**Project “European Network for the Cohesion and Solidarity in Rural Areas - ENSURE”**

**6th International Partner Meeting *“Evaluation and setting of the ENSURE Network NGO”***

**(June 5–June 7 2019, Slovenska Bistrica, Slovenia)**

 **After-event and Final Project Press Release**

The project "European Network for the Cohesion and Solidarity in Rural Areas - ENSURE", is being concluded in July 2019. The 6th international partnership meeting took place from 5th to 7th June in Slovenska Bistrica (Slovenia). The 3-day event was entitled "*Evaluation and setting of the ENSURE Network NGO*".

On the first day of the event (Wednesday, June 5th), the partners met to recall and discuss all the international events that were carried out as part of the ENSURE project, which started in July 2017. The meeting took place in the idylic scenery surrounded by the Pohorje forests at the mountain top Trije kralji.

The opening partnership meeting (kick-off) was held in October 2017 in Slovenska Bistrica, the following entitled "Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) from a new perspective" took place in April 2018 in Motovun (Croatia), followed by the June meeting entitled "Participatory democracy in local development stategies" which was held in Madrid (Spain). The latest international event in 2018 entitled "Going local vs. going European" was held in October in Pesaro, Italy. The 5th project event "Impacting the Young Generation" took place this year in Volos (Greece), and the above-mentioned closing event was held in Slovenska Bistrica (Slovenia). At the end of the opening day, partners discussed local events aimed to promote the project that they carried out in their local surroundings during the project implementation, as well as the possibilities for further cooperation in projects to come. A project brochure was also presented as one of the project results.

The key event of the 6th international meeting took place on Thursday, June 6, in the Slovenska Bistrica Castle, the venue of the international conference entitled "The Challenges of the EU and Future of Rural Areas after 2020". In the opening part of the event, Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Mr. Franc Bogovič introduced the concept of Smart villages in Europe and dr. Franco Sotte of the University of Marche (Italy) presented key emphasis and open issues of the common agricultural policy after 2020.

During the second part of the event, a round table was held on the main topic. The participants were as follows: MEP Franc Bogovič, State Secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food of the Republic of Slovenia, mag. Tanja Strniša, professor Emeritus of the University of Ljubljana and University of Bologna ddr. Rudi Rizman, dr. Dimitrios Antoniadis from the University of Thessaly, Greece, and President of the Slovene rural development society Aleš Zidar. The speakers emphasied that the countryside in its centuries-old development has represented and still represents one of the key development points of the common European development. Nevertheless, due to the feeling of inaction, euroscepticism appears as one of the challenges even in the countryside and will require great attention in the future. There is no doubt that the challenges in field of rural development exist, but where there is a will there are also solutions.

After the round table, the project partners enjoyed the tour around the Slovenska Bistrica Castle and took a stroll around the town centre. At the dinner they were presented with local folklore and cultural heritage.

On the last day of the event, the project partners joined the students of the Higschool of Slovenska Bistrica, with whom they participated in two workshops - one dedicated to the challenges of the EU, led by ddr. Rudi Rizman, and the other, which was dedicated to civic participation in the EU, led by dr. Malgorzata Wochowska.

In the ENSURE project, we have paid special attention to the question of how to bring Europe and the European Union closer to the countryside, that is, what challenges does the European countryside face?

The project partners, who contributed to the project through their productive cooperation, are:

Razvojno informacijski center Slovenska Bistrica (the lead partner) (Slovenia)

Municipality Trudovets (Bulgaria)

Lokalna akcijska grupa Središnja Istra (Croatia)

Hranicka rozvojova agentura (the Czech Republic)

University of Thessaly (Greece)

Kistarcsa Cultural Association (Hungary)

Associazione Alessandro Bartola (Italy)

Ligatne Municipality (Latvia)

Municipality of Kolašin (Montenegro)

Gmina Lask (Poland)

Consiliul Judetean Alba (Romania)

European Affairs Fund of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (Serbia)

Federacion de Municipios de Madrid (Spain) and

Futuro Digitale (Italy).

Follow us on facebook.com/ensurenetwork to learn more about the event and the project itself!

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