. At the core of any policy debate, however, should remain the fundamental notion that no farmer can be long-term sustainable if their business does not do well.

Wholesale change, however, is not on the menu for the EU’s Birds and Habitats Directives, which will not be opened up. After a very long wait, the decision was made to improve implementation. This is in line with the ELO’s thinking; a long period of legislative rewriting and uncertainty would have created real land management issues for our members. Now, however, we must work together to ensure that these directives, together with the Natura 2000 program, are brought in line with 21st century management. This means less red tape, more interaction with those who manage the land, and better ways to involve the private sector.

Europe, however, is changing for the worse when it comes to crop protection. The 2016 debate on climate change saw overheated rhetoric and fundamental misunderstandings over scientific evidence come close to banning glyphosate from Europe. After the ban on neonicotinoids, and with the consequences of the endocrine disruption legislation still unsure, the cupboard is getting bare. With a lack of effective tools, how will we combat existing and new threats to our crops and fields? We cannot legislate these away, or throw a press release at them; it is high time the European public and some of its leadership re-evaluated its stance. While many would point to the organic sector as an alternative, we would remind them that market needs crop protection tools as well, often even from the same manufacturers.

2016 also saw the unwelcome return of debates over what farm size is the best, whether national farmers should be prioritised in a common market, and who should be able to buy land where. For us, the answer is that the common market is indivisible; we should not allow legislation to create special categories or exemptions. The land should be farmed by those who are best able to, no matter what Member State they were born in.

We need to keep what is best about our countryside; its variety, spectacular beauty and its multifunctional nature; these are timeless traditions that all Europeans can get behind. However, we must see that behind these traditions there should be a continuous quest to make it new. Our countryside, our food chain and our biodiversity depend on nothing less and we owe it to future generations of European to make it so.

Thierry de l’ESCAILLE
Secretary General, European Landowners’ Organization
THE ELO FAMILY
European Landowners’ Organization

The European Landowners’ Organization (ELO), created in 1972, is a unique federation of national associations from the 28 EU Member States and beyond, which represents the interests of landowners, land managers and rural entrepreneurs at the European political level.

Independent and non-profit making, the ELO is the only organization able to stand for all rural entrepreneurs. The secretariat is based in Brussels and provides European support for the member organizations on all facets of the modern countryside, which covers over 90% of the EU28’s land area.

The ELO promotes a prosperous countryside through the pillars of private property rights, sustainable land use and profitable rural businesses. Its policy recommendations are developed by engaging with European, national and international stakeholders and upholding our values. The ELO supports its policies with practical projects and actions across the European countryside that demonstrate the value of private land management. Our policies and results are shared with key actors from the rural sector and policy makers at different events the local, regional, national and European level.

In order to create a balanced development or rural and urban areas, it is necessary to deliver both a competitive and sustainable economic future for Europe. Climate change and biodiversity loss create short and long-term challenges for our members and their enterprises. The ELO and its members are therefore committed to a balanced approach between strong economic performance and wise natural resource use.

Through its unique combination of policy work, research, practical actions and live events, the ELO maintains a unique position across the agricultural, environmental and rural sectors in Brussels and throughout Europe.

www.elo.org
RISE Foundation

2016 has been a busy year for the RISE Foundation as it completed and launched one study on Nutrient Recovery and Reuse, and started two new studies – on the CAP and the European livestock sector.

‘Out of the Box’ thinking on the future of the CAP

A new project, sponsored by Syngenta, UNIGRAINS and FNPSMS, was launched in early November 2016, bringing together high level experts to consider wholly new approaches to the CAP and make sure that its future direction is well integrated with global goals such as the Common Agricultural Policy. It seeks to move the current fractured debate forward in a different and more integrated direction.

As per the RISE style, initial thinking will be aired at a European Parliament and the final report launched at a pre-FFA workshop in March 2017.

The Appropriate balance of the European Livestock sector

During the development of the NRR report, the Foundation became increasingly aware of a growing critical movement against livestock consumption and production by both small European and large international organisations, not least because of the ground breaking international agreement to pursue the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the Paris COP21 climate change agreement. And whilst much of this criticism stems from the very real impact that the sector is having on our resource use, climate change and environment (combined with the worrying predictions in increased global consumption), it has led to RISE looking more closely into the European livestock sector and questioning how it should transition to face today’s global challenges.

What changes are necessary in the livestock sector in Europe so it may adapt to, and best contribute to, growing global food demands in a balanced way?

The sponsorship call is still open for this study. If you are interested in becoming a sponsor, please email rise@risefoundation.eu. The final report will be launched in 2018.

www.risefoundation.eu
@RISE_Fnd
Friends of the Countryside

The Friends of the Countryside (FCS) are more than 650 landowners and managers across Europe who support the activities of the ELO and promote a vision of a sustainable and profitable countryside. This vision can best be realised through a thorough grounding in fundamental property rights that underlie long-term projects, often planned over generations. The collaboration between the ELO and FCS, combining tradition and innovation, makes their work both stronger and more effective.

General Assembly in Wolfsburg, Germany

More than 200 Friends of the Countryside came together on the 27th May 2016 for their annual General Assembly in the German city of Wolfsburg. This event is a great opportunity for the rural entrepreneurs from all parts of Europe, to exchange ideas, discuss, and meet old and new friends.

The FCS President Michael zu SALM-SALM opened the GA by asking for a minute of silence for the victims of the attacks in Brussels, which happened during the Forum for the Future of Agriculture (FFA), which the FCS have co-organised from the start. FCS Board Member Günther von der SCHULENBURG welcomed everyone on behalf of the German delegation. Thanks to his generous help during the organisation of the event, the GA and the afternoon program with its various activities were a success.

The day finished with a gala dinner, welcomed by Dr. Günzel von der SCHULENBURG, which took place at Schloss Wolfsburg. This historic house was owned by his family until the Nazis dispossessed them in 1943. During the dinner 4 new estates joined the Wildlife Estate Label network and two more received the Anders WALL Award, which rewards private entrepreneurs who have made a special contribution to Europe’s rural environment.

The next day, different tours were offered, all leading to estates in the State of Lower-Saxony. The GA was followed by a post tour through eastern Germany, with visits of estates, museums and other places of historical importance.

On the 2017 we will celebrate the 20th General Assembly of the Friends of the Countryside, for this special occasion we have chosen to celebrate it in Belgium, where our organisation is based. It will take place on the 2nd June in Hex, Belgium.

www.friendsofthecountryside.org
2016 began with the Forum for Countryside Entrepreneurship (FCE), an annual event that bring together YFCS members with senior professionals, which this year addressed the power of marketing. At this event, the YFCS also awarded the 2016 FAMIGRO Award, instituted to highlight the best of new countryside enterprises to Edouard de MERODE and his WIGNAC cider production project.

The YFCS General Assembly took place in Austria, where attendants examined the ins and outs of adding value to estates; from managing a golf club to adding value in the food chain – from mushrooms to fish breeding. During the meeting ELO Board Member Felix MONTECUCCOLI discussed sustainability and its implementation in Austria, and ELO/CLA staff member Ana ROCHA gave an update on Brexit. In addition, YFCS ambassador Alix HEIM DE BALSAC introduced us to the youth organization “FORUM FORET”, which she founded and which is designed to answer more forestry specific questions to young people in France.

In 2017 the YFCS Board looks forward to inviting its members to the next FCE, which will meet in Anjou, France to discuss countryside sustainability and estate management. Once again, new and old land managers will meet to exchange knowledge and shape new ideas. The YFCS General Assembly will, for the first time, coincide with the FCS General Assembly and take place in Maastricht at the end of May 2017. Finally, the YFCS will send its traditional delegation to the UK Game Fair on the weekend of the 29th of July.

Last, but not least, please do not hesitate to contact the Board regarding the FAMIGRO AWARD. Any countryside start-up with innovative ideas can take part and potentially claim the € 5,000 to the best project as well as professional financial advice.
The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

It has been two years since the new rules of the reformed Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) were put in place. Since 2014, farmers and local authorities have been adapting to the agreed changes, particularly in the direct payments, 30% of which are linked to “greening”.

Greening has been not only the main change but also the main criticism. NGOs united to demand a CAP ‘Fitness Check’ to ascertain whether the policy is fit for purpose. With that in mind, and to comply with the revision agreed during the negotiations, the Commission opened a public consultation on «Greening», to which the ELO replied. This exercise confirmed the potential environmental benefits from Greening, even after only one year. It also brought 15 greening simplification changes, including the controversial plan to prohibit the use of pesticides on productive EFAs.

The latest series of simplifications, associated with the review package of the Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF), was the so-called Omnibus Regulation. It included technical changes to better address the market crisis that characterised 2016.

Meanwhile, the ELO has been discussing the future of the CAP and ELO established, as part of the ELO’s Policy Group (EPG), a Working Group to develop our vision for the European agriculture and the required features of the next CAP. The ELO organised several meetings to gather the views of different stakeholders on the future of the CAP, mainly through its intergroup meetings and the Regional Forum for the Future of Agriculture. Several ELO delegates were actively involved in the Cork 2.0 Declaration, agreed at the European Conference on Rural Development in Ireland, aiming to look at the future of the CAP.

In 2017, the ELO will continue to be engaged in discussions on the future of the CAP. One important action will be its reply to the “wide-ranging” public consultation on how to reform the CAP, expected at the beginning of the year. The other will be the presentation of the CAP paper during the Forum for the Future of Agriculture in March 2017, ahead of the expected legislative proposals in the second half of the year.
Since the opening of the discussions, the ELO’s core ambition is to secure that the question of implementation on the grounds with the active participation of private stakeholders is duly taken into account. The ELO maintains that effective guidelines can help correct problems of interpretation of the Directives.

The Commission published the ‘Fitness Check’ evaluation on the 7th of December 2016 and concluded that the Directives remain highly relevant and are fit for purpose. The Commission is planning to develop an Action Plan to address the implementation challenges of the Directives in early 2017; the ELO will be following this progress closely.

In parallel, the ELO replied to the request of the Coordination Group for Biodiversity and Nature (CGBN) concerning the biodiversity roadmap in order to fully implement the actions included in the EU Biodiversity Strategy.

The European Commission has also adopted a Regulation on the need to fight invasive alien species and published a list of 37 such exotic animal and plant species, which contribute to both economic and biodiversity losses. The EU Member States have now been called upon to fight the spread of these species in the next three years. The ELO is actively involved in influencing the implementation of this Regulation and in the discussions around the adoption of a second list of species and plants of EU concern.

ELO continued to be involved in the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process. In this framework, it organised notably a conference in Padova focusing on forest management in Alpine and Continental biogeographical regions, participated to the Boreal seminar in Vilnius, and pursued its Pilot Twinning action, a structured collaboration between people from five Natura 2000 sites to allow for peer learning and better conservation. Twinning will capture outcomes and lessons learned and make them accessible to the wider site management community. A workshop was co-organized with ECNC and Eurosite in Netherlands to share views on twinning activities.

Biodiversity and Natura 2000

At the beginning of 2016, important consultations took place on the fitness check of the Birds and Habitats Directives. ELO members and staff attended several meetings organised by Directorate General for the Environment, comprised of green NGO, business representations and public officials.
Innovation

The ELO believes strongly that only continuous innovation in the agricultural sector can deliver the results needed for Europe’s land managers; a flourishing farm business at a time of unstable commodity and energy prices, better results for our ecosystems, and plenty of safe food for Europe’s demanding consumers.

To meet these challenges, the modern farm business should not just embrace the latest tools and technologies, but also work out his or her own innovative practices. This quest, therefore, does not just take place in the laboratories of agricultural industries, but very much in the fields of our members.

Over the last few years, the EU has shown increased support to integrate the concept of innovation into European policy. In 2013, the European Commission set up the European Innovation Partnership (EIP) which is acting “across the whole research and innovation chain, bringing together all relevant actors at EU, national and regional levels”. This is in addition to the Horizon 2020 programme, which is the biggest EU Research and Innovation programme ever with nearly €80 billion of funding available over 7 years (2014 to 2020). Horizon 2020 is the financial instrument implementing the Innovation Union, a Europe 2020 flagship initiative aimed at securing Europe’s global competitiveness. The ELO is currently involved in several H2020 projects.

In 2016, the ELO continued to push for more and better access to agricultural innovation. One of the main sticking points remains the non-appearance of the EC’s legal opinion whether or not a new generation of plant breeding techniques will be classified as GM technology, and thus subject to much stricter, even prohibitive, regulation. The ELO believes that, whatever the opinion should state, this should be published as soon as possible in order to create clarity.

2017 will (hopefully) see the release of the above-mentioned legal opinion, along with the implementation of the Circular Economy Package, including new measures on (drinking) water and re-cycling and re-use. We can also expect to see new drives towards innovation regarding the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the delivery of the Paris Climate Summit.
Crop Protection

Nearly without exception, all productive European agriculture depends on the use of crop protection products. Without these, farmers would lose staggering amounts of yield and consumers would be at serious risk of food-borne diseases.

This is not just done to ensure that crop losses are kept to a minimum, but also with the vital objective of securing a safe food supply for global consumption. However, the vast majority of these products have achieved a negative reputation throughout Europe, when it comes to conventional farming tools.

The reputation of conventional crop protection products, the balance between risk and hazard and the collision between agriculture and environment mean that crop protection remains a highly controversial. In 2015, the issue of endocrine disruption (the possible effects of chemicals on the human and animal hormone system) meant the 2014 roadmap established by the Commission is being followed, with more than 400 synthetic substances provided for the agricultural production being examined for endocrine disruption effects. This includes the azole class of crop protection chemicals which are a vital part of the struggle against fungal infections in wheat.

After last year’s public battle of neonicotinoids, the battlefield moved on to the issue of glyphosate, which was noted as “probably carcinogenic” on the basis of “limited evidence” by the UN’s International Agency for Research on Cancer. However, the European Food Safety Authority could not identify any chronic or acute risks for consumers, but requested further information from producers regarding its fate in the environment.

The use of crop protection products will always remain a controversial subject that will attract highly charged ethical debates over their uses and effects. Europe recognises, though, that their use is essential for its safe food supplies.
Later in the year, during the COP22 in Marrakesh, nearly 200 countries backed the implementation of the Paris agreement, labelling it an “urgent duty” and pledging to mobilise at least US$100 billion (€94.15) per year. The tough work starts now as parties must implement the agreement, which has been made more uncertain after the 2016 US presidential elections.

The ELO has been an active participant in this process, starting with the publication of the paper entitled “Climate Change and the rural economy: managing land in the face of climate change” before the meeting in Paris, where the ELO participated.

The agreement puts more pressure on governments to act and led the EU Commission to publish a set of proposals for the transition to a low-carbon economy, including in the buildings, agriculture, waste, land-use and forestry sectors. This is part of the EU’s efforts to reduce its GHG emissions by 40% below 1990 levels by 2030, which now, for the first time, includes the greenhouse gas emissions and removals from land use and forestry. It sets out accounting rules and allows for certain flexibilities.

The ELO has been discussing this issue internally and with other stakeholders and will continue to do so in 2017 when the legislative proposal is to be discussed in the European Parliament. The ENVI Committee will take the lead, having appointed Norbert LINS MEP as rapporteur. The vote in the ENVI Committee is expected in June 2017.

The agreement brought great momentum to raise the profile of landowners who are investing in a climate-proof agriculture and who are already managing their land for both adaption and mitigation of climate change. Their efforts have already resulted in the reduction of GHG emissions while keeping productivity levels. However only with renewed efforts is this trend likely to continue.
Forestry and Cork

The proposal of the Commission on the inclusion of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and removals from LULUCF (Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry) in the EU 2030 Climate and Energy framework, according the European Commission mandate from 2014, has been the main topic during the 2016.

It takes into account the Paris Agreement that includes a long-term goal to limit global warming to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C. Regarding the forestry it spells out its contribution in reaching the long term climate mitigation objectives.

This Regulation sets out Member States’ commitments on LULUCF for the period from 2021 to 2030, as well as the rules for the accounting of emissions and removals from those sectors. It is not addressed to individual actors (farmers, foresters) and the proposal maintains the “no-debit” rule (accounted emissions from land use are compensated by removal of CO₂). They are some positive points on the proposal as the flexibility of compensating emissions; also opportunities as the afforestation for the Countries with less forested area.

But they are also some critical issues because the proposal just focuses on harvest control, not in management or forest growth; and the forest reference level –used to calculate the emissions and removals- is based in some years of reference of low harvest due to the small wood prices.

The Bioenergy Sustainability Policy has been another topic followed closely by ELO, as a part of Renewable Energy Directive post-2020 (REDII) that includes the biomass sustainability criteria to demonstrate sustainable production and efficient use of forest biomass in transport, heat and power.

On May, with the ELO present as observer, the FOREST EUROPE Work Programme and Terms of Reference were adopted. ELO was also at the first Working Group on the future direction of FOREST EUROPE, and in common with other observers’ organisations we highlighted the opportunity to reflect forestry’s positive contributions to climate change, bio- and circular economy.

Among the priorities for 2017 of the Standing Forestry Committee will be the review of the EU Forest Strategy, the follow-up on the work related to the 2030 EU Energy and Climate Framework, the European Innovation Partnership, and the update to the EU Bioeconomy Strategy.
Land Access and Property Rights

The ELO is founded on the belief that private property rights and a well-functioning land market are fundamental in delivering both sustainability and profitability in the European countryside.

Over the last two years, the debate on land accessibility and property rights has resurfaced in Europe. A multitude of events and developments have given rise to this debate, ranging from excessive government intervention in the price of farmland, but also the establishment of the Four Freedoms of Europe and land prices in a globally competitive market.

Most EU Member States have certain regulations regarding their national land markets. However, such measures should not disturb fundamental market mechanisms which ensure an optimally productive agricultural sector – above all, they must avoid creating political preference and clientelism. Furthermore, while Member States may set parameters, these should never interfere with European laws and freedoms. Those Member States currently involved inpreferring national solutions to European principles are not acting out of strength, but rather show weakness in their distrust of both the EU and market forces.

The key to resolving land access issues should not be found in artificial manipulations of land markets or in nationalism, but rather to improve (access to) financial services and structures so that especially young and new farmers can enter the market. In doing so, existing land markets can operate more efficiently and the new rural activities may be deployed.

The ELO believes that any discussion on the scale of farming in Europe should focus on what is productive and sustainable, and not on absolute farm sizes. Current discussions on land access are dangerously mixing different technologies and preferring emotion over reason; such argumentation represents a threat to private property rights and the instincts of countryside entrepreneurs – one does not grow one’s business in a climate of uncertainty. The EU must work together with its countryside and support the best and most sustainable entrepreneurs, not perform social experiments and support unviable enterprises.

In 2017, the ELO will continue to advocate for strong property rights that are independent of the size of the agricultural or forestry holding, and welcomes any chance to expand on its point of view.
Housing and Energy Efficiency

As part of the energy package that was published the 30th of November 2016, the European Commission released two proposals aiming at amending the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) and the Energy Efficiency Directive (EED).

Before these revision proposals, the ELO already contributed to the European Commission consultation on evaluation of the EPBD in 2015 and reacted to the report of the European Parliament on Implementation of the Energy Efficiency Directive in June 2016.

ELO is part of a coalition gathering European Historic Houses Association, The European Property Federation, the International Union of Property Owners and The European Group of Valuers’ Associations. Together, we raise the voice of the united European property sector toward the legislators.

Our main priority is to avoid more detailed and prescriptive renovation requirements in the two above mentioned Directives, as well as an over-emphasis on deep renovation. We do not believe that strict regulations could achieve this goal: this is only done by incentivizing the interested parties. Currently, the Directives appear to not take great consideration of the vitality of the real estate sector, including owners, land managers and investors.

The energy performance certificate (EPC) from the EPBD is at the heart of ELO’s concern. Direct experience has made clear that those who draft the EPC struggle with devising a reliable performance indicator for the EPC. Nor is there a consultant with the needed experience to provide useful recommendations. Since its implementation, it appeared obvious that the EU Directive has gone too far regarding prescriptive details: ELO members need more freedom to choose measures suitable for their buildings and financial capacities.

The ELO also questions the Commission’s over-extensive interpretation of the EED’s metering requirement. There is an unequal and unjustified treatment between owners and/or tenants of an apartment in a multi-apartment or multi-purpose building supplied from district heating, and those supplied from a central source.

The European Parliament and the Council of the EU should vote on these proposals by the end of 2017. The ELO and its partners will be following closely all the developments regarding the vote of these two Directives.
Wildlife Estates Label

The ELO and the national delegations of WE project continued their efforts in 2016 to raise the awareness of society for the importance of private conservation management.

The Wildlife Estates Label has been developed as a means to acknowledge the exemplary management of landowners and managers of territories in Europe and to make them more visible to society as strong guardians of nature. This initiative is based on a voluntary approach to highlight the key role of land managers in protecting biodiversity. It makes the link between biodiversity and sustainable hunting to facilitate a better communication between land managers, hunters and local authorities. The project is managed by 19 national delegations who are responsible for spreading the initiative at the country level.

Today, the Wildlife Estates network consists of 236 estates. Over the 11 years of operations of the programme, labelled hectares passed from a mere 23 000 to more than 1.150.000 hectares.

On the 27th – 29th September international experts for wildlife management and the national delegations gathered in Køge, Denmark for the 11th Plenary Session of the WE Label Steering Committee to discuss the progress of the project, exchange experiences and validate the new WE Estates in various countries. There was a broad agreement about the important role of private land managers for nature conservation and that hunting could be used as a means of fauna conservation.

ELO and the national delegations of the Wildlife Estates project will continue with their efforts to maintain the growth rate, with the expectation to achieve 2-3 Million hectares under the WE Label in the next 3-5 years. We also look forward to the 2017 Plenary Session in Romania and to increase our presence (expand our network) in the Eastern European Countries.

www.wildlife-estates.eu
and subscribe to the WE Newsletter!
Pollinator Network initiative

In the frame of Wildlife Estates, the ELO and the members of the FCS, together with Syngenta, continued its efforts to raise awareness about the benefits of multifunctional field margins for farm biodiversity.

Different designs of field margins can be utilised for environmental enhancement and resource protection - including establishing grass strips, sowing wildflower pollen and nectar sources for insects or sources of seed for farm birds.

Which option, or combination, is selected depends upon the objective required and to supplement existing natural habitat available. In collaboration with Agriland, several estates received agronomic advice and facilitated access to targeted seed mixtures during 2016 in Belgium in order to successfully implement the desired measures and retain biodiversity in the field and offer natural protection for areas beyond the margins.

In 2017 one of the objectives is to include targeted questions into the WE questionnaire on biodiversity friendly farming measures in order to evaluate each candidate estates’ contribution to farm biodiversity.
2016 was the last year of the three-year fruitful project. This last year brought many activities for the ELO which lead the project’s local and EU level stakeholder engagement activities and communication.

The stakeholder engagement involved the organization of an EU level workshop on the potential of labelling in landscape management and the project’s final conference that focused on how we can apply a landscape approach to land-use science and policy in Europe.

During the three years of work the HERCULES project has underlined the importance of applying an holistic, multi-scalar and inter-disciplinary approach to effective research and understanding of rural landscapes in Europe. The final conference, organized by the ELO on October 4, 2016 in Brussels, invited policy makers, scientists and practitioners to discuss the next steps; how to apply a ‘landscape approach’ to support their long term sustainability, i.e. respecting and enabling their inherent dynam-ics, cultural specificities and multi-agency nature. Having a landscape approach at the centre of policy and governance would be a more effective way of accommodating and managing the competition and interdependencies among natural resources, cultural heritage values and ecosystem services. Governance and policy need to take into account the socio-economic factors at work in the landscape as well as the biophysical, in addition to the culture(s) of the people living and working within it.

In line with the topic of the conference the ELO also elaborated a document in which the landscape approach and certain recommendations towards a landscape centered policy are discussed.

www.hercules-landscapes.eu
@HerculesFP7
Hercules Project
Since January 2016 the ELO and its partners are taking part in the Horizon 2020 project for the duration of 36 months. In October 2016 took place a stakeholder meeting in Carbonia, Sardinia to discuss the next steps, targeting to develop a methodology to assess bioenergy production potential on available “underutilised lands” in Europe (contaminated, abandoned, fallow land, etc.) at national and local level. Based on this methodology, the project will produce multiple feasibility studies in selected case study locations (Germany, Italy and Ukraine).

There are a number of barriers to the market uptake of sustainable bioenergy, including limited coordination among policies in areas directly relevant for the bioenergy sector, e.g. agriculture, energy and environment. In the target countries, FORBIO will foster a better alignment of policies in these areas, by organizing consultations and facilitating the exchange of information and best practices among relevant stakeholders and especially policy-makers. In addition, thanks to its focus on underutilised areas and its in-depth assessment of environmental, social and economic sustainability issues, the project will mitigate the risk of competition between renewable energy, bioenergy development objectives and objectives in the areas of agriculture and food security, while contributing to climate change mitigation and other environmental sustainability objectives.

In addition, the project will carry out awareness raising and capacity building activities in order to share lessons learnt and good practices.

This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No691846.
REVAB: REuse and Valorization of Agricultural Buildings through training based on real experiences

The challenges faced by the rural areas in the last years resulted in a loss of centers of rural living and a lack of use for existing agricultural buildings.

The REVAB project, launched in 2015 and running until 2018, is funded by the Erasmus + Programme and is composed of partners from six European countries. This project uses the enormous potential for reuse of existing agricultural buildings and supports the rural entrepreneurs, thanks to a training system based on case studies and Open Educational Resources (OER).

The REVAB project;
- fosters the entrepreneurial approach of the use of existing agricultural buildings
- stimulates rural entrepreneurs, rural land and real estate owners and young farmers to think about possibilities of (re)use and valorization of existing agricultural real estate and farmstead respecting economic, ecologic and social effects
- seeks to avoid further consumption of agricultural land through settlement and industrial real estate.

In 2016, the 3rd transnational meeting that took place in Germany enabled the consortium to advance and choose successful case studies in each country of the project (IT, ES, BG, DE, PL) in order to create the training system for the entrepreneurs.

For 2017, the project is taking a step forward with the creation of the first comprehensive, flexible and fully open-source training system for the reuse and valorization of agricultural buildings. This tool will help stakeholders learn through real-life, successful experiences and exchange at regional and national level. Training young rural entrepreneurs will help to keep rural areas alive, create and leave investment, provide secure jobs and ensure the sustainability of rural life.

In 2018, the consortium will finalize the training system, which will be disseminated through the creation of an interactive website. The project will be the subject of a scientific publication which will be sent to the European Parliament and the national governments of the project partners.

Project n°: 2015-1-BE01-KA202-013183

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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.
The CO-FARM project, launched in 2016 for a duration of 30 months, provides rural entrepreneurs, rural landowners and farmers skills and knowledge to implement initiatives of cooperation amongst them, offering an opportunity to address some of the issues the sector faces and secure the future of family farms. But farmers and rural entrepreneurs need to be trained in the principles of business-to-business cooperation.

A flexible training program will be developed and implemented, providing farmers with knowledge and skills necessary to work in a cooperation environment. Based on case studies, this program will be very practical in nature and will aim at enhancing the capacity and willingness of the target groups to cooperate at a farm level. The knowledge and skills gained will be applied in a number of different environments and the learning from the experience of such application will be used to amend the teaching program.

Cooperation takes different forms according to the country, so the transnational dimension of the project, through a consortium of 8 partners from different EU countries, is very important. Mediterranean Europe (ES, IT), Central Europe (DE, BE), Eastern Europe (SI, CZ) and Northern Europe (IE) are represented in the project consortium giving it a full coverage of different contexts within the EU.

Project Nº: 2016-1-IE01-KA202-016870

@COFARM_ERASMUS

CoFarm

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.
FEAL: multifunctional Farming for the sustainability of European Agricultural Landscapes

Around half of the EU’s land is farmed. That makes agricultural activity essential for the emergence and maintenance of the cultural landscapes, including the preservation and the promotion of landscape elements and landforms.

European Agricultural Landscapes (EAL) have an important cultural value and play a crucial role in the conservation of biodiversity. These assets can also represent tremendous additional value for farmers, but in order to exploit this, young farmers and land managers need training to ensure sustainable management. This training needs to be met with personal motivation and a high level of skills.

In order to provide such training, the FEAL project began in December 2016 and will aid farmers in conceptualizing and implementing innovative farming techniques that can link the interests of farmers and the broader society. It will highlight that positive EAL management can have beneficial effects on production as well. Existing projects and experiences will be shared between different countries in order to stimulate innovative entrepreneurship in agriculture.

FEAL will represent the first comprehensive, flexible and fully open-source training system for implementing sustainable and multifunctional farming practices maintaining and improving EAL based on ICT and e-learning. For the first time, an entrepreneurial exchange about the topic will be possible on regional, national and European level. This method will allow the actors to know what other European farmers are actually successfully doing, selecting the aspects that fit their entrepreneurial, cultural and social context.

The FEAL consortium, composed of partners from 6 different countries, is convinced that successful strategies can be adapted from one region to another without denying local identity and conditions. Therefore the project will be carried out transnationally in order to give remote target groups, despite their geographical location, the possibility of accessing win-to-win situations.

Project no.: 2016-1-SK01-KA202-022502

@FEAL_ERASMUS
This project will be carried out in collaboration with the PLAID project, considering the similarity of goals and expected outcomes. A collaborative work will maximize the efficiency and impact, favoring synergies.

The overall objective of the project is to enhance peer-to-peer learning in the commercial farming community by:
- Understanding the role of European commercial demonstration farms, in the application of scientific findings, and the spreading of best practices and innovative farming approaches within the farming community.
- Building on this understanding, evidence and tools for organizing effective farmer-to-farmer learning approaches will be synthesized and made available to end users.
- Opportunities will be identified and supported for strengthening these activities.

The project will utilize the experience of different actors and involve practitioner partners throughout the project to deepen understanding of effective on farm demonstration activities. The first step will be to conduct a geo-referenced inventory of open commercial farms that engage in demonstration activities in Europe detailing the sectors, themes and topics on which they provide expertise, and describe the techniques they apply. Case studies will be selected to perform an in-depth comparative analysis based on criteria of geographical coverage within Europe, representation for EU-agricultural sectors, systems and territories and low tech versus high tech in mediation techniques.

The results of the cross-comparative case study analysis will allow the project to identify a set of best practical approaches for both the on-farm demonstration of research results (science driven) and the spreading of best farming practices among practitioners (innovation driven) and recommendations for AKIS governance and policies on how to support effective on farm demonstration activities. The empowerment of both the commercial farming and policy community to uptake these best practices will occur through structuring the project results and farm demo showcases on the AgriDemo-Hub, an interactive, user oriented, web-map application.

This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No728061.
ELO AWARDS
For the past 9 years, the ELO, under the auspices of the European Commission (DG Environment and the Joint Research Centre), in association with the BOKU and Ljubljana Universities and Syngenta International, have granted the ‘Land and Soil Management Award’.

In 2016 the award was bestowed on Mr Nuno MARQUES and Professor Mário CARVALHO for their winning project entitled ‘Creating new land and soil management opportunities under Mediterranean soil and climatic limitations’.

The project’s main objective is to achieve sustainable intensive agriculture under Mediterranean conditions with its climatic and soil constrains by improving soil fertility, water and land productivity and the efficiency of external inputs. The project is located on Herdade da Perreira, an 800 hectares estate located in south of Portugal mainly producing beef, forage, and cereals.

The key challenges on the estate were increased risk of runoff, erosion and compaction and the decline of soil biodiversity. All of which were resulted from the extensive use of intensive tillage. Over the last 30 years the project participants defined step by step the best ways to tackle these difficulties and finally developed a new management system that is based on conservation agriculture (no-till, crop rotation and residue management including animal manure) and the utilization of autumn-sown crops.

This new system significantly improved the fertility and drainage of their soils, resulting in improved crop yield and extended animal grazing possibilities throughout autumn and early winter. The improved grazing periods have reduced the needs of stored fodder and imported animal feed. Furthermore, it has led to significant improvements in the efficiency of external inputs like fertilizers, pesticides and energy consumption that allowed the estate to save costs on production.

Mr MARQUES believes that the success of this project could be extended to other areas of the Mediterranean. In fact, the results are already being disseminated by the winner to other farmers in the region through open days and the results are a central part of the local no-till farmers club.

Don’t forget to send your application in 2017

www.europeanlandowners.org/awards/soil-land-award
The Belleuropa Award 2016 was presented by Karl-Heinz FLORENZ, Member of the European Parliament and Francesco NATTA, sponsor of the Belleuropa Award, on the occasion of the European Biodiversity Conference to the owner of the agricultural and silvicultural enterprise Rixdorf in Schleswig-Holstein, north of Hamburg. Mixed deciduous forests dominate the silvicultural area. In addition, grasslands, swamp forests and wetlands (natural ponds and water systems), which are not or only slightly used, connect the areas with each other. Newly developed habitats or the expansion of the existing ones continually increase this important part of functioning ecosystems.

The company Rixdorf has set itself the goal to reconcile the management of agricultural and forestry land with the interests of environment and nature conservation through careful and considerate utilisation of the natural resources and the simultaneous fulfilment of the requirements of various purposes, such as economy, environmental protection and tourism. Certain valuable areas such as swamp and wastelands, horst trees and their environment are left completely or temporarily uncultivated.

The management of the estate, including hunting and fishery, has always been in harmony with the conservation and preservation of game and fish stocks and other flora and fauna. Some larger areas in Rixdorf are part of the Natura 2000 network. Eco-tourism is organised in such a way that unnecessary disturbances to sensitive animal species are avoided and the natural experience is preserved. The guests have the opportunity to get to know the natural diversity of Rixdorf’s agriculture and forestry. Internships and training positions provide experience for the young generation of future land managers.

Don’t forget to send your application in 2017.
European Bee Award

In 2014, the ELO and CEMA (European Agricultural Machinery Association) established the European Bee Award to contribute to the promotion of common solutions for the benefit of pollinators and biodiversity in the farmed environment.

In 2016, already on the third edition, the prestigious European Bee Award selects innovative projects in two different categories: ‘land management practices’ helping to protect pollinators’ habitats in the farmed environment and ‘innovative & technological solutions’, aiming at reducing the impact of farming activities on pollinators’ populations.

Standing out from 27 applications coming from 17 different European countries, the winning 2016 projects were acclaimed by the jury for their outreach and scalability and their successful stakeholder cooperation. Buglife’s project “B-lines – connecting landscape for pollinators” from the UK won the land management practices category with a landscape-scale initiative aiming at re-flowering meadows and creating corridor-wide habitats for pollinator communities. The project “Double Knife system with automatic grinding machine” from the start-up BB-Umwelttechnik in Germany won the award for innovative technology solutions, with a novel bee-friendly mowing technology that help reduce the impact of farming activities on pollinator populations.

The Award Ceremony was hosted in the European Parliament in Brussels by Franc BOGOVIČ MEP, gathering over 100 participants — bee-keepers, policy makers, landowners, academia and representatives of the agri-food sector exchanged best practices, while enjoying a festive networking evening celebrating bees and biodiversity. Matt SHARDLOW, Chief Executive, received the prize on behalf of Buglife, and Max BANNASKI, CEO and founder, received the prize on behalf of BB-Umwelttechnik, in the presence of Janez POTOČNIK, former EU Commissioner for the Environment, Thierry de l’ESCAILLE, Secretary General of the ELO and Gilles DRYANCOUR, CEMA Honorary President.

Learn more about the winning projects on Countryside Magazine 165: tinyurl.com/beeaward2016
Flemish Tree of the Year Contest

The Belgian Tree of the Year represents a search for the most interesting and notable trees in Belgium. These are not necessarily the biggest, oldest or most beautiful trees, but rather trees with a story.

After a round of open nominations by the public, the jury selects one tree per province. The contest alternates every year between Flanders and Wallonia, and trees from Brussels can participate each year. Thereafter the public votes to select their winner.

In 2016, starting out with 80 submissions and with over 15,000 votes Belgian Tree of the Year competition was a success. The Dorpslinde from Massemen (the lime tree of Massemen) was, with more than 6,500 votes crowned winner of 2016. This was celebrated with a ceremony where among others the Flemish minister of Nature and Agriculture, Joke SCHAUVLIEGE and former Belgian minister of agriculture Karel PINXTEN spoke to congratulate the winners.

As part of the prize, the lime tree from Massemen will be one of the 15 representatives in the European tree of the Year contest. Next to this will the winning tree undergo a personalised care treatment from Bomen Beter Beheren, the union of Flemish arborists. Finally landscape consultancy group Landmax will organise a tree friendly initiative for the community.

In 2016 the 3rd edition of the Belgian Tree of the Year award, financially supported by Fonds Baillet Latour was co-organised by SBNLvVL (Stichting Behoud Natuur en Leefmilieu Vlaanderen), ANB, BOS+, ELO, Landelijk Vlaanderen, de Bosgroepen and the KBBM.

Don’t forget to vote for your favourite tree in 2017

www.boomvanhetjaar.be
5 EVENTS
General Assemblies 2016

Twice a year, the ELO members meet in those Member State about to take up the Presidency of the EU for their General Assemblies.

These are always an occasion for ELO members to receive updates from the ELO executive, to make important decisions about the future of the organisation, but above all to learn about that particular country. Hosted each time by the national organisation(s), the ELO meets high-level stakeholders and its members are often invited on a countryside tour in order to explore the best of Europe’s extraordinary agricultural variety. In 2015, the General Assemblies took place in Slovakia and Malta.

During the GA in Slovakia, ELO members discussed the future of the Common Agricultural Policy, especially given the importance of land management, agriculture and forestry to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Members further met with the Slovak government, which outlined its plans for the EU Presidency and the way it has restored private land in the post-Communist period. This GA also saw the re-election of Christoph BUREN as ELO President, with Gabriel LODARES and Algis GAZIUTIS being appointed as Vice-Presidents and Niels TRESCHOW as ELO Treasurer.

In December, ELO members met again on the island of Malta to discuss, among others, the consequences of Brexit for European politics and its broader agricultural policy, especially given that the United Kingdom represents a large net contributor to the overall EU budget and therefore to the CAP. There was also the chance to engage with José HERRERA, Malta’s Minister for Sustainable Development, who spoke about the consequences his country has suffered due to property division through inheritance, which has left too many land parcels too small to work. During a lively question and answer session, the Minister stated that creating clarity regarding the legal definitions of GM crops would be part of the Maltese agricultural agenda.

In 2017, the ELO’s General Assemblies will take place in Estonia (12 – 14 June) and Bulgaria (date TBC).
The Tree of the Year was born in the Czech Republic and has been successfully spread and adopted throughout all the regions of Europe, including big countries such as Spain, Germany, France and the UK. Every year, 200,000 votes are received during the public online voting at European level.

This year’s winner was the “The Oldest Tree of Bátaszék” from Hungary with 72,653 votes! According to the local tradition, the trunk of this old Oak is sprinkled with wine every year to ensure a rich grape harvest.

In April, the ELO and the Environmental Partnership Association celebrated the Award Ceremony of the European Tree of the Year 2016 in Brussels, under the patronage of Pavel POC MEP, vice Chair of the Committee on the Environment, Public health and Food Safety of the European Parliament, and with the support of Tetra Pak. Around 200 people attended the ceremony including national organisers of the contest, policy makers, stakeholders and tree lovers. The event was presented by Natalie PAUWELS from DG Environment and Ladislav MIKO from DG SANTE of the European Commission.

The wooden amulet that passes from winner to winner every year was handed by Heiki HANSO, representing last year winner from Estonia. During the cocktail, participants enjoyed a photo exhibition of all the finalist trees, and wines from the South Moravian Region, kindly offered by the Mendel University in Brno.

The 2017 Award Ceremony will take place the 21st March 2017 at the European Parliament in Brussels.

www.treeoftheyear.org
@Treeoftheyear
Tree of the Year
Over the years, the FFA has remained true to these ideas and grown from 200 participants to over 1,600 at this year’s event. As attendance has grown, so has its scope; now looking beyond the borders of Europe to achieve a truly global outlook. Keynote speakers included Jeffrey SACHS, Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, Commissioner for Agriculture Phil HOGAN and a welcoming video from UN Secretary General BAN Ki-Moon.

The agenda this year focused on the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals: No time for business as usual. Luminaries from various leading international institutions, such as the UN Environmental Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the European Commission, NGOs, and businesses from every sector presented their diverse views to a packed auditorium.

Among the issues discussed on stage were broadening the engagement of the private sector in nature protection, restructuring Europe’s policy silos in order to meet the SDGs and the vital importance of mobilising not just land managers, but the whole food chain.

The 10th Forum for the Future of Agriculture will take place on March 28th, 2017. It will focus once again on the implementation of the SDGs, and provide an initial assessment of how they are progressing both on the ground, and in terms of policy developments.
The event was organized in collaboration with ELO’s Austrian member organization the Land&Forstwirtschaftliche Betriebe Österreich. This collaboration helped to reach out to local stakeholders having a stake in agriculture-related issues in the country.

The discussion was focused on topics such as how sustainable farming could look like in the future, producing enough to feed a growing population while not increasing pressure on natural resources such as land, water and biodiversity. Furthermore, the European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was discussed and whether it was fit to enable Europe to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In addition, questions on the role of land managers and property rights to ensure environmental protection were elaborated.

The main conclusion of the event that united all speakers and guests was best phrased by the Chairman of the Forum, Janez POTOČNIK: “You can’t do it alone”. The changes that are needed to provide both food and environmental security are too large to overcome by any single actor in the food chain, and that taking action against climate change is as much the responsibility of the farmer as that of the consumer.
In order to tackle these interconnected challenges and find answers the FFA gathered together senior officials from the government, universities and NGOs and invited them for a three-hour discussion. The event first examined the global need for sustainable food production, especially in alignment with several of the UN SDGs, before focusing on what Europe and particularly Slovenia can do to improve the farming sector through its policy and resource management systems.

All participants agreed that the challenges ahead of Slovenia and Europe are unprecedented and will require action from all parties. Delegates agreed that the changes that are necessary cannot just come from the food production sector, but would need to involve consumers and the food chain as well.

The event was supported and co-hosted by Mr Franc BOGOVIČ, Slovenian Member of the European Parliament who highlighted that open forums like the FFA are essential both at EU and at national level. Janez POTOČNIK, Chairman of FFA, added that none of the needed changes can be made without the right policies and regulations. However, until all stakeholders start listening to each other and become willing to compromise, the right solutions will not be found. While there are clear tensions between agricultural and environmental communities, it is clear that both sides cannot leave farmers and foresters alone to face the challenges of this century. It is time that both sides accept the necessity of the other, and that common solutions are needed; the environment needs a more sustainable farming system, but agriculture will also benefit from a stable climate and a healthy ecosystem.
The week took a different format than in previous years as active parties were invited to link their events to the themes of the day. The ELO has linked its workshop on the potential of labelling in landscape management organized in the framework of the FP7 HERCULES project to Day 2 of the Green Week, themed ‘investing in our countryside’. During this workshop, the potentials of labelling approaches were further discussed for sustainable landscape development from various perspectives. Policy makers, practitioners and researchers shared their ideas on, and experiences with labelling approaches and financing in the European context, and discussed ways forward.

What landscape labels could add is a coordinated way to establish integrated, inter-sectoral and multi-level governance and financing mechanisms to plan and manage cultural landscapes at a regional level. They bear chances for creating new alliances and networks to direct landscape management towards sustainable practices and outcomes. However, they could also be perceived as “just another label”.

During the 2017 Green Week, with its theme of Green Jobs for a Greener Future, the ELO will once again demonstrate the contributions of private landowners, as well as the challenges they face in ensuring a prosperous and sustainable countryside.

The Green Week 2017 will take place from May 29th to June 2nd www.eugreenweek.eu
In 2016, the ELO’s annual innovation conference discussed the gap between the current consumer expectations and the agricultural sector’s capabilities.

The expectation of the European consumer seems to rise every year, not just in terms of food safety, but also in its locality, quality, and high food safety standards – however there is a general unwillingness for consumers to pay the costs associated with these standards. Acknowledging the contradictory expectations of the consumers, this year’s Innovation Conference provided a platform to discuss these issues, and examined whether or not the innovation that could fill the gap between price expectation and quality demand could be fulfilled through new technologies.

Panelists from the industrial sector, the academics and civil society expressed their concerns for the present public perception of farmers and the lack of communication between both parties.

Europe’s current attitude to some agricultural technologies has the power to scare away the next generation of innovation. Fortunately for the farming community, Europe has fewer issues regarding the application of digital technology to agriculture. The presented digital precision farming tools have proven to contribute to a farmer’s efforts in biodiversity and environmentally friendly farming. The possibility to produce measurable differences through the technology is an added positive; as such topics are among the core concerns of today’s consumer. However not all innovative measures are connected to technology. “Natural farming” is one such example, including innovative solutions such as rice field margins and allowing biological processes, such as feeding birds, instead of using chemical insecticides.

Panelists and audience discussed the public opinion on the use of biotech in farming and whether digital technology is at risk to develop a similar negative public opinion; the decreasing influence of farmers in the food chain and how to reduce the distance between farmers and consumers.

The ELO’s Innovation Conference will return in 2017.

This conference was supported by BASF, Yara and Deutz-Fahr.
The event gathered six panelists belonging from academic, political and agricultural areas. They gave an overview of the current situation in their own field, which allowed a nuanced and enriching debate on this very sensitive, but critical, topic.

Although the topic may appear divisive, this event was an occasion to have a respectful and fruitful debate. Speakers such as Karl-Heinz FLORENZ MEP insisted on the necessity to support conventional farmers and politically acknowledge the contribution of most part of them to the environment, some others underlined the importance to develop further organic farming. This was for example the case of our keynote speaker, Beate STRANDBERG, senior scientist at the University of Aarhus, who also provided an academic input to the discussions. Claudia OLAZÁBAL, head of unit of the Directorate General for Environment, described the European Commission’s positive position on organic farming, which could be considered as a way to reconcile two different approaches: if it is important to promote organic farming practices, the key seems to be to integrate further biodiversity in all agricultural practices in general.

After the Q&A session, it appears that the line separating today conventional, integrated and organic farming was not that prominent: sustainable agriculture is a goal widely shared by more and more farmers, and it is therefore crucial to find new ways to work together to achieve this goal. If organic farming needs to be better supported within an efficient policy framework, other agricultural practices must not be left aside and should also be considered as solutions to improve biodiversity.

The European Biodiversity Conference will return in 2017
The Belgian Ecosystem Services (BEES) network organized the third edition of the BEES X-mas Market. On the 13th of December 2016 people from academia, public administration and civil society, from Belgium and abroad, gathered together with one common interest: to discuss research, practice and policy on ecosystem services.

This year’s host, the Natural Capital Platform of the Faculty of Bioscience Engineering at Ghent University gathered more than 30 different initiatives and organisations for an informal event to exchange ideas and learn from one another’s experiences. The public, given the host of the event, were mainly students from Ghent University. This gave the ELO the opportunity to inform and interact with the younger generation on the issues of today and challenges which await us in the future.

In honour of the 30th anniversary of the Erasmus + Programme for education, training, youth and sports, special attention was given to the Erasmus + projects in which the ELO participated, REVAB, CO-FARM and FEAL. In short, REVAB focuses on the reuse and valorisation of agricultural buildings through training based on real experiences. The CO-FARM project aims at enhancing cooperation amongst farming entrepreneurs by developing a flexible training system. Lastly, FEAL seeks to raise awareness of the worth and cultural value of multifunctional farming for the sustainability of the European agricultural landscapes.

COMMUNICATION
The ELO believes that the voice of land managers and rural entrepreneurs should be taken into account in every process of decision taking. The CountrySide Magazine exists to provide such a voice, as well as those of policy makers, academics and all others with an interest in the European and global countryside. It builds bridges, promotes events, and helps its broad readership understand agriculture and environment at the global, national and local level. It further provides a platform to present policy developments, ELO and partner events, and gives space to new ideas.

More than 15.000 readers in EU and beyond receive the CountrySide Magazine. They include members of the EU institutions, land managers, academics, as well as decision takers in all EU capitals.

Edited every two months in English and French, with a German and Spanish 4 page abstract, the paper version is composed of 16 pages.

✉ countryside@elo.org

Find all the past issues at the ELO website
The ELO Online

**The ELO website:** is our digital window to the world, and acts as one of the main communication tools for the organisation. It is updated regularly with information, conference invitations, ELO projects and other worthwhile material. For ELO members, the website also serves as the access point to its secure intranet, where a wide range of documentation, photo’s, videos and information about our events is available.

**The ELO Newsletter:** is sent out to all ELO members through our members-only intranet, containing all the latest developments in the European Union, upcoming events in Brussels as well as new projects and policy developments. The ELO newsletter is part of the comprehensive news and information services to our membership.

**The ELO on Social Media:** is the quickest, 140-word and beyond tool to get in touch with ELO, ask questions and receive direct event updates. We link news, serve up photographs, discuss our policies and keep you informed – all at your fingertips!

We invite you to:

- Follow us on Twitter @EULandownersOrg, and be part of a buzzing discussion on topics related to agriculture, environment, and innovation from Brussels.
- Like our page on Facebook and get continues update about our events, meetings, field visits, projects and publications.
- Members can contact our office to request access to our intranet services.
COOPERATION WITH THE EU INSTITUTIONS
Intergroup “Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside”

The Intergroup “Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside: brings together MEPs from different political groups to discuss subjects related to wildlife and nature conservation, agriculture, land management, resource efficiency, and sustainable hunting among other subjects.

In 2016, the European Landowners’ Organization (ELO) addressed several important issues with the support of the President of the Intergroup the MEP, Karl-Heinz FLORENZ. They were debated during special events organised in the European Parliament and gathered MEPs, journalists, scientists and any interested stakeholder.

In May 2016, the Intergroup discussed the way forward for the greening of the CAP and the practical ways it can work for Europe’s biodiversity and land managers. The participants, speakers and delegates recognized that there are still steps to be taken in order to ensure that the greening does not fail. For farmers, this means ensuring that the greening is integrated properly with the business side of farming and allows a certain amount of flexibility. For nature protection NGOs, there are still questions of viability when it comes to the translation of European rules into national policies.

As a follow-up of this debate, a meeting on the thematic “Circular Economy for a new agriculture” presented new studies published by the RISE Foundation1 on nutrient recycling. The reports offer ways forward for a more performance based, resource efficient and environmentally beneficial agriculture and aims to support the thinking and development of the European Commission’s recent Circular Economy package. The studies made a series of recommendations, suggesting that engagement of both public and private sectors was crucial in making the transition to a circular economy.

Other related matters have been also raised together with the Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation of the European Union (FACE) through various workshops on the Biodiversity Strategy, the role of hunters and rural stakeholders in financing biodiversity conservation, and the review of the firearms Directive. 2016 was concluded with the Intergroup supporting the European Biodiversity Conference under the topic “Biodiversity Friendly Farming: is organic the future? The Intergroup “Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside” launched the year 2017 with an event addressing the need to rethink the CAP which gather together more than 200 participants. Following this success, a workshop dedicated to the issue of private land conservation is scheduled the 10 May 2017.

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1 Nutrient Recovery and Reuse (NRR) in European agriculture’, ‘The Sustainable Intensification of European Agriculture’ and ‘Public Goods from Private Land’
The first results were extensively discussed during the Plenary Session which took place in Brussels on the 30th of May 2016. ELO’s Secretary General co-chaired the event with the European Commission and the meeting gathered 29 participants representing the 7 organisations which are part of the Platform. It was decided that the Platform Secretariat will produce a leaflet summarizing the main findings and gaps which have been identify between the Rural Development funds and actions towards large carnivore management.

A key task for the EU Large Carnivore Platform in its first two years has been also the collection of case studies demonstrating good practice in facilitating coexistence. In 2017, the secretariat proposes a deeper analysis of the case studies which seem to present greatest potential for wider application and transfer to different locations.

A proposal for a Pilot project “Establishing regional or local platforms on coexistence between people and large carnivores focused on key actions for large carnivores in areas with high levels of conflict” was put forward by Karl Heinz FLORENZ, MEP with the support of ELO and was adopted by the Committee on Environment of the European Parliament. The project will be subject to a call for tender from the European Commission in 2017.

Finally, following the organisation in 2016 of a regional workshop in Berlin with participation of the ELO German member, Familienbetriebe Land und Forst as co-Chair, it was decided that 3 regional workshops will take place in 2017. Among them will be an event in Romania which will address the sensitive issue of the quotas and monitoring of large carnivores in the country. These workshops will feed into the Natura 2000 biogeographical process in the Boreal Region.
European Historic Houses Association

The private owners of Europe’s historic houses often have an exemplary dedication to the sustainability of the historic landscapes on their estates. Therefore, the European Historic Houses Association is a natural partner for the European Landowners’ Organization, with whom it shares objectives like energy efficiency, environmental protection, sustainability and biodiversity.

This year has been particularly exciting for the European Historic Houses Association with regard to one major upcoming event: the European Year of Cultural Heritage in 2018. The European Historic Houses Association keeps working on new partnerships with other organizations in order to develop relevant projects and make this European year a true success.

The European Historic Houses Association has cooperated with ELO with regard to two EU’s Directives: the Energy Efficiency and Energy Performance of Buildings Directives. The European Commission has released two proposals aimed at amending these two legislations. Although we support the enhancement of energy performance for European buildings, we want to ensure that private owners of cultural heritage still have access to affordable housing, building and renovation costs. The main element is the retention of the provision regarding the requirements set in the Directive, as they could not be realistically applied in consideration of different specific features of these buildings.

The illicit trafficking of cultural goods has always been one of the main priorities of the European Historic Houses Association. It started a campaign this year in order to invite the Belgian interior minister to come back on his decision to suppress the Belgian police department dealing with this sort of trafficking. A common letter, jointly signed by ELO, Europa Nostra Belgium and the Belgian association of historic houses and gardens was sent to the Minister in this regard.

These themes also came back during the association’s annual General Assembly that took place the 5th and 6th of October 2016 in Brussels. During this event, a high-level conference was also organized gathering policy-makers, experts and private owners around the topic of “Education, training and innovation for better management of historic buildings” with the special address of the Director General of Culture of the European commission. It was another opportunity to stress the growing necessity for private owners to innovate in order to promote and maintain their historic properties.

www.europeanhistorichouses.eu
European Historic Houses
Europa Nostra

2016 was a very successful and busy year for Europa Nostra. Intensive lobbying for the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 and several meetings with key stakeholders at last bore fruit in form of the long-awaited proposal of the European Commission.

In 2017 Europa Nostra will continue to mobilise civil society and its wide network of members in preparation of the Year and for its first ever European Heritage Summit to take place in June 2018 in Berlin.

One of the highlights of 2016 was Europa Nostra’s European Heritage Congress in Madrid for which more than 1,000 heritage stakeholders gathered in May. This major event is organised as part of the “Mainstreaming Heritage” project that is co-funded by the European Union. President Plácido DOMINGO personally welcomed the 30 laureates of the prestigious European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage / Europa Nostra Awards.

Under the “7 Most Endangered” programme that is jointly organised by Europa Nostra and the European Investment Bank Institute and supported by the EU, the 7 most endangered heritage sites 2016 were announced at a public event in Venice on 16 March 2016. In addition to these sites, the Venice lagoon was declared the most endangered heritage site in Europe.

Throughout the year, Europa Nostra continued to spread the message of heritage as a driver of sustainable development and the importance of safeguarding it across and beyond Europe, including high-ranking events in Equador, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee meeting and in the United Arab Emirates - clearly demonstrating that the voice of cultural heritage is needed and listened to, both in Europe and at a global level.

www.europanostra.org

Europa Nostra President Maestro Plácido DOMINGO congratulates EU Commission President JUNCKER on the decision to propose a European Year of Cultural Heritage in 2018 and hands over the full report “Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe”.
Future for Religious Heritage (FRH)

All over Europe, our shared culture of tangible and intangible religious heritage needs to be safeguarded for future generations to enjoy. FRH, an independent, non-faith, not-for-profit organization, continues its efforts to promote the protection and use of religious buildings and their contents. FRH works with its members to develop cross-border projects.

In 2016 FRH has focused on the following projects:

Religiana
This pan-European online tool will allow travelers to see at a glance the religious heritage present within a locality, to help them search by specific interest, to know when buildings are open and to obtain feedback from other visitors. It also sets out to provide an on-line, tax efficient donation platform.

The Friends of FRH
FRH has continued to develop its circle of Friends - a source of volunteers and of funding - through presentations, events and mailings. It is set up by la Fondation Roi Baudouin.

EUROPETOUR
FRH is currently partner in this European project (part of the ERASMUS+ programme), identifying the skills needs of those active in rural cultural tourism across Europe, to identify shortfalls and to establish suitable remedial actions such as training schemes.

FRH Biennial Conference
The 2016 FRH Biennial Conference took place from 9th to 11th of November 2016 in Vicenza, Italy. It brought together over 150 people from across Europe committed to save and promote religious heritage.

The conference ‘Tourists, Travellers and Pilgrims: Encountering Religious Heritage in Today’s Europe’, that was organized under the patronage of the Ministry of Culture of Italy, has examined pilgrimage in both its traditional and modern sense.

Communication
In 2016, FRH has strongly improved its social media presence and has increased its press coverage. The FRH website has grown its traffic to 200,000 page views per month. FRH has also developed an audio-visual service providing its supporters with video and photo coverage of its events. A new website will be designed and launched next year. Follow us on Twitter @FRH_Europe!
EPA boasts 25-year experience in project coordination and carrying activities oriented to changing people’s mind-sets to protect and improve the environment.

In April, the Award Ceremony of the European Tree of the Year 2016 took place in Brussels. This contest has been organized at European level since 2011 by EPA and ELO, and supported by TetraPak. More than 240,000 people from all over Europe voted online during the month of February, electing “The Oldest Tree of Bátaszék” as the European Tree of the Year 2016.

As every year, EPA took part in the Environmental Funders Group of the European Foundation Centre (ECF). The group of European funders see a positive note on the increased importance of investing in the environment and in society development. Every year, the meeting of the Environmental Funders group in Brussels connects local stakeholders to Brussels.

The annual get-together of the EPA members took place this year in the historic village of Sváty Jur, near Bratislava. Directors and project managers discussed key issues and programs, influenced by the challenge of the shrinking space for civil society and democracy in Europe. Project managers organized separate workshops to discuss topics of European cooperation in the areas of grant management, Greenways, EuroVelo, Trees and Water.

EPA is also one of the largest European Organizations specialized in grantmaking for sustainable development since the 1990s. It has since continued the practice of NGO-friendly support mechanisms and result-oriented grantmaking. EPA member foundations have administered Swiss–EU Block Grants and Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway grants for NGOs in their countries.

EPA provides grant giving expertise as well as offers professional services for sustainability to both private and public entities. If you are seeking for advice on how to design a grant program, improve the social impact of your funded projects or new grantmaking tools, feel free to contact us at pship@nap.cz

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Environmental Partnership Association (EPA)

The Environmental Partnership Association (EPA) is a leading environmental organization established for 25 years in Central and Eastern Europe. With a team of 80 employees, EPA operates in 6 countries via its 6 member foundations in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

www.environmentalpartnership.org
www.dovrenazaharada.cz
Environmental Partnership Association
Rural Coalition

The ELO is part of the Rural Coalition of Europe. The six European organisations that form the platform are involved in rural activities and share the goal to strengthen the voice of Europe’s rural population and to increase the competitiveness of the EU agricultural sector.

In 2016, the members of the Coalition reiterated that the Common Agricultural Policy should help to maintain economically viable and competitive rural areas, preserve cultural landscapes and at the same time enhance the provision of ecosystem services. It must also be easy to administer at the land managers’ level, and must try to avoid increasing red tape for farmers, land managers, forest owners, hunters and other rural actors.

The Coalition is also active on the ENRD (European Network for Rural development), as part of the “producers cluster”, to follow the implementation of the RD policy, creating the momentum for the Cork 2.0 declaration and to make proposals for the EIP focus groups (AGRI), particularly the subgroup on innovation. The coalition also supports the work on the Natura 2000 Users Forum.

Members of the Coalition:

- **COPA-COGECA** European farmers and European agri-cooperatives
- **CEJA** European Council of Young Farmers
- **ELO** European Landowners’ Organization
- **FACE** The Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation of the EU
- **UECBV** The European Livestock and Meat Trades Union
- **CEPF** Confederation of European Forest Owners
Members of the European Heritage Alliance 3.3 intensified their joint lobbying efforts in 2016 for cultural heritage. A rewarding highlight was the proposal of the European Commission for a European Year of Cultural Heritage in 2018. At their Brussels plenary meeting on 18 April 2016, the International Day on Monuments and Sites, Alliance members also discussed the challenge of mobilising adequate funding for it at all levels.

In 2016, the European Heritage Alliance 3.3 also grew in importance and numbers as six new members joined the platform: RANN (Réseau Art Nouveau Network), ECTN (European Cultural Tourism Network), ERIH (European Routes of Industrial Heritage), Interpret Europe (European Association for Heritage Interpretation) and ETC (European Travel Commission).

In November 2016, Alliance members gathered in the German city of Leipzig on the occasion of denkmal 2016, Europe’s leading trade fair for conservation, restoration and old building renovation, to kickstart the preparations for the European Year of Cultural Heritage. Thanks to the participation of Michel MAGNIER, Director for Culture and Creativity of the European Commission, in both meetings, the Alliance continued its structured dialogue with EU institutions throughout the year.

Last but not least, all member networks sent a joint letter to the EU Heads of State or Government in December 2016 calling on them to provide adequate funding to the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 both at European and national/regional level. In this letter, the European Heritage Alliance 3.3 and its members confirmed their readiness to contribute to the Year at EU level by mobilising the sector throughout 2017/2018 and beyond.

[www.europeanheritagealliance.eu/](http://www.europeanheritagealliance.eu/)
Perspectives for 2017

After a year of Brexit, Trump and international crises, the spotlight will be (partially) back on Europe’s countryside this year as the consultations for the new CAP will open up and we once again determine the coming decade of this vital policy. While it is too early to say where we will land, we believe that now, more than ever, farmers must demonstrate their value to society; not just in terms of production and food prices, but environmental values and in the fight against climate change.

There is a clear space for Europe’s land managers; we are on the front line of many of these challenges, and we believe these can be overcome. However, without sufficient positive incentives that can only brought to bear through the CAP, we will not achieve our goals.

It will also be a challenging year in the innovation sector; there is no end in sight regarding the resolution of the endocrine disruption debate, and the unwelcome, unfounded and undignified discussion on glyphosate will return to our tables. While we will always support a ban on products given clear scientific evidence, we will outright reject any effort based on sentiment and emotion.

As we have seen that the European Commission does not want to re-open the text of the Birds and Habitats Directives, we will now concentrate on making the regulations work better for land managers around Europe. Better guidance, more flexibility and greater funding for private conservation must be part of this effort.

To see the best results of such efforts, we need look no further than our Wildlife Estates; with over 1.000.000 hectares of extraordinary European countryside under management, it is testament to the strong values and wishes of our land managers. We will continue to grow this project in the coming years, and continue to promote private conservation as the best possible tool to halt biodiversity losses and mitigate climate change.

Finally, the ELO is very proud to present the 10th year of our Forum for the Future of Agriculture. In ten years, it has clearly established itself as the premier event on the Brussels’ calendar for food and environment with 1.600 guests and global speakers. This anniversary, we will feature former UN Secretary-General Kofi ANNAN, Commissioners Phil HOGAN and Miguel ARIAS-CAÑETE, and Dame Elen MCARTHUR. It is, as always, a warm pleasure to invite all readers to attend.
###Abbreviations & Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AKIS</td>
<td>Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>3E</td>
<td>Economy, Ecology, Education</td>
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<td>CAP</td>
<td>Common Agricultural Policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>COO</td>
<td>Chief Operating Officer</td>
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<td>COP</td>
<td>Convention of Parties</td>
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<td>DG</td>
<td>Directorate General</td>
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<td>EC</td>
<td>European Commission</td>
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<td>EFB</td>
<td>European Family Business</td>
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<td>EHHA</td>
<td>European Historic Houses Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>EED</td>
<td>Energy Efficiency Directive</td>
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<td>EIP</td>
<td>European Innovation Partnership</td>
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<td>EP</td>
<td>European Parliament</td>
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<td>EPA</td>
<td>Environmental Partnership Association</td>
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<td>ELO</td>
<td>European Landowners’ Organization</td>
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<td>ETS</td>
<td>Emissions Trading System</td>
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<td>ETY</td>
<td>European Tree of the Year</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>EUFS</td>
<td>European Union Forestry Strategy</td>
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<td>EUTR</td>
<td>European Timber Regulation</td>
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<td>FCS</td>
<td>Friends of the Countryside</td>
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<td>FFA</td>
<td>Forum for the Future of Agriculture</td>
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<td>FP7</td>
<td>Seventh Framework Program</td>
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<td>FRH</td>
<td>Future for Religious Heritage</td>
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<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>General Assembly</td>
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<td>GI</td>
<td>Green Infrastructure</td>
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<td>GM</td>
<td>Genetically Modified</td>
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<tr>
<td>GMO</td>
<td>Genetically Modified Organism</td>
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<tr>
<td>GPS</td>
<td>Global Positioning Satellite (system)</td>
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<td>IAS</td>
<td>Invasive Alien Species</td>
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<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>LULUCF</td>
<td>Land Use, Land Use Change, and Forestry</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAES</td>
<td>Mapping and Assessing Ecosystems and their Services</td>
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<td>MEP</td>
<td>Member of the European Parliament</td>
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<tr>
<td>MFF</td>
<td>Multi-annual Financial Framework</td>
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<td>MFLR</td>
<td>MultiFunctional Landscapes Roadshow</td>
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<td>MS</td>
<td>Member States</td>
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<td>NIM</td>
<td>Non-Intervention Management</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<td>TotY</td>
<td>Tree of the Year</td>
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<td>TTIP</td>
<td>Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership</td>
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<td>PNi</td>
<td>Pollinator Network initiative</td>
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<td>RDP</td>
<td>Rural Development Policy</td>
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<td>RISE</td>
<td>Rural Investment Support for Europe</td>
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<td>SFM</td>
<td>Sustainable Forest Management</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNFCC</td>
<td>United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change</td>
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<tr>
<td>WE</td>
<td>Wildlife Estates (Label)</td>
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<tr>
<td>YFCS</td>
<td>Young Friends of the Countryside</td>
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In light of the tragic events that took place this year in Brussels and the world, the ELO team would like to dedicate this Activity Report to all those who were affected by the terrorist attacks.
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