



## PREPARE News 5 November 2005

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

### Greetings.

This News offers a report on the PREPARE Gathering 2004, held at Chiflik in Bulgaria in late September. The News also :

- describes national initiatives in Bulgaria and in Latvia to move towards the creation of national rural movements or networks;
- records the decision by the PREPARE partners to extend the main PREPARE programme to Croatia, following the EU accession agreement signed by that country;
- describes PREPARE's submission to the Council of Agricultural Ministers related to the Draft Rural Development Regulation 2007 to 2013
- foreshadows the publication by PREPARE of a report on national rural movements in Europe, written by Vanessa Halhead.

### PREPARE Gathering 2004

The last week in September saw a remarkable event at Chiflik in central Bulgaria - the PREPARE Gathering, attended by over one hundred people from rural organisations in 22 countries. As with previous PREPARE events, this brought together people from all the new member states and accession countries of central Europe. But this year's event gained extra intensity from the presence of 17 people from the new EU neighbour countries of Belarus, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia-Montenegro, Albania and Macedonia, many of whom are working within the context of the 'Localising Sustainable Development' project of the United Nations Development Programme.

Most of the participants arrived at Chiflik by way of three-day Traveling Workshops in either southern Romania or mid-southern Bulgaria. These workshops offered rich contact with local initiatives and enterprises in the two countries.

At the main Gathering, the focus was on **'The local partnership-based approach to rural development, drawing on the example of LEADER and LEADER-type programmes'**. Speakers from the European Commission and from many different countries described the kinds of partnership, at local or sub-regional level, which have been developed in western Europe and which are now emerging in central Europe. This plenary activity was accompanied by a sequence of discussions in working groups, which crystallised into conclusions under 7 broad themes :

- Finding, training and supporting local leaders
- Improving information flows
- Involving the people in development processes
- Building networks and partnerships
- Using local resources to local benefit
- Raising the awareness of government and of the private sector
- Securing the necessary money.

A full report of the Gathering will be available soon; will be sent to all participants in the Gathering; and will be placed on the PREPARE Website.

### **National conference in Bulgaria**

On 1 October, over 70 people representing rural organisations in Bulgaria met at Chiflik to discuss the idea of moving towards the formation of a national rural movement in that country. This one-day conference, under the title 'Partnership in Rural Development', was initiated by the Bulgarian Ministry of Agriculture, at the suggestion of PREPARE. The aim was to discuss the potential for partnership between government, local authorities, social and economic partners, and civil society in rural development programmes in Bulgaria; and the means by which such partnership may be strengthened.

The keynote talk was given by Mrs Meglena Plugchieva, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, who said that the government wished to encourage a strengthening of civil society in the rural areas and an active partnership between government and civil society in rural development.

Short presentations were made by Hannes Lorenzen, on behalf of the European Parliament; Michael Dower, PREPARE Coordinator; Kaja Kaur, President of Kodukant, the Estonian Movement of Villages; and Janja Kokolj-Prosek, of the Slovenian Ministry of Agriculture. In the afternoon, the participants broke into groups, to discuss what form partnerships should take, in order to promote rural well-being in Bulgaria, and what steps are needed to promote such partnerships. When these groups reported back to the final session, it became clear that there was enthusiastic support for the principle of partnership and for the idea of moving towards the formation of a national rural movement.

A working group was set up, with the task of planning a series of regional meetings to be convened by the Ministry of Agriculture, at which these ideas can be further explored. PREPARE has offered support to this working group.

### **National conference in Latvia**

On 22 October, representatives of 98 rural organisations met at Bauska in southern Latvia to discuss the formation of a National Network of Rural NGOs. There was a strong positive reaction, and a Working Group was set up to prepare detailed proposals for the formal creation of this Network.

This Conference (which was funded by PREPARE) was the climax of a year's activity by an earlier working group, set up in August 2003 as the result of a joint initiative by PREPARE and the Latvian Ministry of Agriculture. This group attended the PREPARE Gathering 2003 in Slovakia; visited Estonia to see the work of Kodukant, the Estonian Movement of Villages; organised a regional meeting; and put forward proposals for discussion.

At the national conference, PREPARE representatives Kaja Kaur and Michael Dower described the pattern of rural networks or movements in other new member states. The State Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture said that they would welcome liaison with rural NGOs through a formal network. Support was expressed by many other organisations. It is expected that a further national meeting will be held early in the New Year, at which a formal decision will be made about the proposed national Network.

### **Extending the scope of PREPARE's programme**

Till now, the main focus of the PREPARE Programme has been on the strengthening of civil society in the rural areas of the 10 countries of central Europe - Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria - which had accession agreements with the European Union at the time we started on the programme in 1999. Since then, 8 of these countries have joined the Union. Six of the countries –

Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Slovenia – have a national movement or network. PREPARE has sought to encourage exchange between these networks, and to promote the creation of similar movements or networks in the other four countries. The initiatives in Bulgaria and Latvia are described above.

As other countries gain accession agreements, PREPARE expects to extend the main programme to promote the strengthening of civil society in those countries. The first such extension applies to Croatia, as described below.

### **PREPARE in Croatia**

Following the EU accession agreement signed by Croatia, the PREPARE Organising Group has decided to extend the main PREPARE programme to that country. We already have contacts with some NGOs in Croatia, including ECOVAST Croatia whose President Tihomira Stepinac Fabijanac attended the PREPARE Gathering 2004. We are aware of initiatives in Croatia by the UNDP, the British Department for International Development and others to promote the development of civil society. We aim to make contact with these organisations and with the government, in order to judge how PREPARE may best contribute to the strengthening of civil society in the rural areas of this very significant country. We will welcome contacts with any in Croatia who are interested in this theme.

### **Submission to Agricultural Ministers**

Previous Newsletters have described the submissions that PREPARE made to the European Commission during the period from February to July this year, when the Commission was preparing the Financial Perspective for the period from 2007 to 2013 and then the draft Rural Development Regulation for the same period. Our Website, [www.PREPARENetwork.org](http://www.PREPARENetwork.org), contains the text of our submissions. We believe that these submissions had some real impact on the Commission's proposals.

These proposals are now the subject of intensive debate in the European Parliament and among the member states, and will also no doubt be reviewed by the new European Commission. This debate will continue well into next year, with the expectation that the shape of the Union's budget and programmes for the period beyond 2006 may be finally decided by say June 2005.

We therefore intend to maintain our active role in seeking to influence that debate. A first step in that process was our submission in early November to the Council of Agricultural Ministers. The key points in this submission are as follows.

- We strongly support the proposal to create from 2007 the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, as a complement to the evolution of the CAP. Competitiveness in agriculture will be greatly assisted by the diversification and strengthening of wider rural economies.
- We welcome the scale of funding proposed by the European Commission for rural development – rising from c.11 billion to c.14 billion euros per year over the period 2007 to 2013. We are very concerned that some member states are suggesting substantial cuts in the rural development budget over this period. We urge Ministers to support the scale of funding suggested by the Commission, bearing in mind the grave weaknesses in the social and economic structures of many rural regions, particularly in central and eastern Europe.
- We welcome the recognition in the Commission's draft Regulation of three broad purposes – agricultural restructuring, environmental enhancement, and diversification of the rural economy. The balance between these three purposes will vary between different rural regions : it is therefore right that member states should have the significant measure of discretion in expenditure that is provided in the Regulation.
- Nevertheless, we support the Commission's proposals for minimum spending on each of the three Axes, and for a strategic and monitoring role by the Commission in the shaping of rural development programmes. These are justified by the commitment of the European Union to

social and economic cohesion, to Natura 2000 and rising standards of environmental care, and by the changes in farming consequent upon CAP reform.

- The LEADER Initiative has brought great benefit, by stimulating an integrated, territorial, partnership-based approach to rural development. But this approach is not yet applied throughout EU-15, and is only now reaching the new member states. We wish to see in EU-15 either a continuation of the LEADER Initiative or the effective mainstreaming of LEADER principles in all rural development programmes; and, in the new member states and accession countries of EU-12, the launching now of a well-funded LEADER Initiative, desirably continuing beyond 2013.
- A strong civil society is a key player in successful rural development policies. We urge governments to use technical assistance and rural development funds to support the creation and basic operational costs of civil society organisations who are active in rural development; to support capacity-building in civil society organisations, particularly in new member states; and to enable non-government organisations to contribute directly to the shaping and implementation of European and national programmes of rural development.
- We urge Ministers to support the active and quick-moving animation of exchange, both internationally and within countries, of the kind that was achieved by the LEADER Observatory. A European Rural Development Observatory should be created in 2007, with a wide brief to collect and disseminate good practice and to promote multi-national exchange among all involved in rural development throughout Europe.
- We urge Ministers to consider the adoption of measures, to be implemented at European or national level, to stimulate a contribution from Foundations, banks and other parts of the private sector to the funding of rural development, as a complement to public funds.

The full text of our submission is on the PREPARE Website, [www.preparenetwork.org](http://www.preparenetwork.org).

### **A salute to Franz Fischler**

As Franz Fischler leaves his post as European Commissioner for Agriculture, we offer him our thanks and congratulations on his persistent and effective efforts to protect and promote the interests of the rural areas of the widening Union. He has master-minded the necessary radical changes in the Common Agricultural Policy; introduced rural development as the second pillar of that policy; sustained the impetus of the LEADER Initiative; and persuaded his fellow Commissioners to include a significant element of rural development in the proposals for the Union's regimes from 2006 onwards. He understands the needs of rural areas, including those of the new member states and accession countries which are the prime concern of the PREPARE Network. We thank him.

### **... and to the new Commissioner for Agriculture**

We extend a welcome to Mrs Fischer Boel as the new Commissioner for Agriculture. We trust that she will recognise the needs of rural communities throughout the Union, and continue the policies that Franz Fischler has so effectively pioneered. The proposals made by the old Commission will need to be robustly defended by Mrs Fischer Boel and her colleagues.

### **Localising sustainable development**

The PREPARE programme was given a strong showing at the Advocacy Conference organised by UNDP in mid-November at Banja Luka in Bosnia. This was the climax of the UNDP's programme on 'Localising sustainable development', which has seen pilot schemes in three settlements in each of 8 countries – Kaliningrad (Russia), Belarus, Ukraine, Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Serbia-Montenegro & Kosovo, Albania, and Macedonia. As reported in earlier PREPARE News, the UNDP organiser of this programme, Márta Márczis (who is herself a member of the PREPARE Organising Group) had involved a number of PREPARE members as experts in this programme. 17 people from the programme took part in the PREPARE Gathering this year. We therefore welcomed the opportunity for the PREPARE approach to be outlined by Michael Dower at the Banja Luka meeting. Much interest was expressed by those who attended. We have offered to maintain contact with those who are

working at local level in these countries, and to give what help we can to their continued efforts to strengthen civil society and to promote sustainable development.

### **Meeting of national rural movements**

The PREPARE partner organisations have been invited by the Swedish Popular Movements Council to attend a meeting in Stockholm in mid-January 2005 of all known national rural movements in Europe, to discuss cooperation between these movements. This follows the discussion on this theme during the international seminar held as part of the Swedish Rural Parliament in Ystad, Sweden, in May 2004. That seminar focused on the rural movements and on the possible value of forming closer links between them, at a time of expansion of the European Union and of rapid change in the challenges facing rural areas and in the policies affecting those areas.

### **Report on national rural movements**

PREPARE is fortunate in being invited by Vanessa Halhead to publish her report on national movements in Europe. Vanessa is active in rural community development in Scotland, and is a member of a group which is working towards the creation of a national rural movement in that country. Last year, she obtained a Winston Churchill Fellowship to study the existing rural movements of Europe. Her report contains a brief description, and comparative analysis, of the national rural movements in 15 European countries; and separate chapters on the movements in four countries on which her visits were mainly focused - Denmark, Estonia, Finland and Slovakia. Publication of the report has been made possible by a grant to PREPARE from the *Fondation de France*, through our partner organisation Forum Synergies.

Details of the report (when it is published) will be posted on the PREPARE Website, and in our next Newsletter.

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