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Rural Development

**Statement
on behalf of the European Union
by**

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Madam Chairperson / Mr Chairman, distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Czech Republic has the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

The EU sees the most important objectives of sustainable rural development to be the **protection of the environment and rural landscapes, the sustainable use of land and water resources, biodiversity, and aims at fostering growth and job creation as well as enhancing innovation in rural areas.** Within the EU-27, we seek to meet these challenges by unlocking the potential of rural areas by improving the environment and the countryside, as well as the quality of life. Rural development policy in the EU is now financed by a single fund: the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

In recent years, the EU's rural development policy has been focused on three core thematic areas that **have great relevance for sustainable rural development internally and internationally:**

1. Developing a market oriented, competitive agricultural and food production sector:

The EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is contributing to a stronger, more dynamic and **sustainable agri-food sector** by focusing on the priorities of **knowledge transfer, modernisation and innovation** in agriculture and the food chain as a whole.

Incentive payments are available to farmers who participate voluntarily in EU or national schemes designed to improve the quality of agricultural products and production processes and which give assurances to consumers on these issues.

The development of **organic farming and production of organic food** as an overall system of farm management and food production, combining best environmental practices, is a prime example of our commitment to promote sustainable agriculture. The "European action plan for Organic Food and Farming" (EAP) is directly linked to the conclusions of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), encouraging the creation and expansion of domestic and international markets for environmentally friendly goods, including organic products. It puts forward concrete policy measures, such as improving information for consumers and traders, streamlining public support via rural development, improving production standards, strengthening the control system and research.

Basic internationally harmonised standards for sustainable agricultural production are also needed. Consumers are increasingly demanding more comprehensive information about the food they consume.

In addition, a substantial number of research projects, both in the 6th and the 7th Research Framework Programme are addressing crucial innovation needs of quality food production, including the further development of the organic food and farming sectors.

2. The reinforcement and adjustment of the role of farming in the maintenance of the environment and natural resources as well as the sustainable management of land for future generations:

The EU applies **agri-environmental measures** supporting specifically-designed practices that go beyond baseline standards and help protect, maintain and/or enhance the environment and the countryside (with an emphasis on water, soil and climate change) as well as maintain and improve biodiversity. Regarding **less favoured areas**, financial support is also available for

health and low educational levels, degraded natural resources, vulnerability to risk, and poor access to political power. In response, EU policy integrates the objectives of poverty eradication, food security, and sustainable natural resource management, while fostering participatory processes and adaptation of interventions to local circumstances and needs.

Agricultural development forms a core component of rural development strategies in cooperation programmes with most of the partner countries. The EU is devoting more attention to agricultural development, as exemplified by the December 2008 approval of the **€ 1 billion Food Facility**. Moreover, in an increased number of partner countries, agriculture, rural development and food security have been chosen as core sectors of cooperation.

Thank you for your attention.

