



PREPARE News 1 July 2003

To all with whom we have had contact through the PREPARE programme

Greetings! This Newsletter, the first in what is intended to be a regular series, marks the launch of the formal PREPARE Network and of the PREPARE Website, www.PREPAREnetwork.org

This Newsletter is being sent to all who attended the travelling workshops in Estonia/Sweden 1999, Hungary 2000 and Finland 2002; and to the many people with whom we have had contact about the PREPARE programme and ideas. Please send it on to others who may be interested. The Newsletter is intended :

- to bring you up to date with the PREPARE programme
- to describe the formal PREPARE Network, and to encourage you to join, and
- to invite you to take part in the first gathering of the Network, to be held in Slovakia in October 2003.

Progress on the PREPARE programme

We have made much progress since the PREPARE Programme was formally launched in early 2000, as a sequel to the Travelling Workshop to Estonia and Sweden in June 1999. The main events have been a multi-national workshop held in Hungary in July 2000; the creation of the Slovakian Rural Parliament; the holding of PREPARE-related events in Romania and Lithuania, and a further programme of action in Lithuania; the launch of the first formal national PREPARE programme, in Slovenia; a Travelling Workshop to Finland in September 2002; a successful effort at fund-raising, leading to a grant of USD 150,000 from the C S Mott Foundation; the launch in January 2003 of a national PREPARE programme in the Czech Republic; a strong involvement in the SAPARD Conference held at Pardubice in the Czech Republic in May 2003; and support for a national initiative in Poland.

These main events are briefly described in turn below. The second half of the Newsletter contains a description of the PREPARE Network, and the details of the PREPARE Network gathering to be held in Slovakia in October 2003.

You are invited :

- a. to visit the PREPARE Website, www.PREPARENetwork.org
- b. to join the Network, by completing an accession form which can be found on the Website. This form asks you to state briefly your role and interests in the rural field, so that others in the Network may find the kindred spirits that they seek (you are not obliged to put this in the public arena if you do not want to do so)
- c. to express interest in the PREPARE Network gathering in October 2003 – see details and application form at the end of the Newsletter.

PREPARE workshop in Hungary, July 2000

About 80 people, drawn from government agencies and NGOs in the 10 pre-accession countries, took part in the Travelling Workshop held in Hungary in July 2000, on the initiative of the Hungarian Rural Parliament. This intensive 4-day event included two days of visits by smaller groups to local initiatives in micro-regions in different parts of Hungary. The report of the Workshop will be placed on the PREPARE Website.

Slovakian Rural Parliament

The Rural Parliament in Slovakia was established in October 2000, after a preparatory phase during which the initiating group had much contact with the other organisations in the PREPARE Group, and drew inspiration from the Swedish Popular Movements Council and the Hungarian Rural Parliament. The initiative was taken by a group of national and regional bodies, including government agencies and NGOs. The Rural Parliament's main objective is to improve the quality of life in rural areas in a sustainable way. It has about 600 individual members, and about 80 institutional members. European Union funding from the Special Preparatory Programme enabled it to create a network of focal points in different parts of Slovakia, each with a trained facilitator : there are now 44 of these focal points.

Workshop in Romania

In January 2001, a workshop was held at Bacau on the theme of 'Regional involvement in common needs of rural communities' PREPARE. The event was organised, with funding from the Soros Foundation, by the Associative Chamber for Agriculture and Food in Bacau County. The aim was to shape a programme of rural development for that part of Romania. Taking part were many Romanians, plus PREPARE network members from five CEEC countries. Stefan Talamba of the Chamber in Bacau has been working on possible sequels to this workshop.

Conference in Lithuania

In June 2001, a national conference was held at Trakai in Lithuania, within the context of PREPARE. This event, organised by the New Economy Institute, focused upon ways to promote partnership for sustainable rural development in Lithuania. The speakers included four members of the PREPARE Organising group. The conference was part of a larger project, funded by the EU office in Lithuania, and entitled 'European Rural Networks – a Way to Sustainable Rural Development'. As a sequel to the workshop, the Institute launched a programme of local development in three Lithuanian communities, with support from the County of Skåne in Sweden, and is seeking resources for related projects. A regional association has been formed; and a national association of rural communities is emerging.

PREPARE programme in Slovenia

PREPARE'S first formal national programme was launched in September 2001 in Slovenia. The Slovenian Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development approved the proposals put forward by the PREPARE group for a programme designed to strengthen the village movement in Slovenia as a partner of government in rural development. In October 2001, a national workshop was held in Kranjska Gora, bringing together representatives of local action groups, national NGOs and the government. The participants in this workshop, which was funded by the Ministry of Agriculture and the PREPARE Group, agreed that a series of regional workshops should be held to discuss the proposal to strengthen the village movement.

The next step was a series of twelve regional workshops, held between January and March 2002, funded by the British Embassy in Slovenia. The participants in these workshops agreed that a new national framework was needed in order to stimulate the active involvement of local people in their own rural development. After further discussions, a new civil association, the Slovenian Rural Development Network, was established in early 2003. It has launched an 18-month programme of work, focused on providing its members with

information, training and opportunities for networking. This programme is funded partly by the Ministry of Agriculture, partly by the PREPARE Group using funds from the C.S. Mott Foundation, and partly by contributions in cash or in kind from the members of the Network. The Network's web site, in Slovenian and English, can be found at www.drustvo-podezelje.si The Network accepted an invitation to join the PREPARE Organising Group.

Travelling Workshop to Finland, September 2002

The PREPARE Travelling workshop to Finland in September 2002 – the third in the series following Estonia/Sweden in 1999 and Hungary in 2000 - had a greater emphasis than these earlier workshops upon governmental approaches to rural development. Finland offers a remarkable example of determined action by government and rural people to pursue effective nationwide programmes of rural development. Key elements in this are :

- the Rural Policy Committee, which (under Prime Minister's authority) brings together representatives of 10 Ministries and government agencies, plus representatives of leading non-government organisations, and coordinates all policies related to rural areas
- the Village Action movement, with small groups working at local level all over the country, linked to each other through county-level groups and the national Village Action Association
- Determined use of both national budgets and EU funds through a nationwide pattern of Local Action Groups. These are based on the LEADER model, but are variously funded by EU funds (LEADER : Objective 1 : ALMA) or national funds (POMO).

A report on the Workshop is being prepared, and will appear on the PREPARE Website. The Finnish Village Action Association has accepted an invitation to join the PREPARE Organising Group.

Hungarian Rural Policy Council

The PREPARE Workshop in Finland has helped to stimulate initiatives in other countries. For example, the participants included Mr. Peter Szegvari, Senior Advisor of the Hungarian Prime Minister, on the initiative of the Hungarian Rural Parliament. He and the Rural Parliament representatives were impressed by the approach to rural development in Finland. Following the workshop, the Rural Parliament made a formal recommendation to the Hungarian government that key elements of Finnish Rural Policy should be implemented in Hungary. The outcome is that, in June 2003, on the strong initiative of the Prime Minister's Office, the Hungarian Rural Policy Council has been established, with participation of 9 Ministries and representatives of Regional Development Councils. From September, this Council will have a staff of eight people working to secure an integrated approach to rural development in Hungary.

Grant from the C S Mott Foundation

The PREPARE activities have drawn upon many sources of finance. The programme is based on partnership between the ten co-initiating NGOs and a wide network of organisations in the 10 pre-accession countries. Initiative on any element may come from any point in the partnership, within a framework set by the Organising Group, and the partner responsible for each activity has taken the lead in finding the funds for that activity.

However, the Organising Group decided in early 2002 that more flexible funding was needed, and made approaches to a number of Foundations. In late 2002, we received news of a \$150,000 grant from the C S Mott Foundation. This grant, channelled through the Swedish Federation of Rural Economy and Agricultural Societies, is being devoted to support for the national programmes in Slovenia, the Czech Republic and – potentially – Poland, plus central costs such as creation of the PREPARE Website.

Funding from other sources is currently being sought to cover the costs of the multi-national gathering, regional exchanges and international networking. Further national programmes, in Bulgaria, Romania and elsewhere, may later be launched.

PREPARE programme in the Czech Republic

A second national programme was launched in January 2003 in the Czech Republic, on the initiative of two Czech NGOs – Omega Liberec, and the Centre for Community Work. The programme is funded by the Civil Society Development Foundation (PHARE), and the PREPARE Group using funds from the C S Mott Foundation. The first step was a series of three Regional Workshops, designed to enable people from different rural sectors to meet and to discuss what is needed, from the State and from other organisations, to achieve the regeneration of rural areas in the Republic.

The Regional Workshops reached a general consensus that sustained action would be needed over the next decade to achieve this rural regeneration. This action must be based on effective partnership between government and the private and non-government sectors. To promote such partnership, there is need for the effective expression of rural interests at national level; and for building the capacity of local action groups and voluntary organisations at local level.

A second phase of the PREPARE programme has now started, with a national workshop held in Prague in early June. This was perhaps the first gathering of participants from all three levels of public administration and from every group of local actors in the country. The participants recognised the importance of local partnerships in rural development, and supported the creation of local action groups as key actors. They appealed to the Czech government and Parliament to support the LEADER principle as a valuable approach to rural development. The programme will continue by giving support to local action groups.

SAPARD Conference at Pardubice, May 2003

The PREPARE Organising Group gave substantial assistance to the SAPARD Unit in DG Agriculture of the European Commission in organising the Conference on 'Developing and promoting local initiatives in the Candidate Countries' which was held in Pardubice in the Czech Republic, 8 to 11 May 2003. This ambitious event was attended by equal numbers of government and non-government representatives from the 10 pre-accession countries, a pattern pioneered by the PREPARE Group. Many key people in the PREPARE network were among the speakers. The conference included very useful discussion about the challenges of rural development in the accession countries; the EU's LEADER programme and its possible application in those countries; and the expected pattern of EU and national funding for rural development after the accession of eight of the countries in May 2004. A strong emphasis was placed on the need for partnership between public, private and voluntary bodies, and the ways in which such partnership might be promoted.

National initiative in Poland

The PREPARE partners have offered support to an initiative in Poland, where many Polish rural and environmental NGOs, assisted by the Cooperation Fund, have decided to cooperate and work together on strategies for future partnership. After three preparatory meetings in October to December 2002, the Polish Forum on the Animation of Rural Areas was organised in February. This was attended by many representatives of Polish NGOs and of government, and the PREPARE Group. The outcome of this Forum is that 42 Polish rural development organizations (including all the major ones at national level) have signed an agreement of cooperation, with objectives to support and promote sustainable development of rural areas and to build partnerships between NGOs, businesses and public institutions in order to improve the quality of life in rural areas.

A meeting of the Forum was held in late May 2003 to discuss a programme of joint work. A working group of 10 people was set up to focus upon the future programme, and to draft a position statement from Polish rural organisations related to the reform and future shape of the Common Agricultural Policy. The Forum has accepted an invitation to join the PREPARE Organising Group.

The PREPARE Network

The initiatives described above have brought us into contact with many hundreds of people over the last three years. This contact has revealed that there is a widespread desire for multi-national exchange between those who are involved (as individuals or organisations) in rural development. This desire is not confined to the ten pre-accession states of central Europe. People in the present EU countries, and in south-east Europe or elsewhere, are also keen to exchange ideas on how to be active in rural development, how to build partnerships between the public, private and voluntary sectors, how to influence the policy of the EU and of governments.

We have therefore decided to formalise the PREPARE Network, and to invite all who are interested to join. This is conceived as an open network of individuals, multi-polar in nature, controlled by its membership, flexible in operation. There will be no subscription, unless the members later decide that there should be. Organisations, including those on the PREPARE Organising Group, will not be formal members : they will be represented by individuals, on equal terms to all other members. The network is conceived as a meeting-point for people who work in the public, voluntary or private sectors : thus, people from government and from non-government organisations are equally welcome.

The main medium of the Network will be the newly-created Website. This Website **www.PREPAREnetwork.org**, will include :

- Description of the PREPARE programme, regularly updated
- Reports produced in the context of the programme
- Links to the activities and Websites of all the partner organisations and to many other sources of information and support in the field of rural development
- A register of members, with their roles and interests, so that people in the Network may find the kindred spirits that they seek
- A Forum or chat-room, permitting groups of members to pursue electronic debate on whatever issue they choose.

An invitation. If you are involved in rural development in any capacity, anywhere in Europe, and you share the idea that drives the PREPARE programme – to strengthen civil society and to promote multi-national exchange in rural development – we invite you to join the PREPARE Network. The accession form can be found on the PREPARE Website : please let us know if you have difficulty in accessing it.

PREPARE gathering, October 2003

The first full multi-national gathering of the PREPARE network will be held in October 2003. It is open to all members of the Network. We expect that it will be attended by well over 100 people.

The gathering will take an unusual form, with two connected elements :

- travelling workshops, bringing participants from their home countries to Slovakia between 11 and 14 October
- the main gathering at Banska Stiavnica in Slovakia, from 15 to 17 October.

Travelling workshops. The first part of the gathering will be a series of travelling workshops, made by bus or minibus between 11 and 14 October. Each travelling workshop will be organised by a member of the PREPARE network; will start in one of the 10 pre-accession countries; will visit interesting rural enterprises or organisations en route; will be hosted in these places by other members of the PREPARE network; and will arrive on the

evening of 14 October at Banska Stiavnica in Slovakia. Network members may join the itinerary that they choose, either at the starting-point or at one of the overnight stops.

The distances to Slovakia are so great for some countries that we are proposing that participants from the northern countries (e.g. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Sweden) should fly to Warsaw in order to join a Travelling Workshop there; and that participants from Bulgaria should either fly or travel by normal bus services to Hungary, in order to join a Travelling Workshop starting there.

For those who wish to fly direct to Slovakia, there will be a one-day travelling workshop on 14 October, visiting rural enterprises and organisations between Bratislava and Banska Stiavnica.

The full gathering. The second part will be the full gathering at Banska Stiavnica. It will consist of :

- one day (15 October) of introductions, reports on the travelling workshops and plenary discussion
- one day (16 October) of working groups, on subjects chosen by the participants, together with an 'ideas market' which will offer the chance to compare ideas, find partners for future projects etc.
- a final day (17 October) of plenary discussions, including a first formal meeting of the PREPARE Network

It is assumed that the buses and minibuses which carry the travelling workshop participants to Slovakia will remain with their party during the full gathering, and will make the return journey to the point of origin on 18 and 19 October.

Costs. The gathering in Slovakia is being organised by the Slovakian Rural Parliament. They and the other PREPARE Partners are securing funds which will cover all the costs of participants on food and accommodation in Slovakia, and a large part of the costs of travel and accommodation on the travelling workshops. Those who ask to join a travelling workshop will be told of any extra cost there may be to them, before they commit themselves : they will in any case need to find their own way to the starting-point. We may be able to help with the travel costs of those who go direct to Slovakia, but cannot yet be sure of this.

If you would like to join the gathering in October, please complete the form attached, and send it (preferably by e-mail) to the Slovakian Rural Parliament at the address shown. If you ask to take part in a travelling workshop, you will then hear from the organiser of that workshop.

PREPARE Contacts

The PREPARE programme is run by an Organising Group with the following members. We will be happy to hear from you.

Hannes Lorenzen (Forum Synergies), *e-mail* hlorenzen@europarl.eu.int

Michael Dower (ECOVAST), *e-mail* mdower@glos.ac.uk

Kaja Kaur (Kodukant, Estonia), *e-mail* kajakaur@hotmail.ee

Márta Márczis (Hungarian Rural Parliament), *e-mail* marta.marczis@undp.org

Jela Tvrdonova (Slovakian Rural Parliament), *e-mail* tvrdonova@arvi.sk

Marko Koščak (Slovenian Rural Development Network), *e-mail* heritage.trail@siol.net

Urszula Budzich-Szukala (Polish Forum for the Animation of Rural Areas),

e-mail ula@cofund.org.pl

Nils Lagerroth (Swedish Popular Movements Council and Swedish Federation of Rural Economy and Agriculture Societies), *e-mail* nils.lagerroth@hs-o.hush.se

Peter Backa (Finnish Village Action Association), *e-mail* pb@multi.fi

PREPARE Network
Application to take part in the Network gathering in Slovakia
and (if desired) in the travelling workshop before the gathering

I have applied through the PREPARE Website to become a member of the PREPARE network.

Name

Organisation or enterprise (if any)

Role in this organisation or enterprise

Postal address (please include full postal code and country)

.....

.....

Telephone numbers, including mobiles if you wish (please include international code)

.....

Fax number (please include international code).....

E-mail address.....

Website.....

please tick boxes

I would like to attend the PREPARE Network gathering in Slovakia, 15-17 October

I would like to take part in a Travelling Workshop 11 to 14 October
and return 18/19 October

I would prefer the following starting-point for that travelling workshop :

Bulgaria by air or bus to Hungary, then start the workshop by bus

Czech Republic

Estonia by air to Warsaw, then start the workshop by bus

Hungary

Latvia by air to Warsaw, then start the workshop by bus

Lithuania by air to Warsaw, then start the workshop by bus

Poland

Romania

Slovenia

Other country (name of country), arriving by air or other means at :

Warsaw on 11 October, then start the workshop by bus

Budapest on 11 October, then start the workshop by bus

or I will arrive in Vienna airport or Bratislava on evening of 13 October,
and take part in the one-day tour in Slovakia on 14 October

or I will find my own way to Banska Stiavnica, arriving onOctober

Please return this form, preferably by e-mail, **before 10 September 2003**, to

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