

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



PREPARE News 7 December 2005

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

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year *Tanti Auguri di buon Anno e buon Natale*
Весела Коледа и Честита Нова Година (Vesela Koleda i Chestita Nova Godina)
Veselé vánoce a šťastný nový rok Priecigus Ziemassvetkus un laimigu Jauno gadu!
Prettige Kerstdagen en een Gelukkig Nieuwjaar Wesolych Świąt i Szczęśliwego Nowego Roku!
Häid Jõule ja Head Uut Aastat ! *Cráciun Fericit si la Multi Ani*
Hyvää Joulua ja Onnellista Uutta Vuotta ! *Veselé Vianoce a stastný Nový rok!*
Joyeux Noël et Bonne Année Srečen Božič ter Srečno, Zdravo in Veselo Novo Leto !
Fröhliche Weihnachten und ein gutes neues Jahr Feliz Navidad y Prospero Año Nuevo
Kellemes Karácsonyi Ünnepeket És Boldog új Évet ! *God Jul och Gott Nytt År !*
ΚΑΛΑ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥΓΕΝΝΑ ΚΙ ΕΥΤΙΧΙΣΜΕΝΟΣ Ο ΝΕΟΣ ΧΡΟΝΟΣ (Kala Hristougenna ki Eutihismenos o Neos Hronos)
Geru Sventu Kaledu ir laimingu Naujuju Metu!

We send you greetings for the festive season, after an active year for the PREPARE programme. We look forward to contact with you as this programme develops during the coming year.

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This News offers an update on PREPARE's continuing contributions to the debate about European Union policies for rural development; to the preparation of national and regional rural development programmes for the period 2007 to 2013; and to the strengthening of civil society in EU member states and accession countries.

At the end of the News is a list of forthcoming European rural events.

PREPARE Gathering 2005

78 people from 21 European countries took part in this year's PREPARE Gathering, which was held in early October at Birštonas Spa in Lithuania. It was preceded by Travelling Workshops in the Daugavpils and Bauska regions of Latvia, and in three different counties in Lithuania. These lively three-day excursions were organised and led by the Latvian Rural Forum, which was created last year with the support of PREPARE; and by the Lithuanian Rural Communities Union, a PREPARE partner.

The focus of the Gathering was on the new generation of national and regional programmes for rural development, which governments throughout the EU are now preparing in the context of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development; and on a vision for the future of rural Europe, which we believe should inspire these programmes.

The PREPARE partners, who have been active in influencing the shape of the EU Regulation and Strategic Guidelines in this field, are now turning their attention to the policies within each country. At the Gathering, senior people from Ministries of Agriculture and from civil society organisations were able to share views on how the new programmes should be shaped.

In a lively and highly participative session, the whole Gathering reached consensus on a statement of '**Ideas towards a Vision for Rural Europe**' – see later in this Newsletter.

Present at the Gathering were delegations from countries outside the EU – Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, Ukraine and the Kaliningrad region of Russia. This participation reinforces the contacts that PREPARE has with these Balkan or CIS countries, and may enable us in coming years to help the strengthening of civil society there. As a first initiative in that direction, PREPARE has been able to offer financial support towards the creation of a formal rural development network in Croatia.

European and National conferences

Members of the PREPARE Organising Group have played an active part, as speakers, in a series of European and National Conferences and workshops focused on the new generation of Rural Development programmes. These contributions have included (*PREPARE speaker in italics*):

- 10/11 October National Rural Development Conference, Sofia, Bulgaria, organised by European Commission and Ministry of Agriculture *Michael Dower (PREPARE Coordinator)*
- 19/20 October Assembly of European Regions, Rural Development Conference, Exeter, England *Michael Dower*
- 2 to 5 November European Conference on Rural Development, Teplá Monastery, Czech Republic *Jela Tvrdonova (Slovakia) and Michael Dower.*
- 10/11 November National Conference on LEADER and the National Rural Development Network, Sofia, Bulgaria organised by European Commission and Ministry of Agriculture *Márta Márczis (Hungary) and Liisa Häme (Finland)*
- 15/16 November Regional Training Seminar for pioneer LEADER-type Group, Razlog, Bulgaria, organised by UNDP and Fair Chance Association *Michael Dower*
- 1 December National Conference on Rural Development Programme and LEADER, Portoroz, Slovenia, organised by European Commission and Ministry of Agriculture *Michael Dower*
- 2 December Regional seminar on Rural Development Programme and LEADER, Novo Mesto, Slovenia, organised by Dolenjska-Bela Krajina Heritage Trail *Michael Dower*
- 15 December National Seminar on Rural Development Programme and LEADER, Limassol, Cyprus, organised by European Landowner's Organisation & Laona Foundation *Michael Dower*

European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

During the first half of 2005, we were actively involved in the debate about the scope of the EAFRD and the wording of the draft Rural Development Regulation for the period 2007 to 2013. When this Regulation was published on 15 July by the European Commission, we were glad to see that it reflected the call that we had made for a wider approach to rural development and a significant increase in funding. However, we had substantial reservations about parts of the proposal, and therefore continued our efforts to influence the debate in the European Parliament and among member states during the subsequent months. Our concerns focused on :

- **Funding.** The need to defend vigorously the scale of funding proposed for rural development proposed by the Commission, rising from c.11 billion to c.14 billion euros per year over the period 2007 to 2013. Spending of this size is essential in order to address the grave weaknesses in the social and economic structures of rural areas in the new member states and the accession countries (see **Comment** below).
- **Strategy.** The need for a clearly stated strategy for rural development at European level, prepared by the Commission in consultation with the stakeholders. This European strategy should guide the preparation by member states of national rural development strategies. It should include minimum figures for spending on each Axis in the EAFRD.
- **LEADER.** Member states should be required to apply the LEADER principles to all their rural development programmes, except where they can show (to the Commission's satisfaction) why they cannot do so. The minimum of 7% of programme funding applied to the LEADER axis does not (in our view) represent the "mainstreaming of LEADER" to which the Commission refers. The new member states should be required to apply part of the funds to support for the creation and capacity-building of local partnerships.
- **Civil society.** The experience of LEADER and other programmes has shown the importance of strong civil society as a key element in successful rural development policies. The scope of the technical assistance funds should be widened to support the creation and basic operational costs of civil society organisations who are committed to an active role in rural development; and to support capacity-building in civil society organisations and in partnerships established on the LEADER principles.

Current position. The Regulation has been approved, in amended form, by the Council of Ministers. The outcome on the key points above, as at December, is that :

- The scale of funding for rural development is still not decided**, because the EU budget for the period 2007 to 2013 is not yet fixed. We are extremely concerned that the negotiations in the European Council may lead to severe cuts in the rural development budget proposed by the Commission. (****Comment** : as this News is being finalised, we hear that the EU budget for 2007 to 2013 has been settled : we await confirmation of what this means for the scale of rural development funding, and will report this with our own reaction on the PREPARE Website, www.preparenetwork.org)
- The Commission has been authorised to prepare Strategic Guidelines, which are now in full draft and being considered by the European Parliament and member states (see comment on PREPARE's input below).
- Minimum figures for spending on each Axis of the EAFRD, somewhat lower than those proposed by the Commission, have been agreed as part of the Regulation.
- These minima include 5% for the LEADER Axis in EU-15, and 2.5% in the new member states. Governments are given discretion on how this LEADER Axis should be handled.
- There is no specific reference in the Regulation as to the use of technical assistance funds for support to civil society. However, there is provision for the creation of formal Rural Development Networks, at European level and in each country, to facilitate exchange of information etc.

Strategic Guidelines for Rural Development

PREPARE has contributed to the debate on the wording of the EU Strategic Guidelines, which are currently with the European Parliament and the member states for comment, and which may be finalised in February 2006. The purpose of the Guidelines is to set out the European priorities for use of the EAFRD. PREPARE has welcomed the wording of the draft Guidelines, but has expressed continuing concern on the following points :

- **Competitiveness, sustainability and cohesion.** The Guidelines refer prominently to the Lisbon strategy (growth and competitiveness) and the Göteborg goals (sustainability). Cohesion is referred to later in that section as a secondary issue. PREPARE's view is that these three aims - competitiveness, sustainability and cohesion – should be treated as equal purposes underlying the Strategic Guidelines.
- **Challenge and opportunity.** The Guidelines focus on the challenge of making good the social and economic weaknesses of the rural areas. It should also stress the assets that the rural areas represent to the whole population of Europe, in terms of continued production of food and timber and energy, added value to these resources, a high-quality setting for the lives of residents and for the recreation of all, a hardworking and skilled labour force, a seedbed for enterprise etc.
- **Axis 3.** The wording of Axis 3 in Guidelines is too narrow, referring (for example) to 'tourism, crafts and the provision of rural amenities' and to 'developing micro-business and crafts', but not saying plainly that the programmes should seek to diversify and strengthen all relevant aspects of local economies, and to sustain and enhance the quality of all relevant rural services.
- **LEADER.** The text on LEADER is too narrow. It should explain the high value which LEADER principles have had in fostering a territorial, integrated, partnership-based approach to rural development; and should set out the ambition of mainstreaming these principles, in the way that has been done in (for example) Finland and Ireland. It should explain how sub-regional partnerships can bring into the rural development process the energy and resources of the private and civil sectors and the funds available under other public programmes, not only those under rural development. It should emphasise that the LEADER Axis is a cross-cutting axis, which can be used to implement other Axes and to get added value and win-win-win solutions by linking the three main Axes.
- **Link to other EU and national programmes.** The Guidelines should emphasise more fully the need to link the EAFRD to other programmes, including the Regional, Social and Cohesion Funds. It should also pick up the key idea, so well articulated in Finland, of the link between 'narrow' rural development (such as that funded under the EAFRD) and 'broad' rural development (such as spending on health, education or transport).
- **Civil society.** The Guidelines should emphasise the creative role that civil society – in the form of local associations, NGOs, local and sub-regional partnerships etc – can play in rural development programmes. This implies not only 'information and publicity', but also the need for governments to seek and enable the active participation of civil society in shaping and implementing rural development programmes.

Rural Development Advisory Committee

For the last two years, PREPARE has had a seat on the European Commission's Advisory Committee for Rural Development, alongside ECOVAST which is a PREPARE partner. This Committee is a valuable means to understand, and to influence, the Commission's thinking. In August, we were invited by the Commission to nominate observers from Romania and Bulgaria to sit on the Committee and to express views from the two accession countries. We nominated Ioana Popescu, Executive President of the Center for Rural Assistance, Romania; and Albena Palpurina, Director of the Fair Chance Association, Bulgaria. Ioana attended the meeting of the Committee in September. We hope that Albena will be invited to a subsequent meeting.

European Rural Alliance

The PREPARE partner organisations were among those invited to meetings in Stockholm in January 2005, and then to Helsinki in September, to discuss cooperation between national rural movements or networks and national LEADER networks. The first of these meetings was hosted by the Swedish Popular Movements Council, the second by the Finnish Village Association. The outcome was an agreement at Helsinki to form a European Rural Alliance, to act as a 'rural voice' of Europe and to promote cooperation among all parties. A working group is preparing proposals for the structure of the Alliance. We will keep PREPARE members informed.

International Rural Network

A small but strong PREPARE delegation took part in the 4th biennial Conference of the International Rural Network (IRN), held in Abingdon, Virginia, USA in June. IRN is a global network of academics, practitioners and policy makers involved in rural community development, health and education. Its aim is to promote rural well-being.

The 2005 conference, entitled 'The Power of Place', focussed on communities empowering themselves through place-based initiatives, asset-based development sensitive to community and culture, and regional, integrated approaches. There were about 400 participants, from 46 countries and 35 US States. Within 7 conference themes¹, 25 plenary presentations, 80 workshops, and 8 study visits were organised over a 6-day period. There were also cultural events, with excellent local music, dance and theatre : this was one of the highlights, because Appalachia is the home of blue-grass music.

European delegates were from Belarus, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden and the UK. PREPARE was represented by Márta Márczis (Hungary) and Jela Tvrdonova (Slovakia). Márta spoke, at the opening plenary, on the rural movements in Europe, focussing mainly on the PREPARE member countries.

Jela Tvrdonova, Johanna Heikkila from Finland and myself (Vanessa Halhead) presented a workshop on "Participative democracy and rural policy formulation - the role of rural community movements in Europe". This included my presentation on the rural movements of Europe; Jela's on the Slovak Rural Parliament and PREPARE; and Johanna's on rural policy in Finland and the Finnish Village Association. This workshop, attended by about 30 people, was well received.

The conference provided a unique opportunity to present the work of PREPARE and the rural movements of Europe to an international audience of rural development experts. IRN is an excellent network through which to link the work going on in Europe to that in other countries, and to learn from them. PREPARE should aim to use this network further in the future.

The full conference proceedings will be available on the website: www.international-rural-network.org. The next IRN Conference will be held in India in January 2008.

Vanessa Halhead

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- ¹ The Power to Act Locally? New Rural Governance and Rural Economic Performance
 - Local Action and Self-Help in tackling health and hygiene issues
 - The local development, health and environmental impacts of the emerging 'food nexus'
 - Place-based Education and Sustainable Rural Development
 - Can Information and Communications Technologies [ICT] transform the prospects for rural places?
 - Rural Innovation and the Power of Place Based Rural Services
 - Towards Healthy Rural Communities through Community Inclusion

PREPARE initiative in Croatia

In Newsletter 6, we reported on the reconnaissance visit to Zagreb by PREPARE in February 2005, for discussion with NGOs, Ministry officials and others about whether it was timely, and desired within the country, to move towards the creation of a national rural network in Croatia. As a sequel to this visit, 5 people from Croatia attended the PREPARE Gathering in October. In November, PREPARE agreed to give financial help to a group of NGOs who are working to create a formal rural network and to organise a national Rural Development Conference.

Initiatives in the Czech Republic

In Newsletter 6, we reported that PREPARE had given financial support to the work of two Czech NGOs – Omega Liberec, and the Centre for Community Work - in training a group of 15 leaders or animators of local action groups. This training was successfully completed in June : its value was recognised by the Ministry of Agriculture, which offered certificates to those who had taken part. This training is a significant contribution to the rising interest in rural development, and particularly in the formation of LEADER-type local action groups, in the Czech Republic. Already, 61 such groups are in existence, and a formal network of these groups is in process of emerging. A National Rural Observatory has been created by a group of individuals who are involved in rural development. They have offered to host the PREPARE Gathering 2006, and this offer has been accepted in principle. We will circulate news of this event as soon as the dates have been agreed.

Ideas towards a Vision for Rural Europe

produced at the PREPARE Gathering 2005, at Birštonas Spa in Lithuania, by 78 people who work for public, private and civil organisations from 21 European countries and who share a strong commitment to the future well-being of rural areas and of rural communities throughout Europe – within and beyond the European Union.

We believe that policies and programmes related to rural areas and communities should be animated by a vision of what these areas should be like in say 15 years' time, and their high value for the social, economic and environmental well-being of the whole of Europe.

Underlying values

The vision should draw upon the shared values which people associate with the countryside. These values include :

- Sustainability, participation, partnership and a bottom-up approach.
- Stability and continuity in rural communities
- The right of all people to choose where they live, and to have good quality of living conditions
- Cooperation and respect for the interests of others, including the citizens of other continents
- Active partnership between town and countryside
- Respect for the environment, including natural and cultural resources.

People, work and space

The vision is holistic and integrated, rather than partial or sectoral, closely related to the character of each area. It takes a balanced view of the social, economic and environmental aspects of the future of rural areas.

Society. The rural communities of the future will be :

- Balanced in age structure, so that they are renewed as the generations pass, and so that the different generations can support each other

- ❑ Attractive to young people and families
- ❑ Able to match or exceed national averages in levels of education and health
- ❑ Equipped with, or able to gain convenient access to, adequate social services of all kinds
- ❑ Rich in social and cultural life, drawing both upon tradition and upon modern ideas
- ❑ Socially inclusive, with respect and harmony between different social or ethnic groups and with full care for the disadvantaged
- ❑ Self-aware as communities, and animated by the trust and cooperation on which social capital is built
- ❑ Capable of taking initiative for their own collective well-being
- ❑ Capable also of seeking and sustaining partnership with public authorities and others.

Economy. The rural economies of the future will be :

- ❑ Diversified in character, with strength in primary and secondary and tertiary sectors and with effective local links between these sectors
- ❑ Secured by a strong measure of locally-based entrepreneurship
- ❑ Based upon the sustainable use of local resources, knowledge and skills
- ❑ Effective in adding value locally to these resources and skills
- ❑ Supported by an adequate and environmentally sensitive infrastructure of roads, water supplies, telecommunications etc
- ❑ Strengthened by appropriate use of innovation
- ❑ Well linked to continuing agriculture and forestry, which should be sustainable, multi-functional and (where appropriate) diversified in sources of income and activity
- ❑ Enriched by the local production of renewable energy.

Environment. The rural territories of the future will be

- ❑ Sustained in quality of wildlife and biodiversity
- ❑ Clean in air, soil and water
- ❑ Beautiful and diverse in landscape
- ❑ Enriched by a protected architectural and cultural heritage and by high quality of harmonious modern design in buildings and other features
- ❑ Valued for their environmental qualities by all people
- ❑ Protected from inappropriate development
- ❑ Accessible for public recreation and tourism, within the limits of carrying capacity.

The vision should be developed and shared by the governments, organisations and peoples of Europe – urban as well as rural. It should be expressed in policies and programmes at European level; and should be reflected in national, regional and local policies and programmes, recognising the particular character and needs of rural areas in each country and region.

Masters Course in European Rural Development

The University of Gloucestershire, England is offering a new course in European Rural Development, which is aimed at people living anywhere in Europe and which can be undertaken by study at home or in your workplace. The course will be delivered in the English language, by 'distance learning' (Web CT), plus pre-sessional briefing and a summer school. The course takes 18 months full-time or 3 years part-time for a Masters degree, or shorter periods for a Diploma or Certificate. The course will start in September 2006, or exceptionally in January 2006. For information, contact Dr Anne Miller, Course Leader, *tel +44 1242 532973*, *e-mail amiller@glos.ac.uk*; or visit website *www.glos.ac.uk/ccru*

PREPARE publication

A report on 'The Rural Movements of Europe', by Vanessa Halhead, will be published by PREPARE in late December. This 120-page document, based on research which Vanessa carried out two years ago with funding from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, provides a detailed description of the remarkable growth of national rural movements over the last decade and more, with analysis of the 18 national rural movements now known to exist in Europe. This overview is accompanied by chapters focused on the rural movements in Denmark, Estonia, Finland and Slovakia.

The report, which is in English, is being circulated to all the PREPARE partner organisations, to other rural movements, to European non-government organisations, to European Commissioners and officials, members of the European Parliament and others.

Individual copies are available by post from Michael Dower, PREPARE Coordinator, 56 Painswick Road, Cheltenham GL50 2ER, England. If you would like a copy, please send a note to him, enclosing cheque for UK£5 **or** bank notes for UK£5 or 10 euros or US\$10, to cover postage and packing (the aim of this request is to avoid bank charges for both sides).

Forthcoming events

European Landowners Organisation (ELO)

A programme of events - national seminars in each of the New Member States, 3 regional conferences, and a European Conference, to be organised in Brussels, at the end of the programme - will bring together the members of the ELO network, its partners, the stakeholders involved in the Enlargement process as well as representatives of the national and EU authorities. It aims at gathering all the actors of the EU rural world and to launch a debate on the future of the countryside and rural development. The goal is also to induce synergies between the organisations invited to carry on the programme at regional and local level. Information from Ronan Girard, Executive Director, ELO, 67 rue de Trèves, B-1040 Bruxelles
Tel +32 2 234 30 00, Fax +32 2 234 30 09, e-mail dg@elo.org

Agricultural Economics Society's Annual Conference

Paris, France 29-31 March, including one-day event 29 March on Agriculture and rural development. Information from AES Programme secretary, Dr Alan Renwick,
e-mail alan.renwick@sac.ac.uk

Swedish Rural Parliament 2006

At Sjuharad, western Sweden, 31 March – 2 April 2006, including an international workshop. Information from e-mail *landsbygdsriksdagen@bygde.net*

Rural Futures Conference

"The Rural Citizen: governance, culture and wellbeing in the 21st century", University of Plymouth, England, 5-7 April 2006, information from e-mail *scunit@plymouth.ac.uk*
or website www.ruralfuturesconference.org

Euracademy Summer Academy 2006

The 5th Euracademy Summer Academy for Rural Developers and Animators will be held in Hungary, Friday 30 June to Sunday 9 July 2006. The theme of the year is "What can the knowledge society do for sustainable rural development?" The venue is not yet confirmed, but both the city of Győr and the Lake Balaton region are being considered. All rural developers are invited, plus those who are interested in the issues of knowledge society, e.g. those involved in training and education. Information from Irén Kukorelli, e-mail *sziren@rkk.hu*

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