



PREPARE News 3

May 2004

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

EU enlargement and the challenge of rural regeneration

The PREPARE partners congratulate our friends, and all the people, in Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Slovenia as they join the European Union. We look forward to the day when Bulgaria and Romania also are members. This enlargement of the European Union is a natural reunion of nations, and a historic opportunity to build a finer Europe.

The new member states bring expertise and energy, resources and traditions, from which all Europe can benefit. But we face a major challenge. Many rural areas suffer from severe weakness in social and economic structure. These weaknesses are found throughout the new member states, in the peripheral and mountain regions of western Europe, and in the Mediterranean. This weakness reduces the quality of life for millions of rural people. It places extra pressure on the cities as people leave the countryside to seek a better life.

To address this challenge, a great new effort of rural regeneration is needed. This should be led by the rural people themselves, and by civil society organisations. They should be supported by the neighbouring towns, since a thriving and attractive countryside brings benefits to all. Support can come also from foundations, banks and major companies.

To stimulate that effort, the European Union and its 25 member states should adopt a far more ambitious approach to integrated rural development than has yet been conceived by the Union. The approach must be multi-sectoral, far wider than agriculture alone. It must be local, with a focus on the scale of activity that is suited to rural areas. It must be designed to strengthen civil society and stimulate partnership.

We call on the people and the governments of the enlarged European Union to use the joyful moment of the reunion of nations to launch a determined effort of regeneration of the rural areas of Europe. We pledge that our organisations will pay their part in that great effort.

Let ALL Europe Live!

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* jelatvrdonova@yahoo.co.uk

Marko Koščak and Samra Jahic (Slovenian Rural Development Network),

e-mail heritage.trail@siol.net **or** info@drustvo-podezelje.si

Urszula Budzich-Szukala (Polish Rural Forum), *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 and Tarja Helanen (Finnish Village Action Association),

e-mail peter.backa@ssc.fi **or** tarja.helanen@kylatoiminta.fi

PREPARE Gathering 2004

The three-day PREPARE Gathering 2004 will be held at Chiflik, 80 km east of Sofia in Bulgaria in late September. It will be preceded by three-day Travelling Workshops, starting in either Sofia (capital of Bulgaria) or Bucharest (capital of Romania) : this gives participants a choice to visit rural initiatives and enterprises in either country. The dates are Friday 24 September (arrival in one of the two cities) to Friday 1 October 2004 (departures, with an option to spend a few more days in Bulgaria or Romania on personal travel). A detailed announcement, with invitation, will be issued later. There will be 100 places, of which we propose that 80 should go to the new member states plus Romania and Bulgaria. We thank Tanya Shoumkova, leader of the UNDP team in the Ministry of Agriculture in Bulgaria, Albena Palpurina of Fair Chance Association and their colleagues for organising the event.

Submissions to the European Commission

Following the Salzburg Conference on the future of rural Europe, organised by the European Commission in November 2003, the PREPARE partners agreed a programme of advocacy, in order to influence the decisions by the EU related to the programmes of rural development for the period beyond 2006. In early February, just before the Commission was due to publish its proposals for the Financial Perspectives 2007 to 2013, we sent a letter to the Commission, urging the allocation of significant funds to rural development, and calling for a far more ambitious approach to integrated rural development than has yet been conceived within Pillar 2 of the CAP. We understand that this letter made some impact. The Commission's proposals, as published, provide for a significant increase in real terms in spending on rural development over the seven-year period, with about half of these funds going to the accession countries.

These proposals are only the start of the decision-making process. The proposed spending on rural development is at risk of being cut if member states reduce their contributions to the overall budget of the EU or insist on other priorities. We are therefore remaining alert to the evolving debate within the Union. We are seeking to influence the detailed proposals, now being prepared by the Commission, for the content of the Rural Development Regulations which will operate from 2007 onwards. We took part in an all-day Working Group in late March, to advise the Agriculture Directorate General on this issue; and we are submitting a detailed paper to the Commission. This can be found, together with the February letter and our earlier statement to the Salzburg Conference, on the PREPARE Website, www.preparenetwork.org

PREPARE as a partner for decision-makers

PREPARE is now a well-respected and visible partner for decision-makers and institutions of the EU. Following our earlier assistance to the EU SAPARD Unit at their Conference in Pardubice in May 2003 (see PREPARE News 1) and our presence at the Salzburg Conference, we were invited to the Conference called by Commissioner Fischler on 'The CAP and EU Enlargement' in Sofia in March 2004. Now, we have been given a seat in our own right on the renewed Advisory Committee on Rural Development.

Further evidence of our growing influence is provided by the invitation to PREPARE to make a presentation to a 'Summer School' attended by the Ministers of Agriculture from the Federal Republic of Germany, Denmark and the United Kingdom, plus senior officials from their Ministries, held at Wulkow in east Germany in late April. This workshop was focused on rural areas in view of accession, and the Ministers were particularly interested in the rural areas of Poland. Urszula Budzich-Szukala, of PREPARE partner the Polish Rural Forum, and her colleague Halina Siemaszko, Director of the Centre for Business Promotion in Sandomierz, gave a one-hour presentation to the Ministers, which they much appreciated.

European LEADER Association for Rural Development

In February, PREPARE received a generous invitation from the Spanish Network for Rural Development (Red Espanola de Desarrollo Rural – REDR) to send a strong delegation to the European Seminar on Rural Development, to be held in Cáceres, in the Spanish region of Extremadura, in early June. We are taking a delegation of 50 people from the new member states and accession countries of central Europe. All costs in air travel and accommodation during the event will be paid by the Spanish organisers.

This event is the first activity within a newly established cooperation between PREPARE and ELARD, the European LEADER Association for Rural Development. This is a grouping of the national LEADER Networks in Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Ireland and Greece. They are keen to make contact with similar networks in central Europe. The event will enable the PREPARE participants to meet Local Action Groups from the ELARD countries and to visit some of these groups at local level. This is very useful now, because many of the new member states are moving towards the creation of LEADER-type local action groups. Five members of the PREPARE Organising Group are among the speakers at the conference.

C.S.Mott Foundation

The activity within the PREPARE programme in 2003 was greatly assisted by a grant of USD 150,000 from the C.S.Mott Foundation, which is based in Flint, Michigan, USA. In particular, this grant made possible our support for initiatives in Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Poland, briefly described below; and for the PREPARE Gathering last October.

In the autumn, we were encouraged by the Foundation to apply to them for a further grant. We did apply, and in March they granted us a further USD 200,000, spread over the two years 2004 and 2005. This second grant is a tremendous encouragement for our continuing work. We intend to devote the money to servicing the PREPARE Network; support for the strengthening of civil society, and (where this is desired within the countries) for the creation of national rural movements, in Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Bulgaria; and funding of multi-national exchanges, such as the annual PREPARE Gathering.

We see the Mott funding as a base upon which we should build more substantial finance for our work and that of our partner organisations. We have applied to the Phare Small Projects programme for funding for the PREPARE Gathering 2004, and are supporting applications by our partners to various funds. We are in discussion with the Carpathian Foundation, the European Foundations Centre, the Heinrich Böll Foundation and others about the possible creation by a group of Foundations, Corporations and Banks of a major Fund, designed to help the strengthening of civil society and of entrepreneurship throughout rural Europe.

Slovenian Rural Development Network

A grant of USD 32,000 from PREPARE, funded by the Mott Foundation, has formed a key resource for the early work of the Slovenian Rural Development Network. This Network was set up in early 2003, following a joint initiative by PREPARE and the Slovenian Ministry of Agriculture (see PREPARE News 1). The organisation has grown, to a total of 167 members in December 2003. It has secured funding from three other sponsors. It has organised a series of training and educational events for its members; and was co-organiser of a round table on 'Development of tourism and entrepreneurship after accession to the EU'. It hosted an international conference on 'Cultural Identity and Rural Development' at Otocec in October 2003.

The Network has forged links with other NGOs in Slovenia and taken part in a number of international events. It provides a weekly news-sheet to its members about activities, legislative changes, government tenders etc in rural development and related fields. It has prepared, and makes good use of, a database of experts in the field of rural development. It

has advised the Ministry of Agriculture on draft legislation related to supplementary activities on farms. It published a leaflet 'The apple – symbol of a healthy Slovenian countryside', funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Agency for agricultural markets and rural development.

Information from Samra Jahic, Secretary Slovenian Rural Development Network,
Tel +386 4 50 60 222, fax 220, e-mail:info @drustvo-podezelje.si

Progress in the Czech Republic

A grant of USD 24,000 from PREPARE, funded by the Mott Foundation, went last year to a Czech regional NGO, Omega Liberec, for a programme of activity in the Czech Republic, designed to encourage the growth of local action groups and to move towards the creation of a national rural movement. Omega Liberec addressed the issue of strengthening civil society in the rural field from two directions at the same time – top-down and bottom-up.

From **top-down**, they organised three regional workshops, followed by a national workshop. These workshops agreed that there would be value in closer cooperation between NGOs and others at regional and national level. Already existing is a national organisation, the Rural Regeneration Society, of which the majority of members are mayors from all over the country. It is well-recognised by government : but it does not fully represent the civil or private sectors in the rural areas, and it has only a limited regional structure, and few formal links to the growing number of local action groups. The national workshop agreed that the Society should be asked to widen its membership, to set up regional branches and to take interest in international exchanges. A working group was set up, with representatives of twelve regions, to pursue this idea.

From **bottom-up**, Omega Liberec focused on campaigning for a LEADER-type programme; helping local action groups (LAGs) to form; and organising meetings of the action groups. It has set up an association of LAGs in the Liberec region, and is preparing to hold a national gathering of LAGs. It has also produced a handbook of good practice on setting up local partnerships for rural development. It is urging government to provide an effective support system for LAGs.

Information from Oldřich Čepelka, Omega Liberec
Tel/fax +420 48 515 17 42, e-mail omega@tima-liberec.cz

Training programme in Poland

A grant of USD 16,000 from PREPARE, funded by the Mott Foundation, enabled the Polish Rural Forum to run a project 'Preparing Local communities for LEADER-type actions'. This Funding was matched by funds from the Agro-Info programme in the Polish Cooperation Fund. The project was focused mainly on the training of trainers, who will then train the animators of local partnerships which could benefit from LEADER-type funding; and on setting up a database on local initiatives to create LEADER-type partnerships.

The trainers were recommended by the member organisations of the Forum. 24 candidates applied, of whom 13 were initially chosen for the training. 9 of these took part in the first training workshop held in October in Warsaw : this workshop focused on the principles of LEADER, case studies from the EU, the tasks of an animator, and the factors which influence success or failure of a partnership. This group then took part in two study visits – in November to Ireland, hosted by Maura Walsh of the LEADER Group at Duhallow; and in December to Germany, a visit to five Local Action Groups, organised by Johannes Lückenkötter of Dortmund University, a member of the PREPARE Network. A second training workshop was held in January 2004, to summarise the experience of the study visits and to start the preparation of training materials for the subsequent work to be done by the trainers. In all, a total of 10 people received the training. The project ended with a seminar in February, at which the results were displayed.

The project revealed a great enthusiasm among all involved in the training; and a very high level of interest in LEADER-type activities among rural communities in Poland. Work on the continuation of the project is under way. The recruitment of animators has begun, and the first training for them will start in May or June. Funding has been secured from the Office of the Committee for European Integration to carry out the training of animators and to extend the database of partnerships.

Information from Urszula Budzich-Szukala, Cooperation Fund
Tel +48 22 45 09 852, e-mail ula@cofund.org.pl

Janusz Kusmierczyk : a tribute

Urszula Budzich-Szukala writes :

'The Polish Rural Forum suffered a great loss in January. Janusz Kusmierczyk, a board member of the Forum, was killed in a car crash while travelling between his home in Piaski near Lublin and the local partnership in Wlodawa which he helped to create. He was the founder and Chairman of the UNESCO Ecological Club in Piaski and of the Polesie Association in Wlodawa, a genuine local leader and an active member of the Polish Rural Forum. Those who took part in the PREPARE Travelling Workshop in Poland will remember him as the organiser and host of the Eastern route. His personality, sense of humour, and willingness to help others will long remain in our memory. The Board of the Forum will honour his memory by holding a board meeting in Wlodawa in May.'

Liaison with Rural NGOs

In PREPARE News 2, we reported on a two-day European Workshop, organised by the French association GEYSER, and held in Brussels last December. The aim of this workshop was to discuss how rural and environmental NGOs can contribute to the growing European debate about rural development. GEYSER has now published a report based on the proceedings of the seminar and containing also a summary of the study undertaken by Vanessa Halhead of national rural movements in Europe (see below). This report, 'Rural development in Europe : new actors, new demands', in English and French versions, is available on the Geysler Website, www.geyser.asso.fr/na/, together with an interview with Hannes Lorenzen related to the character and significance of national rural movements. Printed copies of this report have been supplied to the PREPARE partners. Individual copies are available on application to Hannes Lorenzen (*fax +322 284 91 54, e-mail hlorenzen@europarl.eu.int*).

Study of national rural movements

Vanessa Halhead, a member of the PREPARE Network based in Scotland, last year gained a Churchill Travelling Fellowship to undertake a study of national rural movements in Europe. She has done a questionnaire survey of all the movements that she can identify – those in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden and Wales. She then spent some time in four of these countries – Denmark, Estonia, Finland, and Slovakia – in order to understand in detail how the movements work and what impact they are having. She has completed her report, and PREPARE is helping her to find a publisher. Details of the publication, when known, will appear on the PREPARE Website.

Swedish Rural Parliament

This year's Swedish Rural Parliament is to be held at Ystad, on the south coast of Sweden, between 21 and 23 May. The event includes a series of international Workshops, of which two are closely related to the theme of PREPARE. Vanessa Halhead will lead a Workshop on 'National Rural Movements', with speakers from a number of those movements. Michael Dower will lead a workshop entitled 'Is there a case for a European Rural Parliament ?' A report on these workshops will appear after the event on the PREPARE Website.

Information on Swedish Rural Parliament is at www.bygde.net

Hungarian Rural Parliament

In January, the Hungarian Rural Parliament held its annual rural policy forum in the Parliament building in Budapest. The President of the Hungarian Parliament opened the event and invited the Rural Parliament to hold all future events of that kind in the building. The Forum focused on the steps needed to prepare the first long-term national rural development strategy for Hungary, based on partnership of all key stakeholders; and on the setting up of formal cooperation between the Hungarian Rural Policy Council and the Rural Parliament movement. The Rural Policy Council was set up (as described in PREPARE News 1) on the model of the Finnish Rural Policy Council, following the participation by the Prime Minister's Senior Advisor Péter Szegvári in the PREPARE Travelling Workshop to Finland in September 2002. Speakers at the Forum included Eero Uusitalo, Chairman of the Finnish Rural Policy Council, and Jela Tvrdonova of the Slovakian Rural Parliament. Recommendations were agreed by the 300 participants, and were handed to the head of the Rural Policy Council.

The next meeting of the Hungarian Rural Parliament will be held on 28 May in Szeged, with participation of Romanian PREPARE members from the Center for Rural Assistance in Timisoara. This regional meeting will focus on cross-border cooperation between **Hungary, Serbia** and **Romania** related to rural development in the Tisza river watershed.

The Hungarian Rural Parliament has formed a partnership with the Swedish organisation SIPU, which is working on sustainable local development projects in the Korca mountain area of **Albania**. One of the leaders of the Rural Parliament visited Korca to facilitate a one-week course in capacity building for local stakeholders in 10 villages. In June, a group of local people from Korca will spend a week in Hungary for a travelling workshop hosted by member organisations of the Rural Parliament.

World Rural Forum

In June, two of the PREPARE partners – Hungarian Rural Parliament and Slovenian Rural Development Network - will host a study tour to Hungary and Slovenia for the Basque branch of the World Rural Forum. Participants will be from the Agriculture Department of the Basque Government, plus farmers and people from agricultural associations. Focus of the tour will be on farming, rural development and corporate organisation. The World Rural Forum is an international non-profit body with members in Europe, Asia, South America and Africa – see www.ruralforum.net

Slovakia : 'Welcome in Europe' journal

The Slovakian Rural Parliament has gained a grant from the EC Delegation in Slovakia for a project called 'Welcome in Europe', which aims to increase the awareness of Slovak citizens in rural areas about the EU countries, especially their experience in local development and the principle of partnership. This project will include publication of a special issue of the Rural Parliament's journal, with articles provided by the PREPARE partner organisations.

PREPARE in Latvia

In PREPARE News 2, we reported on a meeting held in Riga in August 2003, to discuss the idea of forming a national rural movement. Present were about 15 people from various non-government organisations, plus two members of the PREPARE Organising Group. The result was the creation of a small working group, with members from all five regions of Latvia, to plan the creation of a national rural movement.

In February this year, the members of the working group visited Estonia to see the activities of Kodukant. Skaidrite Medvecka, a member of the group, writes :

'The group saw how the effectiveness of Kodukant's activities is based on bottom-up principles; how the village leaders are systematically educated in every county; how

village people get encouragement and support from Kodukant in implementing their projects; how there is a dialogue between local authorities and local NGOs; and how Kodukant operates with governmental and other organisations at the local, county and national level.'

In March, the group organised the first of a series of regional workshops. The reaction was positive, and the group is working towards the idea of a national conference in September, at which a national rural movement may be launched.

Information from Janis Kleins, Ministry of Agriculture, Riga,
Tel +371 702 7029, fax +371 702 7005, e-mail: Janis.Kleins@zm.gov.lv

Baltic Sea NGO Forum

PREPARE took part in the IVth Baltic Sea NGO Forum, "Challenges for Baltic Sea Civil Society in a Changing Europe", held in Pärnu, Estonia in April 2004. Hannes Lorenzen gave a keynote speech at the opening of the Forum, and contributed to the workshop on rural development. The forum is a meeting point for many NGOs from the countries surrounding the Baltic Sea. Its aim is to strengthen civil society in the region by enabling these NGOs to exchange good practice, to network continuously among themselves, and to pursue a dialogue with public authorities. The Forums are held each year, under the auspices of the rotating Presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS). For further information, please consult the websites www.balticsea.net and www.ngonet.ee/forum

United Nations Development Programme

The main focus of PREPARE's work in the current period is the 10 countries in central Europe which are now either new member states of the EU or – in the case of Bulgaria and Romania – expected to become so in 2007. But we are very conscious of countries further east or south-east which face even more serious problems in their rural areas, and where there is the same need to strengthen civil society in order to tackle those problems. Some of these countries, such as Croatia and Macedonia, aspire to become members of the EU.

We are therefore glad that the UNDP is offering active help to many of these countries in their efforts to produce **strategies for sustainable local development**. In charge of that programme is Márta Márczis, based in the UNDP office in Bratislava. She is also, in her private capacity, President of the Hungarian Rural Parliament and a member of the PREPARE Organising Group. She has recruited a team of experts to support the programme. This team includes a number of people in the PREPARE Network, namely Jela Tvrdonova of the Slovakian Rural Parliament (*allocated to Kaliningrad and Bosnia*), Marko Koščak of the Slovenian Rural Development Network (*to Bosnia and Serbia-Montenegro-Kosovo*), Urszula Budzich-Szukala of the Polish Rural Forum (*to Belarus*), Kaja Kaur of KODUKANT (*to Ukraine*), Lorena Stoica of the Carpathian Foundation team in Romania (*to Albania*), Tanja Shoumkova of UNDP Bulgaria and Kjell-Roger Karlsson of SIPU Albania (*as training facilitators in some CIS and SEE countries*).

Jela Tvrdonova describes her work for UNDP in the Kaliningrad region of Russia :

'We are working with stakeholders from public, business and NGO sectors, using round table discussions, interviews and questionnaires. We have started the process of partnership building. The next stage will be the assessment of needs, and a more comprehensive interactive training programme, followed by a study tour in one of the new member countries – I have proposed Lithuania, which is easily accessible from Kaliningrad.'

Marko Koščak describes his work in the region of Bosnia and Serbia-Montenegro-Kosovo :

'It is about participatory planning at the district level, where I and colleagues facilitate the process of getting to the strategy, which will be (at least partly) implemented from development funds to be created by UNDP and (hopefully) national and local funds. In

6 pilot municipalities in Bosnia, Serbia-Montenegro and Kosovo, we have started by helping local people to analyse their local situation; and to motivate them to set up permanent working groups to take part in the process of preparing and later implementing the local strategy for sustainable development. We have interviewed local stakeholders and supported roundtable discussions, focused on their training needs and on the organisation of study tours, through which participants may learn about good practices from their neighbourhood.'

Information on the UNDP programme from Marta Marczis, UNDP, Bratislava
Tel +421 2 59337 184, fax + 421 2 59337 450, e-mail marta.marczis@undp.org

The PREPARE Network

A further step in the life of the PREPARE Network was taken with the opening in April of the Members' Forum on the PREPARE Website, **www.PREPARENetwork.org**. The Forum contains a list of registered members, and a 'clipboard' on which members can place news, seek partners for projects etc. We encourage members to make good use of this clipboard.

The aim of the PREPARE Network is to promote multi-national exchange between those who are involved (as individuals or organisations) in rural development anywhere in Europe. It is conceived as an open network of individuals, multi-polar in nature, controlled by its membership, flexible in operation. There is no subscription, unless the members later decide that there should be. 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 is the Website, **www.PREPAREnetwork.org**. If you are involved in rural development in any capacity, anywhere in Europe, and you share the idea that drives PREPARE – 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.

Two events in July 2004

Readers may take interest in two educational or training events on rural development.

5 to 8 July Oxford, England **European Rural University**

This is the sixth in the series of biennial events organised by ERU. The focus in 2004 will be on 'Sharing Futures : Regional and Rural'. Information and registration form can be found at **www.ylda.org**

16 to 25 July Torun, Poland **Euracademy Summer Academy**

This is the third in the annual series of Summer Academies organised by the Euracademy network, whose aim is to offer mid-career training for rural development professionals. The theme in 2004 will be 'Diversification of rural economies in the enlarged Europe'. Details and registration form can be found at **www.euracademy.org** **[or http://195.251.195.75/westgate/euracademy/index.htm](http://195.251.195.75/westgate/euracademy/index.htm)**

International Rural Network

PREPARE was represented at the Third Conference of the International rural Network (IRN) held last year in Inverness, Scotland. A description of IRN, and a first call for proposals for the 4th IRN Conference and Exchange of Experiences to be held in America next year, can be found on the IRN website, **www.international-rural-network.org**

For information on PREPARE, visit the PREPARE Website, **www.PREPARENetwork.org**, or contact Michael Dower, 56 Painswick Road, Cheltenham, GL50 2ER, England, tel +44 1242 226511, e-mail mdower@glos.ac.uk

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