

**IPARD – LEADER
CONTRACT SIGNING CEREMONY
ANKARA, 9 JULY 2020**

Honourable Minister, Dr Bekir Pakdemirli

Distinguished Deputy Minister, Mr Hadi Tunc,

Distinguished Governor of Ankara, Mr Vasip Şahin,

Distinguished Director General, Mr Hasan Ozlu,

Distinguished Head of IPARD Agency, Mr Muhammed Adak,

Distinguished Chairman of the Local Action Group in Güdül, Mr Adnan Karaman

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to attend this special contract signing ceremony on LEADER Measure of the IPARD, a flagship programme of the European Union.

It was last year in August we came together to announce Call for Applications for LEADER and now after one year we are here to sign the contracts with the successful Local Action Groups. It is a big success, particularly considering the efforts spent since start of **the first pilot project on LEADER in Sanliurfa-Birecik and Corum-Iskilip in 2010**. It has been a long way from these pilot projects to the **accreditation of LEADER Measure in 2019**. We are very proud, in saying that Turkey was the first country who received the accreditation for LEADER in the IPARD countries.

In 1990, when the European Commission proposed LEADER, this concept of **“bottom-up” development led by people in the local area**, was quite new, in contrast to the traditional “top-down” approach to development.

We have now more than 2,800 Local Action Groups in the EU. LEADER, which started back in 1990 as a small pilot test by the EU Commission, has now become one of the most successful policy tool for rural development in the EU.

Experiences in EU countries show that the **LEADER approach brings significant changes in the lives of rural people**. This approach encourages **innovative solutions for rural problems** and assumes an important mission to meet the needs of local communities.

Agriculture occupies a unique position at the heart of the European Union's society, environment and economy. Agricultural activity is sustained by good environmental conditions, which allow farmers to harness natural resources, create their produce and earn a living.

By taking this combined and ambitious approach, and by harnessing the latest advances in knowledge and innovation, the **common agricultural policy (CAP)** aligns agriculture with the **European Green Deal**, which sets out to **create an inclusive, competitive, and environmentally friendly future for Europe**.

The coronavirus crisis has shown how vulnerable we all are, and how important it is to **restore the balance between human activity and nature**. At the heart of the Green Deal the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and Farm to Fork strategy point to a new and better balance of nature, food systems and biodiversity; to protect our people's health and well-being, and at the same time to increase competitiveness and resilience.

I believe that the IPARD programme modelled on the EU policies has been a success in Turkey.

The program has, so far, provided investment support to **14,000 projects on farms, food processing companies and rural diversification and enterprises**. IPARD has created an estimated **60,000 jobs in rural areas and more are created every month**. IPARD supports a wide spectrum of activities, from beekeepers to milk processors. And it also reaches women and young entrepreneurs.

We are also very happy that the IPARD programme has started to reach the civil society and local authorities through **LEADER** and the **National Rural Network**.

We are looking forward to a successful implementation of the LEADER in Turkey. We observe that the rural communities are ready and highly interested in LEADER, signing contracts with 50 Local Action Groups in the first call is an indication of this as well. I believe it will have quite an impact in rural communities.

I know about Gdl and its potential to develop local products, short value chains, rural tourism and enhance social life in the community. I congratulate Gdl Local Action Group for establishing a solid Local Development Strategy not in the office but by consulting local population. My wish for Gdl is to continue the good work and come up with good projects, animation and training to make their vision a reality.

I am convinced that we are going to see amazing developments by LEADER here in Turkey. LEADER has a simple recipe for success based on 7 principles: **area based bottom-up approach, private-public partnership, multi-sectoral strategies, innovation and networking.**

I am convinced it will also work in Turkey. **And don't forget to link with other Local Action Groups in the EU Networks for best ideas and solutions to common problems rural areas face in Turkey and the EU.** It is important today as we face the Covid crisis – Local Action Groups can react fast and can develop innovative ideas needed for the current times.

By this opportunity, I would like to congratulate 50 Local Action Groups who will sign the contract and encourage the other LAGs continue their preparations and be ready for the next calls.

Before concluding, I would like to thank everyone who contributed to the LEADER, very special measure of the IPARD Programme, at all stages and wish you all the successes.

