



PREPARE - Partnership for Rural Europe

PREPARE News 13
May 2009

To members of the PREPARE Network and all friends of the PREPARE programme

Dear Friends,

The present News bring you information on:

- (1) the next PREPARE Gathering (Croatia and Slovenia, 30 June – 4 July 2009)
- (2) reports from various European events linked to rural development, in which PREPARE took part.
- (3) European events related to rural development that will take place in the nearest future
- (4) SYTY and PREPARE comments to ENRD on LEADER and Focus groups

(1) PREPARE Gathering **30 June to 4 July 2009 in Slovenia and Croatia**

Rural Economic Recovery and EU Enlargement in South-Eastern Europe focusing on involvement of civil society in the new member states, accession countries and new neighbour countries

PREPARE – Partnership for Rural Europe – aims to strengthen civil society and promote transnational cooperation in rural development, especially in the new member states, accession countries and the “new neighbour countries” of the enlarged European Union. An essential component of the PREPARE programme are multinational events – the “PREPARE Gatherings”.

The PREPARE Gathering 2009 is a **linked series of events in Croatia and Slovenia**, aiming to bring together representatives of civil society, public and business sector, primarily from Central and South-Eastern Europe (SEE), on the issue of rural development. The main objectives are:



- to provide opportunity to rural communities to discuss and express views on the current challenges of rural development in Europe and beyond it;
- to create a space for exchanging experience and ideas, in particular to stimulate an exchange between rural actors from those Central and Eastern European countries which are already EU members, countries in accession and those preparing for accession, especially from the SEE region;

- to promote dialogue between the public, business and civil sectors.

The planned events comprise:

30 June (or 1 July by 9:00 a.m.): participants arrive to Stubicke Toplice (near Zagreb)

July 1: a series of **“Travelling Workshops”** – study visits of small groups focusing on good practices in sustainable, bottom-up rural development in Croatia and Slovenia;

July 2: a conference in Slovenia focusing on **economic recovery of the European rural areas**, including actions and measures undertaken by the EU and member state governments; reports from the study visits;

July 3-4: PREPARE Gathering in Croatia, including:

- presentations of situation in countries, discussions on potential and needs of rural civil society, building of rural networks and strengthening cooperation between EU member countries, accession countries and neighbouring countries from the SEE region;
- exchange of ideas for future action of the PREPARE programme, with particular attention to the SEE region.

Throughout the event, the participants will be accommodated in Stubicke Toplice, a spa 40 km to the north-west of Zagreb, famous for its hot water springs. A detailed programme and registration forms will be available at the PREPARE website www.preparenetwork.org. As in previous years, cost of participants from Central and South-Eastern Europe, including a substantial part of the travel costs, will be covered by the organisers.

(2) European events related to rural development:

Seminar „Urban-rural linkages fostering sustainable development” Brussels, January 23, 2009

The seminar was organised jointly by DG Agriculture and Rural Development and DG Regional Development, and it was the second seminar undertaken by DG Regio as a result of the CURE initiative.



During her opening speech, Ms Loretta Dormal Marino (Deputy Director-General of DG Agri responsible for rural development) stressed the need for partnership between rural and urban areas, and coordination of rural and urban policies. She pointed out to the present challenges, including climate change and the need for sustainable use of resources, in particular water. She also mentioned the Leader method as an important instrument to achieve not only diversification and quality of life, but also competitiveness and sustainability. In her opinion the Leader method has much to offer as a model for creating sustainable, inclusive partnerships between rural and urban areas.

Five „mini-case studies“ (selected by ICCLEI, with additional information provided by representatives of the communities described in the studies) were presented during the seminar:

- a study on **urban and landscape planning and settlement patterns** (including issues such as housing, economic activities, commerce, transport, location of public goods), as well as land use regulations and policies – **Leipzig City Region in Germany;**

- a study on **mobility systems and short and medium range transport strategies**, including central/urban and peripheral/rural parts of the region – **Lille Metropole, France;**

- a study on **waste and water resource management** (reducing waste generation, increasing recycling, developing new treatments and uses; catchment management planning, improving resilience to flooding, holistic approach to managing water resources) – **Lake Balaton area, Hungary;**

- a study on **joint public procurement of green electricity** and incentives for energy saving – Assen and municipalities in the **County of Drenthe, the Netherlands;**

- a study on **energy production, distribution and consumption at local and regional scale**, based on renewable fuels and embedded in an overall strategy of energy saving – **Kronoberg County in Sweden.**

In the discussion that followed the introductory presentations and case studies, many issues were raised, including:

- the question of „urban sprawl“ – do we want „compact cities“, and is land consumption for residential areas always a bad thing?

- the need to recognise what services can be provided by rural areas to urban areas (including local products);

- the need for an appropriate legislation (e.g. budgetary) to promote inter-community cooperation, e.g. between the city and surrounding rural municipalities, and the need for greater flexibility (e.g. in defining eligibility criteria for funding);

- the inadequacy of the Leader funding in view of its potential impact on urban-rural linkages.



In his closing remarks by Dirk Ahner, Director-General for Regional Development, pointed out to the need to put the urban-rural relations on a more equal footing (although political power often resides in urban areas). He stressed that cooperation between urban and rural areas can bring benefits to both sides,

and also contribute to greater territorial cohesion. He also noted that until now the two instruments developed at EU level, i.e. URBAN and LEADER, although very successful, have been used separately and without interaction. In the final round of discussion a request was made for a special funding mechanism, as the existing ones are not always flexible enough to promote urban-rural cooperation.

The next seminar in the series is planned for June 2009 and it will focus on issues related to social cohesion. Several PREPARE representatives take part in those seminars and actively participate in the discussion.

PREPARE and the European Network for Rural Development

The European Network for Rural Development was created in 2008, in accordance with the Council Regulation 1698/2005 on support of rural development. The technical support is provided by a Contact Point, largely continuing the activities of the European Leader+ Network from the previous period. A Coordinating Committee of the EN RD has been created, consisting mainly of representatives of the Member States: from each MS, there is one person representing the Managing Authority, and one – representing the National Rural Networks (in many countries this means in practice that both representatives come from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development). In the Coordinating Committee there are also twelve representatives of pan-European NGOs representing various rural interests (including those of agricultural producers, environmental and other rural interests). **One of the twelve organisations is PREPARE.**



Capacity Building for National Rural Networks Seminar organised by the European Network for Rural Development, 30-31 March 2009, Brussels

The seminar was addressed to National Rural Networks of the Member States and aimed to present "Challenges of National Rural Networks to Efficiently Support the Implementation of EU Rural Development Policy". According to the organisers, the National Rural Networks need networking methods and tools at all levels involved, and the European Network for Rural Development aims to provide impetus to this process. "All rural stakeholders, and in particular representatives of the beneficiaries of the EU rural development policy as well as administrations involved in the implementation of the programmes, are to become involved in these new rural networks. The activities carried out should ensure not only exchanges of good practice and cooperation between the different actors and countries, but also build active links and guarantee a flow of useful information both ways between the local, regional, national and EU levels". The seminar was to examine "how these interlinks can be built as inclusively and efficiently as possible" (from the Programme brochure of the seminar).

The programme included:

- a series of official presentations and addresses in the plenary part (on March 30), including a presentation of the National Rural Networks and a theoretical discussion about the concepts of networking;
- two parallel "workshops": one on "Strategic framework for national rural networks" and the other on "Efficient tools and interlinks between networks";
- the final plenary discussion (on March 31), including a "round table" on networking as a way to achieve a better integration of rural development policy.

The opportunities for genuine exchange were limited by the size of the event – even at the so-called "workshops" the groups were too large (over 70 people) – and by the number and length of the "case studies" presented. Some of the less experienced national delegations (e.g. coming from the new Member States) found it difficult to choose between the "strategic framework" and the "tools" parallel workshops, and the motivation for such allocation of groups and themes was not entirely clear. However, a certain amount of discussion was possible and it became obvious that most experience in networking in Europe is based on the Leader approach – hence many references to networking under Leader were made in the course of the two days. The main issue was how to use that valuable experience to broaden the networking beyond the relatively homogeneous group of Local Action Groups to the wider group of stakeholders in the National Rural Networks. The participants were quite surprised to hear, however, some Commission officials point out that Leader is, after all, only a small proportion of the RDP funds and should not be treated as a point of reference. It seems that for many of the less experienced participants the overall impression of this discussion could have been very confusing.

International conference "Agriculture and Rural Areas five years after Poland's accession to the European Union" – Warsaw, 28-29 April 2009

The conference was organised by the Polish Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development together with the Polish National Rural Network (managed by the Ministry). It was attended by nearly 300 participants from Poland and other countries. Several presentations dealt with the impacts of accession on all the new Member States; there were also presentations relating to civil society and the opinion of rural communities on EU accession. In particular, there were two presentations that might be of interest to PREPARE. Prof. **Csaba Csaki from Hungary** pointed out to the different response of the agri-food trade in different Central and Eastern European countries – from very positive, export-oriented growth (as in Poland) to increased trade deficits, especially in Romania and Slovakia.



Commissioner Mariann Fischer Boel and Marek Sawicki (Polish Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development)

In his opinion, best results were achieved by those countries where producer subsidies before accession were relatively low and SAPARD was more production-oriented. While the overall impact on farm incomes of EU accession was positive in the whole region, the differences between countries are still quite strong.

Another interesting presentation – especially in view of one of the themes of the next PREPARE Gathering – was made by prof. **David R. Harvey from Newcastle University**, dealing with the impact of the global financial crisis on agriculture and EU policies. In his opinion, the main factors of the crisis are falling commodity prices, as well as energy and input prices, reduced investment, weaker structural adjustment to “commercial” agriculture. An increased demand for protectionist policies is expected, which might result in increased public spending and re-evaluation of spending priorities.

Briefing on Support for rural development by EAFRD (Economic Recovery Plan) – Plenary May 2009

On 11 and 12 December 2008 the Council agreed on a European Economic Recovery Plan (EERP), which among other measures envisages 1.5% of European Union GDP (a figure amounting to around EUR 200 billion including 170 bn € from the member states) to be spent targeted and timely against further economic turndown.

Out of this amount, EUR 1.5 billion should be made available to all Member States via the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). One third (EUR 0.5 billion) should be spent on new challenges defined in the "Health Check" of CAP (climate change, biodiversity loss, water management and renewable energies, milk restructuring) and two thirds (EUR 1 billion) on developing broadband internet infrastructure in rural areas.

The motivation for this allocation of additional funds to the two priority areas of the EU's rural development policy is based on the fact that rural communities can be amongst the most vulnerable to economic downturn. In difficult times, there is a greater risk of exclusion – and when the economy starts to return to growth, the benefits can flow more slowly.

In its draft report, the AGRI committee raised the following proposals:

- Increase flexibility, allow MS to use EAFRD for loans and guarantee funds
- Foresee payments in 2009, not only in 2010;
- Allocate the existing 250 M€ from Budget 2009 to new HC priorities
- Distribute broadband funds (1 billion) according to the needs of MS (instead of using historical distribution key)
- Allow support for internet services and facilities, not only infrastructure
- Provide specific information programme for the new measures in order to increase take-up

The Council had considerable trouble finding an agreement. Finally it needed a decision by the European Council, which decided to reduce the amount foreseen for RD to 1,02 bn, while the amount for the energy package is increased to 3,98

bn. Carrying over unspent funds from 2008 having been definitely rejected, therefore financing shall be assured as follows:

- 600 m€ for RD (and 2000 m€ for energy) from 2009 (Heading 2)
- 420 m€ for RD (and 1980 m€ for energy) to be financed by the 2010 budget (which might bear some difficulties with regard to the low margins expected in Heading 2 for 2010).
- Member states will have total flexibility in how much they allocate to Rural broadband and the "new challenges"

In the light of these council decisions, AGRI therefore took out all provisions regarding the distribution of funds between broadband and "new challenges" and, by unanimity, decided to make available the existing, unused, 250 m€ from 2009 budget for financing the package (instead of using it in addition).

These additional 250m€ were however not accepted by the Commission in the Budget trilogue on 2 April, probably as the Commission prefers to leave these funds unused in 2009, so that they can be reallocated to the energy package in 2010.

(3) European events linked to rural development that will take place in the nearest time:

- **3rd urban-rural seminar on social cohesion, Brussels, 2 July 2009**

Originally planned for 16 June, 3rd urban-rural seminar on social cohesion, has been moved to 2 July. The place is still Brussels and the starting time still 09.30. Invitation including a draft agenda will be available within the coming weeks.

- **Conference on rural poverty, Budapest, Hungary, 11-12 June 2009**

Published in 2008, the study 'Poverty and Social exclusion in Rural Areas' intends to provide much needed knowledge in the construction of a specific EU strategy for social inclusion in rural areas. As follow-up the European Commission is organising a dissemination conference with the support of the Hungarian Government. The conference aims at promoting a holistic approach in fighting poverty and social exclusion in rural areas, highlighting the need for enhanced cooperation of all relevant actors. There are still places available. In case you are interested, please forward as soon as possible your name, surname and e-mail address to Mr Johan Magnusson (johan.magnusson@ec.europa.eu).

- **Workshop Sustainable Development in Lake Areas: Empowering Local Initiatives and Civil Society, 15 - 18 June 2009, Lake Võrtsjärv, Estonia**

The workshops are organised in the framework of the project "Sustainable Development in Lake Areas", which is supported by Foundation de France. The general objective of the project is to support initiatives in sustainable development by ex-change on good practice of participatory implementation and local sustainable development. The exchange shall lead to capacity building of private actors, NGOs and local governments in environmentally sensitive areas.

The thematic workshops will contribute to the development of local democracy and to a more participative management of environmental resources, in order to fill the gap between European citizens and their institutions, and also via feedback to decision makers to contribute to environmental and rural policies that better meet peoples' need for participation.

The project's objectives are

- to exchange experiences about different participatory implementation strategies of Nature 2000 and WFD in concerned rural areas
- to give local actors and authorities better access to practical knowledge about sustainable Nature 2000 and WFD implementation strategies via exchange with successful projects
- to develop political proposals to regional, state and EU governments to use the existing participatory options that are provided from EU-side in order to support sustainable de-velopment in rural areas.

The scientific partnership with University of Marburg / Germany assures that the project inte-grates political knowledge of integrated water body management

Source: <http://www.forum-synergies.eu>

- **Estonian Rural Parliament 7-9 August 2009 Rannu, Tartu County, VIII RURAL PARLIAMENT OF ESTONIAN VILLAGES**
Active villages help to guarantee the sustainability of rural areas

Estonian Parliament of villages is a unique event -- a very democratic way of finding solutions to the rural problems and influencing the decision-making process.

Since 1996, *KODUKANT* has sponsored this biennial event **Rural Parliament of Estonian Villages** (*MAAPÄEV*) to bring together village members, organizations, entrepreneurs and local and national representatives, politicians and decision makers to collaboratively discuss and seek solutions to issues facing rural development. The outcomes of the workshops will be presented to local and national authorities, other organizations and to general public.

The aim of this kind of activity like RP is to encourage people to discuss different problems common for all rural people, either in Estonia or in other EU countries, thus raising their awareness of different possibilities springing from the new rural development strategies and programmes (reformed CAP). 360 delegates from Estonia and 40 international project partners and guests will participate in the VIII Estonian Rural Parliament.

Advertising rural problems and success-stories to the wider audience, directing the public attention to them will rise the awareness of general public about them.

The main topic of the VIII Estonian Rural Parliament is: "Active villages help to guarantee the sustainability of rural areas".

Source: <http://www.kodukant.ee/index.php?id=103828>

(4) PREPARE together with its Finnish partner SYTY submitted the following comments to ENRD on LEADER and Focus groups

Point 1 is related to implementation problems due to legislative or administrative bottlenecks. Point 2 is more about difficulties arising from diversity in national legislation or interpretations. Point 3 and 4 are more related to actual political discussions around LEADER. The positions have been prepared by PREPARE-network members. Village Action Association of Finland coordinated the work.

1. The legislation related to agriculture is not suited as such to rural development and the seven golden rules of the LEADER-method. The fact, that LEADER and agriculture was melt in one larger program has created a lot of administrative and bureaucratic unnecessities, some of them created by national authorities. Interpretations on legislation can vary from one person/authority to another and creates an atmosphere of uncertainty. This again has created unpleasant reactions from LEADER-actors, entrepreneurs or inhabitants, weakening the image of national implementing authorities and EU.

Suggestion: A focus group could try to write down the administrative bottlenecks at EU/state level and find solutions to this problem limiting creativeness and innovativeness. In Finland a simplification focus group is already working. One idea would be to go back to a separate LEADER-program. This simplification at EU and national level should be coordinated.

2. The LEADER-method has been and still is a big success everywhere the method is correctly used. It is creating entrepreneurship, partnerships, quality of life and social capital in rural areas and it should be mainstreamed. LEADER has created great expectations and enthusiasm of local communities in the new member states. There is still big demand for development of the social capital and bottom up approach is probably the best way to do it. More attention should be given to the respect of LEADER-principles in the implementation by member states. The problem is a large number of LEADER-methods instead of one, some of them being something else than LEADER. This creates complications in understanding between authorities and in the field of trans-national cooperation.

Suggestion: A focus group could look how to harmonize the implementation of LEADER in member states. As one of the most successful programs of EU, LEADER mainstreaming should go on and the minimum funding increased at national program level to 10%. A focus group could check the possibilities for a new budget line for farmers - 2 or 3% of the funding (see below).

3. LEADER and agriculture or Leader-groups and farming do not communicate in a correct way. The political game for power and money is not belonging to LEADER. Partnership is needed.

Suggestion: Create a new budget line for this purpose. Some ideas:

- Cooperation actions between villages, rural communities and farmers (environment, village development)
- Activating local economy: direct selling mechanisms, entrepreneurs cooperation, consumer-producer solutions, services
- Rural-urban solutions
- In a longer term the LEADER-tool could be developed to be the main tool for the rural development policy without opposition between agriculture and rural activities.

4. DG Agri or DG Regio? The most important here is the method. Mainstreaming, respect of the LEADER-principles, a functioning administration and happy LEADER-actors creating an image of EU close to its citizens.

Suggestion: One idea could be piloting or creating LEADER for urban areas. Same principles and method as in RD. This pilot could be driven by DG Regio. This sub-programme should also include urban-rural solutions.