

PREPARE – a programme to strengthen civil society and to promote multi-national exchange in rural development



PREPARE News 6

April 2005

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

Greetings.

This News offers an update on PREPARE's continuing contributions to the debate about European union policies and funding for rural development. It describes also :

- a meeting of national rural movements to discuss the creation of a European network
- the creation of a new national Rural Forum in Latvia, and the moves towards the creation of national rural networks in Croatia and in Scotland
- other projects which are being funded by PREPARE
- meetings in Finland, Lithuania and Slovenia, organised by members of the PREPARE network
- the activities of the LEADER+ contact point in Brussels.

At the end of the News is a list of forthcoming European rural events during the rest of this year.

PREPARE Gathering 2005

This year's PREPARE Gathering, including Traveling Workshops, will be held in Latvia and Lithuania in the first week of October. Details of that Gathering will be sent in due course to all in the PREPARE network.

European Union policies for rural development

PREPARE has remained actively involved in the lively, and rapidly evolving, debate among EU member states and others about the policies and the funding for rural development in the period from 2007 to 2013. In earlier Newsletters, we described the submissions that we made during 2004, to the European Commission and then to the Council of Ministers, related to the draft Rural Development Regulation and to the Financial Perspectives (which will form the basis for the EU budget for that period). These submissions can all be found on our Website, www.preparenetwork.org

We have continued to press our points at meetings in Brussels, notably the Hearing organised by the European Parliament on 15 March – see brief report below.

This year, our main focus has been on the **Strategic Guidelines for Rural Development**, which (under the terms of the Rural Development Regulation) will be prepared by the European Commission, and will guide the strategies for rural development to be produced by each member state. In early March, the Commission published a 6-page outline of what the Guidelines might contain and invited comments from PREPARE and other bodies who sit on its Rural Development Advisory Committee. Our submission strongly supported the principle that the European Commission should produce strategic guidelines, and focused on seven main points which should be reflected in the Guidelines :

- The Commission's emphasis on the 'main priorities' of competitiveness and sustainability (the Lisbon and Göteborg agendas) should be matched by the Union's third great goal – cohesion – bearing in mind the Union's long-standing commitment to redress gross disparities of income and living standards between regions.

- These three aims – competitiveness, sustainability and cohesion – should complement and support each other. The Guidelines should advocate win-win-win solutions which can meet all these three aims. This demands an integrated approach to the three Axes in the Rural Development Regulation – structural change in agriculture; the stewardship of land, heritage and environment; and the strengthening of rural societies and diversified rural economies.
- Competitiveness relates not only to the price and efficient supply of goods and services. It is also about quality, authenticity and distinctiveness of goods and services and of the locations in which they are set. Millions of rural enterprises are focused mainly on local markets. The Guidelines should emphasise the nature and legitimacy of local economies everywhere, and state what this implies for the flexible application of programmes and systems.
- The funding proposed by the Commission under the EAFRD will be a vital lever to ‘kick-start’ rural development programmes in many needy areas. But this funding alone will not meet the size of the challenge, particularly in disadvantaged rural regions. The Guidelines should emphasise the need to harness all relevant public policies and programmes to the purposes of rural development.
- The EU has wisely sought to simplify its programmes and systems. But the crucial beneficiaries of simplification should be those who make things happen ‘on the ground’ – farmers, land managers, entrepreneurs and rural communities. The Guidelines should emphasise the need for simplicity and user-friendliness in all national and regional strategies.
- Mainstreaming of the LEADER principles : the Guidelines should advocate the application to all rural development measures of the LEADER principle of an integrated, territorial, partnership-based approach.
- The role of civil society. Sustainable long-term development cannot be achieved by government alone, acting from the ‘top down’. The Guidelines should stress the key role that an active civil society can play in successful rural development; and should urge Member states to work closely and trustfully with civil society organisations towards an ambitious, partnership-based approach to Europe’s rural future.

The full text of PREPARE’s submission can be found in the ‘Documents’ section of the PREPARE Website.

Hearing at European Parliament, 15 March

PREPARE was one of the 7 organisations invited to make formal presentations to the Hearing of the ‘The future of rural development in the European Union’, held by the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Parliament in Brussels on 15 March. Of key concern to members of the Committee was the issue of what funds should be allocated to rural development in the period beyond 2006 and how those funds should be deployed.

Our presentation was made by Urszula Budzich-Szukala of the Polish Rural Forum (a PREPARE partner), and was much appreciated by members of the Committee. She stated our strong support for the proposal to create the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. She then made the following key points :

- We believe that rural areas have much to offer to the enlarged Europe – not only in terms of agricultural production, but also in the creation of jobs, providing high-quality living space, maintaining natural and cultural heritage. They can be the source of social and economic activities that are both innovative and sustainable.
- In this way rural development can strongly contribute to achieving the Lisbon and Göteborg objectives. But we must not overlook serious problems that exist in many rural areas - including rising unemployment, out-migration or ageing of the rural populations, lack of technical and social infrastructure (for example: only 13% of rural children in Poland have access to pre-school education). These issues cannot be solved by traditional agricultural support instruments of the CAP – on the contrary, in many countries transformation of agricultural structures and improvement of land management can only be achieved if alternative sources of income are found for many small (subsistence) farmers. Rural areas need measures that will stimulate bottom-up initiatives and strengthen social capital.
- Therefore, we are particularly happy to see in the Commission’s proposal :

- the scale of funding (rising from 11 to 14 billion euro per year between 2007 and 2013) : it would be a matter of very grave concern if this amount were to be reduced, in view of the challenges and opportunities facing rural Europe;
- the strategic approach, which ensures that specific measures and solutions have to be compatible with an overall strategy embracing all rural areas;
- the balance between competitiveness of the agri-food sector, environmental and land management, and the quality of life and diversification of rural incomes;
- the emphasis on a territorial, partnership-based approach, based on the experience of the LEADER initiative.
- We hope that the LEADER principles can be applied to all rural development measures (in all the three Axes) well beyond the required minimum. We also hope that at the local (territorial) level, the integration of different sources of development funding (including other EU funds, other public and private sources) will be enabled and encouraged.
- An important element would be the creation of a European Rural Development Observatory, with a wide brief to collect and disseminate good practice and promote multi-national activities.
- We welcome the promise of simplification of administrative procedures in the new Rural Development Fund. However, this must be done in a way that allows more flexibility and accessibility for the final beneficiaries, not just for the administering bodies. We hope that the new Fund will ensure a greater involvement of civil society (e.g. rural NGOs) in the whole process of strategic planning, programming, implementation and monitoring of activities. As PREPARE, we offer interested stakeholders, government agencies and decision-makers our contacts and expertise in building trust and partnership for sustainable rural development.

The full text of Urszula Budzich-Szukala's presentation can be found in the 'Documents' section of the PREPARE Website.

Public Rural Conference of the European Parliament

An opportunity to experience a debate on the strategic approach to rural development in the European Union is offered by the Public Rural Conference to be held in Brussels on the morning of Tuesday 14 June, on the initiative of the President of the European Parliament. The theme of this half-day event is 'A bid from the European countryside - the contribution of rural economies to the Lisbon agenda'. If you would like more details, write (not before 18 April) to Hannes Lorenzen, e-mail hlorenzen@europarl.eu.int

International Rural Network

PREPARE has become a member of the International Rural Network (IRN), which is 'an inclusive and interdisciplinary network of academics, rural community practitioners and activists, and policy-makers who are engaged in rural community development, health and education in any country in the world.' Its vision is "to support our members and local rural development organisations to argue for, and secure, equity of treatment with effect to human rights, future economic and educational opportunity, access to health and other services and to secure effective participation in local, regional and international decision-making".

PREPARE will be well represented at the Fourth IRN Conference and Exchange of Experience, to be held 19-24 June in Abingdon, Virginia, USA, on the theme "The Power of Place - Rural Communities, Global Reach". Our team will be led by Jela Tvrdonova of the Slovakian Rural Parliament and Vanessa Halhead of the Scottish Rural Community Network Initiative. Details of the conference can be obtained from Nicola Swan, Director IRN, e-mail Nicola.Swan@btinternet.com

European meeting of national rural movements

All the partner organisations of PREPARE were represented at a meeting in mid-January in Stockholm of national rural movements from 18 European countries. This meeting, hosted by the Swedish Popular Movements Council, was a sequel to the discussion at the Swedish Rural Parliament in May 2004 about the case for creating a European Rural Parliament. The aim of the Stockholm meeting was to consider whether it timely to create a European network of national rural movements and allied bodies.

The meeting was attended by representatives of national rural organisations, or national LEADER networks, from Denmark, England, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Scotland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Wales. After a lively day of debate, it was agreed that it is indeed timely to create a European Rural network (the precise name to be agreed later). The aims of the network would be to help rural people to realise quality of life; to encourage exchange of experiences and ideas between countries and people; to influence decision-makers, especially at European and national level; and to build confidence and empowerment through participative democracy.

The network may best evolve in a step-by-step way, starting as a grouping of national rural movements or networks, and possibly evolving later into an independent NGO or a Federation. The initial members of the network might be those national rural movements or networks which have their roots at village level : there should be further thought about how and when other types of organisation should join the network.

The meeting set up a working group, with the brief to produce proposals for the shape of the network, for discussion at a further meeting of all organisations. This second meeting is likely to be held in Finland in September.

Latvian Rural Forum

A significant addition to the growing family of national rural movements is the creation of the Latvian Rural Forum, as a direct result of a joint initiative by the Latvian Ministry of Agriculture and PREPARE. This initiative started in August 2003 with a national workshop held in Riga, to explore the potential for creating a national rural movement there, with help from the Estonian movement Kodukant (a PREPARE partner). The response was encouraging, and a working group was set up to pursue the idea. In 2004, this group held a series of meetings with non-government organizations; visited Kodukant in Estonia to see how a rural movement can work; attended the PREPARE Gathering in Bulgaria in September; and prepared proposals for the creation of a national rural forum in Latvia.

These proposals were submitted to a national conference held in October 2004, with speakers from Kodukant and PREPARE. We gave a grant towards the costs of organising and holding this event. The conference was attended by representatives of 98 rural organisations, who gave a strong positive reaction to the proposal. As a result, the Latvian Rural Forum has been formally created, as a legal entity. The Forum will act as host, jointly with the Lithuanian Rural Communities Union, of the PREPARE Gathering in October 2005.

PREPARE initiative in Croatia

In the course of 2004, Croatia moved into an accession agreement with the European Union. In response, we decided to extend the main PREPARE programme to that country. We already had contacts with some NGOs in Croatia, including ECOVAST Croatia whose President attended the PREPARE Gathering 2004. In February 2005, PREPARE Coordinator Michael Dower spent a week in Zagreb meeting NGOs, Ministry officials and others in order to explore whether it is timely, and desired within the country, to move towards the creation of a national rural network in Croatia. Discussion with Ministries, NGOs and others suggest that it is timely, since Croatia is now moving as fast as it can towards membership of the EU. An informal network of rural and environmental NGOs already exists. They will welcome PREPARE's help to become stronger, and to raise public and political awareness of the needs of rural areas and the necessary scope of rural development. We are now exploring with them what form this help might take.

Michael Dower

Scottish Rural Community Network Initiative

The PREPARE Organising Group has offered observer status to the group in Scotland which has launched an initiative to establish a national rural movement there. During the last ten years, Scotland has seen a remarkable growth in the number of rural groups who are promoting community development in their local areas. The community sector is now of significant scale, comprising a substantial part of the rural economy. Some of these groups belong to sectoral networks, but there has been no overall Scottish rural network since the Scottish Rural Forum ceased work in 1999. The creation of a network to link all this activity would add value by enabling exchange of experience, building awareness, confidence and mutual support. It would also give the sector and the rural areas greater prominence nationally and enable them to influence the policy and action of public bodies. The group is organising a series of regional seminars across rural Scotland, to be followed by a national conference in November 2005, when it is intended to establish the network.

As part of this process, a seminar was held in Edinburgh on March 17, to expand the awareness within Scotland of the European rural movements, and to engage some key organisations in discussion about the proposed Scottish Rural Community Network. Staffan Bond from the Swedish Popular Movements Council spoke about the Swedish movement. Vanessa Halhead, from the Scottish group, and Staffan Bond also described the wider European pattern of national rural movements. Delegates were impressed by the achievements in Sweden, and the growing strength of the activity at a European level, and saw this as a stimulus for Scotland as it approaches the creation of a national rural network.

Vanessa Halhead

Training for leaders of local action groups in the Czech Republic

In 2003, PREPARE gave financial support to a national initiative by two Czech NGOs – Omega Liberec, and the Centre for Community Work. This included a series of 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; a national workshop; and support for the creation of local action groups, and for capacity-building among these groups. We are now supporting a further phase of work by these two NGOs, focused on training for leaders of local action groups. Out of 32 applicants, 15 were selected for training. The training, which is in 5 sessions (each of three days) at monthly intervals, started in March.

Grant from *Fondation de France*

Through Forum Synergies (a PREPARE partner), we have secured a grant totaling 20,000 euro from the *Fondation de France*. This will be used to fund two new activities :

- a. Publication of a **report on 'National rural movements in Europe'** by Vanessa Halhead, a member of the PREPARE Network who is active in rural community development in Scotland. This report contains a brief description, and comparative analysis, of the national rural movements in 18 European countries; and separate chapters on the movements in four countries on which her visits were mainly focused - Denmark, Estonia, Finland and Slovakia. We will publicise the availability of this report as soon as it is ready.
- b. Launching of a **programme of PREPARE Scholarships**, by which young people at early stages of their career in civil society organisations in central or Eastern Europe can be assisted to spend time with similar organisations in other European countries, in order to widen their experience and their perspectives of the role of civil society. The programme is likely to be launched in the autumn of 2005.

Methods for local development

Several members of the PREPARE network were among 30 people from 12 countries who took part in an International Workshop on Methods for Local Development, held in Helsinki, Finland, 11 to 13 February. The aim of the Workshop, organised by the Method Centre, was to explore what the methods that are used in rural (or local) development in Europe and to create an informal network for exchange of methods. The workshop did not reach a clear definition of the word 'method': but it was agreed that it is useful to develop methods and to share good practice, so that people benefit from each other's experiences. Several project ideas were discussed. Samuel Thirion initiated a project to build on the experience of community initiatives. A proposal was made to create a model for village or neighbourhood planning on the Web – Linux-style (see <http://byaservice.web.mios.fi/>). We also discussed how the Method Centre can develop our ideas and cooperation, for example by running method workshops for organisations and networks, by creating a method library on the Web and by collecting 'method CVs' from key people (see <http://www.ssc.fi/metodbox>).

Peter Backa

Conference in Lithuania

Guoda Burokiene, chair of the Lithuanian Rural Communities Union (and member of the PREPARE Organising Group) was among the speakers at a conference held in Vilnius on 18 February. The conference, entitled "The community movement in Lithuania - new opportunities and challenges", was convened by Arturas Paulauskas, chair of the Lithuanian Parliament. It was attended by representatives of town and village communities from all Lithuanian regions. Other speakers included Jonas Jagminas, chair of the Parliament's Rural Affairs Committee; the Director of the rural development department of the Lithuanian Ministry of Agriculture; and Arūnas Poviliūnas, docent of the Vilnius Magnus University. The conference discussed the situation of rural communities and of Local Action Groups, and adopted a resolution addressed to the national President, Parliament and local authorities.

Guoda Burokiene

Heritage Trails : Conference in Slovenia

Several leading members of the Slovenian Rural Development Network (a PREPARE partner) were among the 160 people from 12 countries who took part in a lively international conference held at Otočec, Slovenia 16 to 19 February, on the theme "Transfer of Good Practice at Rural Development in EU – Heritage Trails Dolenjska and Bela krajina". The aim of the conference was to present the experience gained, over the last decade, from rural development programmes in Slovenia, and (in particular) from the pioneering Heritage Trails programmes which was launched in 1995 by ECOVAST (another PREPARE partner) and its associates in Slovenia, led by the Regional Chamber of Commerce in Novo Mesto.

Participants visited many features on the Heritage Trail in the Dolenjska/Bela krajina region. The conference discussed this and other approaches to sustainable rural tourism; and compared the partnership arrangement for management of the Heritage Trail with the similar but broader pattern of Local Action Groups within the LEADER programme. These were explained by speakers from Slovenia, England, Ireland, Finland and the European Commission. This was very helpful to participants from the new EU member states, who are in process of becoming familiar with the territorial, integrated and partnership-based approach to rural development implied by the LEADER approach. For participants from the countries of former Yugoslavia, the conference was an opportunity to make new contacts and to exchange knowledge and experience between the countries of South East Europe. The conference papers and conclusions are available on request to heritage.trail@siol.net

Marko Koščak

LEADER+ Contact Point

The Otočec Conference (described above) received a lively presentation from Karolina Jasinska of the LEADER+ Contact Point in Brussels. The role of this unit, funded by the European Commission, is to provide information about the activity of LEADER Groups

throughout Europe; and to encourage exchange between these groups. PREPARE has been concerned to ensure that the benefits of this information and these exchanges can be gained not only by LEADER Groups within EU-15 (the European Union as it was prior to the expansion in May 2004), but also by 'LEADER-type' groups and others involved in rural development in central and eastern Europe. Karolina Jasinska assured the Otocec Conference that this was indeed the intention, and encouraged all who are interested to visit the Contact Point's Website, to read the 'Flash News', and to make contact by e-mail at contact.point@leaderplus.org

'Flash News' appears every 15 days, and is available in three languages - English, French and German. Apart from the latest news about Leader+, 'Flash News' includes information on other events and important developments in European rural development. It enables you to find out about opportunities for cooperation on transnational projects.

The link to Flash News, in 'pdf' format, is :

http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/flashnews/12_en.pdf

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http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/mailling_list/subscription_en.htm
or by e-mail at subscribe_flashnews@leaderplus.org

Five-country cooperation on LEADER

On 21 and 22 March, representatives of rural networks and movements in the four 'Visegrad' countries – Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic - plus Slovenia met in Trencianske Teplice, Slovakia to discuss cooperation in the field of LEADER or LEADER-type activities. The aim of this first meeting was to understand the present state of action in LEADER or LEADER-type activity in each of the 5 countries, and the nature of the Local Action Groups (LAGs) which are beginning to appear in this region. It was agreed that a common database of LAGs should be prepared, and that a common project should be developed in order to benefit LEADER activities in the five countries. The group will meet again in Prague this summer, to continue the debate and to prepare the first practical results related to the database and the content of the common project. Information from Jela Tvrdonova, e-mail jelatvrdonova@yahoo.co.uk

Jela Tvrdonova

FORTHCOMING EVENTS - all in 2005

9-10 May in Budapest, Hungary **LANDnet Workshop - Activating e-Community on Land Market related Fields in CEE Countries**. Organised by the Central European Land Knowledge Center (CELKCenter). Details from Beatrix Badics and Dóra Juhász, CELKCenter, Tölgyfa u. 24. 3rd floor, H-1027 Budapest, Hungary. Tel + 36 1 328 00 12, Fax +36 1 266 64 31
E-mail landnet@celk.org, www.celk.org

2-3 June at Lyon, France - "**New markets for social finance**", annual conference of INAISE, International Association of Investors in the Social Economy. Programme and registration form can be found at <http://www.inaise.org>

2-3 June in Vilnius, Lithuania - **International Scientific-practical Conference "Knowledge management & societal initiatives"**, organised by the New Economy Institute as part of the "European Regional Knowledge Management Network", a project with partners in Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and UK. Simultaneous translation in English & Lithuanian. Details from institutasnei@yahoo.com or tel/fax +370 5261 3169.

3-5 June at Faringdon, Oxfordshire, England - Seminar on '**Small Towns and their Hinterland**', organised by ECOVAST UK, in association with European Rural University and others. Details from Michael Dower, mdower@glos.ac.uk

3-11 June at Ilmajoki, Finland - **Euracademy 4th Summer Academy "Social Capital as a Resource for Sustainable Rural Development"**. Details from euracademy-sjk@helsinki.fi

The editor of the Thematic Guides for this, and the last three, Summer Academies is Michael Dower, PREPARE Coordinator. The previous Thematic Guides (which are significant textbooks, rich in case studies from many countries) are on (1) Sustainable Rural Tourism, (2) Information Society and Sustainable Rural Development, and (3) Diversification of Rural Economies. They can be obtained through Stratis Babalikis [s.babalikis@prismanet.gr], each 20 euro.

9-12 June at Limoges, France Conference '**Attracting and Integrating New Populations in Rural Areas : a European Challenge**'. Details from Collectif Ville Campagne, Tel +33 5 55 70 47 00, e-mail collectifvc@wanadoo.fr

14 June in Brussels, Belgium - **Public Rural Conference of the European Parliament**, 'A bid from the European countryside - the rural economy and the Lisbon agenda'.

16-17 June at Cork, Ireland -Third Meeting of the Council of Europe workshops for **Implementation of the European Landscape Convention**. Details from Flore Chaboisseau, tel +33 3 88 41 38 81, flore.chaboisseau@coe.int

19-24 June in Abingdon, Virginia, USA - **Fourth International Rural Network (IRN) Conference** and Exchange of Experience, "The Power of Place, Rural Communities, Global Reach". Details from Nicola Swan, Director IRN, Nicola.Swan@btinternet.com **or** www.international-rural-network.org

21-23 July at Parnumaa, Estonia - **6th Rural Parliament of Estonian Villages**, "Sustainable Development & Co-Operation". Details from Eha Pass, Kodukant, tel +372 51 70 214, e-mail kodukant@kodukant.ee

22-27 August at Keszthely, Hungary - ESRS (European Society of Rural Sociologists) Congress "**A Common European Countryside**". Details from esrs2005@freemail.hu

25-28 August at Hotel Dębowa Góra, Łąck near Płock, Poland - '**Education for Sustainability – building a future for rural Europe**', a Thematic Seminar within the Socrates-Grundtvig 4 programme to promote a network of Rural Sustainable Development Education Centres. Details from Ecological-Cultural Association ZIARNO, Tel/fax +48 24 2778 963, e-mail ziarnongo@o2.pl, www.ziarno.org.pl

15-20 September in Lithuania - **ENNHO** (European Network of National Heritage Organisations) 6th **General Assembly and International Symposium**, "Cultural Heritage in Use : Good and Bad Solutions". Details from rutaly@yahoo.de

22-24 September in Dubrovnik, Croatia - **International Heritage Forum**, "The Best in Heritage", under patronage of ICOMOS, UNESCO, Europa Nostra. Details from www.TheBestInHeritage.com

Week of 2 to 9 October in Lithuania - **PREPARE Gathering 2005**, including Traveling Workshops in Latvia and Lithuania. Details will be sent all members of the PREPARE Network when available.

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