

PREPARE - Partnership for Rural Europe



PREPARE News 8

May 2006

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

Greetings.

This News :

- gives notice of the PREPARE Gathering 2006, to be held in the Czech Republic in June
- records the receipt of a third two-year grant for the C S Mott Foundation
- outlines the PREPARE programme for the next two years, as agreed by the partners
- describes progress in the Czech Republic, with the formation of a National Rural Observatory; and in Croatia, where PREPARE has supported the creation of the Croatian Rural Development Network
- summarises recent inputs by PREPARE to the evolving European debate on the forthcoming new round of national rural development programmes
- describes the recent action by PREPARE partners in the new member states to promote the role of civil society in those national programmes
- reports publication of the report on 'The Rural Movements of Europe' by Vanessa Halhead
- offers other news and a list of European events in the field of rural development.

PREPARE Gathering 2006

The PREPARE Gathering 2006 will be held at Velehrad, in south-eastern Moravia, Czech Republic, 21 to 23 June 2006. The Gathering will be preceded by two-day Travelling Workshops, starting in Prague on Monday 19 June. The hosts are the Czech National Rural Observatory, the Czech Network of Local Action Groups and the Buchlov Local Action Group in Moravia. The theme of the Gathering will be 'The evolution and activity of Local Action Groups, and their role in Rural Development Programmes'.

All members of the PREPARE network will receive the detailed announcement of the Gathering. The venue has a total capacity of 80 people, and we wish to have a wide range of countries represented (last year's Gathering had people from 21 European countries). For this reason, we will be limiting the numbers who come from each country.

Third grant from the Mott Foundation

The continuation of the PREPARE programme has been assured by the receipt of a third two-year grant of \$200,000 from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. The grant is received, and managed for us, by the Swedish Federation of Rural Economy and Agriculture Societies (a PREPARE partner). We are very grateful to the Mott Foundation for their continued confidence in what we are doing.

PREPARE Programme 2006 to 2008

Looking ahead, the PREPARE partners have re-affirmed the aim of their joint programme, namely to strengthen civil society and to promote multi-national exchange in rural development, notably in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. We aim to promote dialogue, trust,

confidence and co-operation between local actors, governments and all stakeholders of rural development, at all geographic levels. We wish to see rural communities empowered to participate in decision-making related to sustainable rural development.

The partners have agreed to pursue the following priorities over the period 2006 to 2008 :

a. **Multi-national activities**, concerned with the whole of our network. This may include multi-national Gatherings, travelling workshops, seminars, training programmes etc., designed to stimulate exchange of ideas and mutual support between people involved in rural development and civil society activity in all or many of the countries listed below.

b. **Support to strengthening of civil society in specific countries.** We wish to help the strengthening of civil society, and the emergence of national rural movements and networks in the new EU member states, accession countries and new EU neighbour countries. We give priority to :

Accession countries - Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia and Macedonia;

New EU neighbour countries - Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Serbia-Montenegro, Ukraine, Belarus, Kaliningrad (Russia) and Turkey

We will welcome applications for support for projects which meet our purposes and priorities. PREPARE's support to projects that relate to strengthening of civil society in one of these target countries will be subject to a normal maximum of \$5,000 of 'pump-priming' money, plus advice and help on securing funds for other sources.

c. **Support to our partner organisations and new national networks.** We wish to help our partner organisations, and the recently formed or emerging national networks in other Central European countries, to build their own capacity and to promote the strength and the role of civil society in their own countries. The focus here is upon :

PREPARE partner countries - Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden

Other national networks - Croatia, Czech Republic, Latvia.

Czech Republic

Last year, PREPARE contributed 12,000 euros towards the cost of a training programme for animators of local action groups, managed by two NGOs, Omega Liberec and CpKp (Centre for Community Organising). This programme, and related work by these NGOs and others, is creating a strong network of local action groups and a steady strengthening of civil society. A new focus for this rural movement has appeared through the creation (by a dozen individuals) of a National Rural Observatory, to which is linked the rapidly growing Network of LEADER-type LAGs. The Observatory has good personal links to the pre-existing national Rural Regeneration Society, of which most of the members are mayors. The Observatory and the LAG Network are hosting the PREPARE Gathering this year.

Croatia

During last year, after Croatia moved into the process of accession to the European Union, PREPARE encouraged the existing rural NGOs there to work towards the creation of a formal Croatian Rural Development Network. After several meetings, this Network has been created and is now moving into an action programme, including plans to hold a national Rural Development Conference in July. PREPARE has contributed 5,000 euros towards the costs of this preparatory work. We have also been asked to advise TAIEX (the European Commission's training organization) on the programme for a national Conference to promote the LEADER approach within Croatia. The speakers at this Conference, to be jointly organised by TAIEX and the Croatian Ministry of Agriculture at Zagreb in May, will include Ivana Laginja, President of

the Rural Development Network, Liisa Häme from the Finnish Village Action Association (PREPARE partner), and Michael Dower, PREPARE Coordinator.

European debate

Over the last two years, PREPARE has made an active contribution to the debate in Brussels about the Rural Development part of the European Union's overall programme for the period 2007 to 2013. We were pleased when it was decided to create a new element, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), as successor to – and much better funded than – the present Pillar 2 of the Common Agricultural Policy. We pushed for this to contain a strong element of partnership between civil society and government, and an integrated and territorial approach to rural development, with a strong focus on LEADER. We also strongly supported the Commission's proposals for the size of the EAFRD budget, and for the minimum proportions of each country's programme budget that should be allocated to each of the 4 Axes in the programme.

We were therefore disappointed that the European Council, when it fixed the overall size of the EU budget for the new period, decided to cut the EAFRD budget from the 90 billion euros proposed by the Commission to 70 billion Euros (still subject to final confirmation). Also disappointing was the agreement in the Agriculture Council to reduce the minimum proportion for each of the Axes. We particularly regret that the minimum for LEADER is cut to 5% in the old member states and 2.5% in the new member states : this will not encourage governments to take a territorial, integrated, partnership-based approach to rural development.

So, the European framework has been agreed. The main action now rests with national governments. In each country, a National Strategy is being prepared, with public consultation, and will be submitted for comment by the European Commission. This Strategy then provides the framework for the National Rural Development Programme, which sets out the budget and the detailed measures. The PREPARE partners are each focusing on the process in their country. We are also comparing notes on this process, and seeking to influence the outcome by direct contact with governments and with the European Commission.

At a meeting of the European Commission's Rural Development Advisory Committee in early April, we expressed concern on the following issues :

- Governments should take a broad view of Axis 3 – diversification of the rural economy and quality of life in rural areas – and not confine it to limited measures, such as diversification of farm activities and village renewal.
- In most of the new member states, Governments appear to propose that only the 2.5% minimum should be spent through LEADER Groups. Our view is that, in most of these countries, there is already sufficient capacity at local level to justify spending more than that.
- LEADER should be seen as a true cross-cutting Axis, capable of delivering elements of all the other three Axes. There may be a strong case for covering the whole rural territory with LEADER-type Local Action Groups.
- There should be much more real involvement of civil society in the preparation and implementation of rural development strategies and programmes. At present, in some countries, that involvement is more nominal than real.
- There is need for capacity-building both within civil society and among civil servants and public authorities, if effective public/private partnership is to be achieved.
- The European Rural Development Network (ERDN) should be outside the Commission and should have as much freedom to act as did the LEADER 1 and LEADER 2 Observatories. It

should not be constrained in the way that the present LEADER+ Contact Point is constrained.

- There should be effective links between the ERDN and the National Rural Development Networks; and the Commission should do what it can to persuade governments to give those Networks freedom to act. We are concerned to find that governments in several new member states are proposing to run the networks 'in house' e.g. within the Ministry of Agriculture, rather than putting them out to tender

Promoting civil society in the PREPARE partner countries

In the first three months of 2006, PREPARE gave financial support to actions by PREPARE partners in the new member states to promote the role of civil society in the forthcoming round of national rural development programmes. These actions are described below.

Estonia. Kodukant (the Estonian Village Movement) organised a briefing session for village representatives and members of the Rural Life Commission in the Estonian Parliament, to discuss the rural strategic plan for 2007-2013. It published two articles (one in the 'Estonian Rural' newspaper and one in 'Kodukant' Village newspaper) to give Kodukant's opinion about the new rural development programme. It prepared Kodukant proposals for that programme, and held meetings with Kodukant members on that subject. *Sirje Vinni*

Hungary. The Hungarian Rural Parliament organised a first National Rural Round Table, in partnership with the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Hungarian LEADER Association. The aim of this international conference was to discuss how to implement the LEADER approach within the National Plan in Hungary, with help from speakers from Hungary and from the PREPARE network, the European Commission and the European LEADER Association for Rural Development. There were 65 participants, including decision-makers from political parties, ministries and regional organisations, and representatives of the LEADER network and NGOs. The event was held in the building of the "International Rural Resource Centre" in Etyek village, which has been created by the Rural Workshop Foundation in cooperation with the Hungarian Rural Parliament and was opened in March. The Centre, which has offices and conference rooms, is based in a historic building that was reconstructed with support from the SAPARD Programme in 2004-2005.

The Conference has improved the communication between national officials, the LEADER network and NGO networks in Hungary; has increased understanding of, and clarified expectations related to, the LEADER approach; and has encouraged partnership and exchange of information between national and European organisations. The Round Table technique is seen as a long-term instrument for inter-sector discussions on rural issues. *Marta Marcziś*

Lithuania. The Lithuanian Rural Communities Union produced an attractive printed leaflet about the Union and its work, for distribution during the year at events and at national and international meetings. This will help to make the Union more visible and better known among rural people and national organisations. *Guoda Burokiene*

Poland. The Polish Rural Forum launched a campaign, designed to secure the involvement of Polish rural NGOs in the process of preparing the rural development programme for the period 2007 to 2013. The main focus was an international conference, in Warsaw in March, co-organised with the Cooperation Fund and the Heinrich Boell Foundation. This event, 'Rural development – a challenge for European societies', was attended by about 160 people, mainly from rural organisations throughout Poland, plus Local Action Groups, academics and rural development practitioners from Poland, Germany and Austria. On both conference days, there

was lively discussion and considerable interest from the media. Following this event, Forum members have made proposals to improve the implementation of Leader in the current and future programmes. Also, the Forum has been invited by the Minister of Agriculture to participate in the Consultative Council set up by the Ministry : we look forward to finding out what the functions of this body will be.

The Forum prepared a package of written materials for the conference, aiming to provide Polish rural NGOs with expertise and arguments in favour of a bottom-up, integrated approach to rural development, which have proved effective in many EU member states. These materials have been placed on the Forum's website, www.faow.org.pl. The website itself has also been much improved, with a clearer and more logical presentation of material and a search tool. A first issue of a Forum Newsletter has been produced and sent to all the members and cooperating institutions.

The Forum also started a process of collecting information about the implementation of Leader in the new member states, working with the Slovakian Rural Parliament. A questionnaire survey has produced replies from Czech Republic, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. These are being used in the efforts by PREPARE partners to strengthen the role of civil society in rural development processes.

Urszula Budzich-Szukala

Slovakia. The Slovakian Rural Parliament organised, in the National Council building, a 'Rural Round Table' session for Slovak decision-makers from 7 political parties, 2 regional self-governments, officials from the Ministry of Agriculture, and a number of NGOs. The aim was to inform them about best practices in the implementation of the LEADER approach in old member states, and to start discussion on implementing this approach in the Slovak Republic. Nils Lagerroth and Liisa Häme (members of the PREPARE Organising Group) assisted as speakers. The event proved to be of high interest to participants; and was very well presented by the media, including coverage in TV News. It has helped to raise awareness towards LEADER in Slovakia.

Jela Tvrdonova

Slovenia. The Slovenian Rural Development Network (SRDN) launched a programme of action, aiming to promote itself as a partner of government in the rural development process; to inform the public about this process; to provide training, counselling and assistance for emerging Local Action Groups; and to strengthen the involvement of Slovenian organisations in international LEADER institutions and the PREPARE network.

Members of the SRDN board had 6 meetings with MPs, including members of the Parliamentary Committee for Agriculture, in order to stress the importance of the new policy of rural development and the need for involvement of civil society. At a meeting with the Minister of Agriculture, we described the Network, its hopes for the rural development programmes, and its links with PREPARE. The Minister promised to participate in the conference about rural development and LEADER programmes, which SRDN plans for May in the eastern part of Slovenia. SRDN has been represented at Ministry of Agriculture workshops related to the new rural development programme, with a particular focus on Axes 3 and 4. The SRDN president is a member of the central project group for that programme.

At the end of March, SRDN organised a one-day conference entitled 'Are We Able to Preserve the Slovene Rural Areas Alive?' Present were 75 people, representing Ministry of Agriculture, Agricultural and Forestry Institutions, many NGOs, SRDN members and other expert organisations in the field of rural development from Slovenia. There was lively debate about how Leader should be implemented in Slovenia and about further cooperation between all sectors. The conclusion was that SRDN should maintain its involvement in all activities at

national and international level, which are of a great support for integrated rural development. It was suggested that SRDN gradually become the National Rural Development Network, which must be set up under Article 68 from the EU Rural Development Regulation. The conference was very successful, and attracted coverage on national TV and on regional radio and TV.

The SRDN Website has been revised, with enriched information about the work of SRDN, the government programmes for rural development and related issues. A number of newspaper articles and radio interviews were published about the SRDN. *Rosana Ščančar*

Action by ECOVAST

ECOVAST – European Council for the Village and Small Town (a PREPARE Partner) is developing an ambitious project, **ASSET** - Action to Strengthen Small European Towns. This project has grown out of three events organised by the UK, Austrian and Croatian sections of ECOVAST – a seminar at Faringdon in May 2005, a conference at Retz in Austria in October 2005 and a seminar at Makarska in Croatia in February 2006. The project is animated by a belief that the small towns of Europe are a massive asset for the people, the heritage and the economies of the continent, and can be a focal point of rural development programmes.

However, throughout Europe, small towns face severe problems, challenges and opportunities. They have lost, or are losing, functions to the larger cities, as part of the processes of globalisation and centralisation. In the face of these forces, there is a strong and widespread concern to revive the small towns, to protect and find new life for their remarkable heritage and to strengthen their economies. To meet that concern, ECOVAST is working with two regional authorities, South East England Development Agency and the Regional Council of Niederösterreich, to launch the ASSET project. The aim is to promote co-operation, and exchange of good practice, between governmental and other agencies throughout Europe who offer support to small towns. We will welcome interest from others in this project.

Phil Turner (email p.turner@ruralnet.org.uk)

ECOVAST UK is preparing a detailed response to the Government's consultation document on the **Rural Development Programme for England 2007 to 2013**. This advocates an integrated approach, which we welcome. But it also proposes that 80% of the available funds should be devoted to meeting the Government's commitments under the agri-environment schemes, in which many agreements with farmers and others run for 10 years. This would mean that actions related to quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy would get very little money. We will ask the government to think again about that division of the money. We will also advocate the creation of LEADER-type action groups throughout rural England; a dynamic and open approach to the creation and work of the National Rural Network; and an integrated policy approach at regional level. *Michael Dower, Chairman ECOVAST UK*

'The Rural Movements of Europe'

In February, PREPARE published a 110-page version of the report on 'The Rural Movements of Europe', by Vanessa Halhead, first produced in 2004. This report presents the remarkable story of the emergence and growth on what is now a 'family' of national rural movements, networks or fora, each of which can claim to represent rural communities in their country. These movements, already existing in 18 European countries, have a vital role in mobilising the energy of rural people and organisations. They have a growing ability to act as initiators of rural development, and as partners of public authorities in rural development programmes, at a time when such programmes are rising on the public and political agenda throughout Europe.

Copies of the report have been sent to Agriculture Ministers of the EU member states; to the Agriculture Commissioner, and many officials of the European Commission; to members of three Committees (Environment; Agriculture and Rural Development; and Budget) of the European Parliament ; to PREPARE partners, other national rural movements, and other European NGOs. The report has been very well received. It has alerted many officials to the growing strength of civil society in rural areas, and its potential to act as partner of government in rural development processes. The full text of the report can be found on the PREPARE Website, www.preparenetwork.org. Hard copies are available on application to the PREPARE Coordinator, e-mail mdower@glos.ac.uk

Response from the Agriculture Commissioner

The report on 'The Rural Movements of Europe' prompted the following response from the office of Mrs Marian Fischer Boel, EU Commissioner for Agriculture

"Thankyou for your letter addressed to Commissioner Fischer Boel, in which you draw attention to the growing strength of civil society in the rural regions. On behalf of the Commissioner, I would like to congratulate you on your actions aiming at strengthening the links between civil society and rural regions to contribute to the achievements of the Lisbon and Goteborg agendas. I can assure you of the Commissioner's full support for these efforts."

Swedish Rural Parliament.

Many members of the PREPARE Network attended the Swedish Rural Parliament, held at the beginning of April at Borås in the Sjuhärads region in south-west Sweden. More than 1,100 participants attended, including 60 from 13 countries besides Sweden. On one day, a large fleet of buses took the participants out to attend seminars in the surrounding villages. Three of these seminars were conducted in English, one of them being focused on networking, with presentations by Vanessa Halhead, author of the 'The Rural Movements of Europe,' and three members of the PREPARE Organising Group - Liisa Häme, Jela Tvrdonova and Goran Soster. The results of this workshop were presented to the concluding plenary session of the Parliament, and form a contribution to the process of creating the European Rural alliance.

Cooperation with French LEADER Network

Michael Dower, PREPARE Coordinator, will represent PREPARE at a Conference organised by the French LEADER+ Network Unit on 'Cooperation with Eastern Europe and Mediterranean countries' at Saint Chinian, Languedoc, 15 to 17 May – details in 'Events' at end of this News.

Master's programme in European Rural Development.

A new distance learning programme, launched by the University of Gloucestershire (England), offers you the chance to study European Rural Development from your workplace or home anywhere in Europe, either on a part-time or full-time basis. The course is aimed at professionals in rural development, or those who want to build on a first degree to develop a career in this field. Tutorial support is available. There will be an induction event and a summer school, to enable students to share ideas and experiences with other students and with teaching staff. For information, please contact Professor Bill Slee, e-mail bslee@glos.ac.uk, or visit website <http://www.glos.ac.uk/subjectsandcourses/postgraduatetaught/erd/index.cfm>

PREPARE Organising Group

Kaja Kaur, who has been a member of the PREPARE Organising Group for the last five years, has withdrawn from the Presidency of Kodukant, the Estonian Movement of Villages, and from our Organising Group, following her appointment as a senior officer in the Estonian Ministry of

Internal Affairs. We thanks her warmly for her contribution to the PREPARE programme. She is succeeded, as Kodukant representative, by Liina Saar.

European rural Events

15-17 May 2006 Saint Chinian, Languedoc, France **LEADER Conference "Cooperation with Eastern Europe and Mediterranean countries"**. Languages, French and English.

Information from Séverine Bressaud, French LEADER+ Network Unit, *Tel +33 1 45 15 89 27, e-mail s.bressaud@rct-territoires.com*

21-25 May 2006 Amiens, France **45th IALB/RENE seminar 'Agriculture in Picardie'**, including stimulating visits to see innovation on farms in the region. Languages, French and English. Information from Chambre d'Agriculture Picardie, 19 bis rue Alexandre Dumas, 80096 Amiens-cedex 3, France. *Tel +33 3 22 33 69 33, fax +33 3 22 33 69 99, e-mail acceuil@picardie.chambagri.fr*

23 May Brussels, Belgium **ELO Conference 'Enlargement+2 : what future for the rural economy in the new Europe ?'** Information from European Landowners' Organisation, *Tel +32 2 234 30 00, e-mail elo@elo.org*

19 to 23 June Czech Republic **PREPARE Gathering 2006**, on the theme 'The evolution and activity of Local Action Groups, and their role in Rural Development Programmes'. Programme includes Travelling Workshops, starting in Prague, 19 to 21 June; then Gathering at Velehrad in south-east Moravia, 21 to 23 June. Information from Michael Dower, *e-mail mdower@glos.ac.uk*

28 June to 2 July Mezotur, Hungary **European Rural University 2006**, with themes including rural poverty, alternative agricultural energies and technologies, women in rural areas, and the preservation of traditions and values in rural communities. Information from György Rátfai, *e mail ratfaigy@ph.szolnok.hu*

30 June to 9 July 2006 Győr, Hungary **5th Summer Academy of the Euracademy Association**, on the theme "The role of Education in Sustainable Rural Development". For information and on-line application form, visit www.euracademy.org . Information also from Irén Kukorelli, *Tel +36 96 51 65 70, e-mail sziren@rkk.hu* or Anita Zagyva, *Tel +36 96 51 65 75*. The application deadline is 15 May 2006.

15-17 May 2006 Saint Chinian, Languedoc, France **LEADER Conference "Cooperation with Eastern Europe and Mediterranean countries"**. Information from Séverine Bressaud, French LEADER+ Network Unit, *Tel +33 1 45 15 89 27, e-mail s.bressaud@rct-territoires.com*

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For information about PREPARE, please contact Michael Dower, PREPARE Coordinator, 56 Painswick Road, Cheltenham GL50 2ER, England.

Telephone +44 12342 226511, e-mail mdwer@glos.ac.uk