

PREPARE Gathering 2010

FINAL REPORT

30.9.2010

PREPARE Network



Partnership for Rural Europe

It is a tradition in PREPARE to organise its main multi-national event each year in a different country and region of Europe, which **combines political debates between stakeholders and decision-makers with travelling workshops** into the host region. This allows all participants to put their feet into rural reality and listen to the people who live there as farmers, rural workers, forestry people, mayors, or rural developers.

In recent years, the main geographic focus of the event was South-Eastern Europe, especially countries preparing for or aspiring to EU accession. After last year's Gathering in Slovenia and Croatia, in 2010 the **Travelling Workshops and Annual Gathering of PREPARE** were organised from **30th August to 3rd September in Ohrid, Republic of Macedonia**. The host organization was **ALKA** – Center for sustainable development from Skopje.

The main two themes of the Gathering 2010 were **“Networking in Rural Areas”** and **“Common Agriculture Policy Reform after 2010”**.

PARTICIPATION

The participants came from:

- countries in **Central and Northern Europe** which have national partners in PREPARE (Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia and Sweden), as well as from Belgium, Iceland, Netherlands and Norway. There were also representatives of the two pan-European partners in PREPARE, Forum Synergies and ECOVAST;
- **South-Eastern European countries** (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia);
- **European institutions**: representatives of Delegation of European Union in Macedonia and of European Parliament. European Commissioner for Agriculture addressed the letter to PREPARE Gathering participants.
- **Governmental organizations** (Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development of Macedonia, representative from Standing Working Group).

In total, there were **109 participants from 20 countries**, which are the highest numbers for PREPARE Gatherings so far.

FUNDING

In addition to the funding from PREPARE, obtained from a grant by the **C.S. Mott Foundation**, financial support to the event was provided by ALKA. Additional financial resources were offered by the local hosts (local organisations, which helped organising the travelling workshops: FAGRICOM (Agricultural Marketing and Rural Development, Macedonia), SNV – The Netherland Development Organisation, Regional Economic Development in Macedonia (GTZ RED) and Rural Development Network (RDN) of Macedonia).

ACTIVITIES REPORT

The participants started to arrive on **August 30**. They were accommodated throughout the event in a large, comfortable hotel “Sileks” in **Ohrid**, the famous Macedonian holiday resort near beautiful Ohrid's Lake.

On **August 31**, it was a **conference** day with **two plenary sessions** organised in hotel's conference room. The first one covered the topic about **Building of Rural Networks** and the second one was about **Common Agriculture Policy After 2013**.

The participants were welcomed by representatives of the organisers (ALKA and PREPARE) as well as by Macedonian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, Mr. Ljupco Dimovski. Also, European Commissioner for Agriculture, Mr. Dacian Ciolos, addressed the PREPARE Gathering participants with a letter that was read out loud at the conference. Speakers from the Delegation of the European

Union from Skopje, AFSARD Macedonia, Standing Working Group, University of Ljubljana (Slovenia), Leibniz-Institute for Agricultural Development in Central and Eastern Europe (IAMO), ELARD and PREPARE raised a lot of **important aspects of rural development**, that can be summarized in the following thoughts:

- **Many European regions cannot contribute to 3 EU goals: Sustainability, Competitiveness and Cohesion because of limited resources** (disadvantage of living in high nature value (HNV) areas, overexploited natural resources, weakening of local food systems, small and traditional farmers are out of game, depopulation of rural areas, huge administration for low benefit, limited absorption cap. of disadvantaged areas);
- **The LEADER initiative**, after having experienced for three programming periods, **has reached a level of maturity**. Unfortunately there is little evidence so far that LEADER programme has been mainstreamed, in fact the **LEADER “bottom up approach” is under severe threat of eradication by the administrative procedures issued. We wish to see that LEADER bottom up approach is central element of the post 2013 EU rural development policy.** Next LEADER approach needs to be implemented through a delivery mechanism, tailored to serve the basic principles governing the LEADER approach. Therefore, we suggest that integrated and territorially place-based rural development programmes, building on the experience of LEADER, shall be given common rules;
- **ARC 2020, towards a new common voice for civil society.** An overwhelming majority of European citizens asks for a Common Agricultural Policy which ensures: agricultural products of good quality, healthy and safe, reasonable food prices, a fair standard of living for farmers, protection of the environment.
- **The human factor in rural development issues is of a crucial importance. Local people are the most important in the rural development.** That means there is a need to employ education, technical training and developing skills of local actors in rural development.
- In order to reach the rural sustainability **it is crucial to give the power to local actors.** We have to give opportunity to real people to influence their own life and to control their own local initiatives, to analyze their own priorities, to detect and use their own resources in order to solve local problems and also to plan and to decide upon future common priorities in different sectors, agriculture, economy, industry, infrastructure and similar.
- **Forests are very important for rural development** as they provide products and services to people especially from decentralized and private forests. In EU forestry is important to regional economy and is experiencing increasing added value of its products. Also, many EU countries have forestry activities identified in their measures. The situation in the region is however different – forests are neglected in rural development (e.g. no specific activities specified for forestry in IPARD programme in Macedonia). Planning is done often isolated for different natural resources. Integrated planning should be done. Secure agriculture and forest management practices addressing market demands and environmental aspects.

Overall, the presentations about the **future of the CAP as part of the ARC2020 process** opened many issues, which will become more relevant for accession countries in near future. We have learned about existing problems, possible reform plans and new challenges. For us the most important thing is to **be fully informed about the functioning of the CAP and the changes which might occur.**



On **September 1** the **Travelling Workshops** – study visits of small groups focusing on good practices in sustainable rural development initiatives in Macedonia were organised. There were **three groups** with approximately 35 participants each, going from Ohrid, each visiting different Macedonian region. In each group there were rural practitioners from different countries. Accompanied by enthusiastic Macedonian guides, each group visited several local partnerships in Macedonia, found out how they were created and who were their members, talked to the local authorities and other actors, and visited the most interesting projects, based on local natural heritage (e.g. caves, waterfalls, lakes), traditional crafts or traditional style of life.

Thematic Working Group 1

Group 1 was acquainted with rural initiatives in Mavrovo region. In Debarca area, the Forestry related activities towards RD policy were presented. In Municipality of Debarca voluntary fire brigade compiled by members of national private forest owners association (NAPFO) was presented as a part of joint efforts by municipality and rural people (forest owners) who contribute towards protection of natural resources as forests. In the municipality there was a presentation of joint efforts of SNV and NAPFO in piloting RD forestry related measures such as afforestation, agro-forestry, land consolidation, renewable energy heating systems etc. Also some aspects of importance of financial support mechanisms in forest (forest fire prevention and protection) were presented on a field. Municipality of Mavrovo/Rostushe offered an overview of tourism possibilities of the National park “Mavrovo” with its history, natural resources, caves, biodiversity, local food products and old crafts. Presenting the local efforts to protect and promote biodiversity in agriculture through the development of gastronomic tourism. As well as the local initiative for village renewal, restorations of old village houses with environmentally friendly materials and therefore development of an alternative tourism.



Thematic Working Group 2

Group 2 visited numerous locations in Prespa region. In Resen Municipality, the group visited Saraj, a beautiful French-style castle, where the Project “Raising awareness among the providers of services in alternative tourism about the benefit of Networking”, realized by the Group for Rural Development of Municipality of Resen, was presented. Group also visited the Museum of ethno traditional costumes in village Podmochani, presented by NGO “Gorica Prespa”. In Dolgi Rid the Prespa Natural Heritage was presented, followed by site seeing of Ljubojno village and visit of traditional mill, where cultural and historical heritage and potentials for development of Rural Tourism were presented by representatives of NGO for alternative tourism development in Ljubojno. In Bitola, group visited the NI Institute and national Museum, which contains a permanent exhibition of archaeological artifacts old up to 5 million years BC. ECOVAST representative made presentation about activities concerning preservation of cultural heritage, traditional architecture and cultural landscape. In Village of Nize Pole the group visited the Center for Rural Eco Tourism and Center for protection of big carnivores. The Project “Pelister Products”, realized by the Group For Rural Development of Municipality of Bitola, was presented to them. Examples of rural tourism were seen in village of Dihovo, where the group visited Villa “Patrice” and Villa “Dihovo”.

The general conclusion of this TW was that Prespa and Pelagonija have a remarkable potential for development of Rural Tourism and for Rural Development in general. There are a lot of private initiatives for Rural development but still these efforts needs to be more organized and there is a need for establishment of strong and sustainable cooperation between the relevant stakeholders in this Area.



Thematic Working Group 3

Group 3 was covering the presentation by the Center for Development of Pelagonija region and their resources and opportunities for sustainable rural development within the region – examples of diverse and appealing local initiatives in village Krklino: auto-ethno museum and private hippodrome. In village Babino was presented private library ALBI - homeland of 15.000 books, as well as other library material concerning the education, culture, economic and political history of Macedonia. The library is located in house with traditional appearance, and today represents main attraction in the area of Demir Hisar and example for fostering development of rural areas. Also, Municipality of Krushevo presented the Project “Krushevo-Ethno town” which symbolizes a time travel, offering the tourists the story of an important Macedonian historical event, by bringing the exact images, smell and taste from the 10 Days of Krushevo Uprising during the Ottoman Empire. This is great initiative for promoting the town with all its historical-cultural sites, traditional dresses, architecture, crafts, and food and to activate and motivate local people and business society to revive the tourist capacities.



Overall, intense discussions about rural development opportunities and new contacts and ideas were born during Travelling Workshops. All three groups made fruitful exchange among themselves and learned a lot from experiences of the local initiatives. There was a lot of positive atmosphere, mainly thanks to very hospitable hosts, who treated the TW participants with delicious traditional food and drink. Late in the night the groups arrived back, completing the 11th year of the PREPARE Travelling Workshops.

On **September 2**, the main topic of the day covered three main goals of Europe - *cohesion, competitiveness and sustainability* – in Rural Development.

The participants were divided in **four Thematic groups**, each discussing one of 4 axes of Rural Development Programme. Afterwards, the main ascertainties and conclusions were then presented:

1) Food security and renewable energies:

Main ascertainties:

- Small farms from the region are facing the challenge of the EU CAP in the process of the EU accession. Development of the agriculture requires development of human and social capital in the region to meet the demands as well and increase in usage of natural resources. While developing we have to protect nature and specifics of the region. At the same time we have to obtain and secure safe food for us and the future generations.
- Climate change and reduction of the CO₂ is not only an issue of increasing energy production from renewable resources. It also requires individual and collective actions related to consumption needs, specifically in food. Therefore we opt for maximizing food security via local production systems, and decreasing the CO₂ emissions by individual and local community actions, that would not affect people and the environment.
- Therefore, renewable energies have to be produced from biomass, already part of the existing biological systems and agriculture waste. If renewable energy production required additional crop production only polluted soils should be utilized for the purpose.

Main conclusions:

- Avoid creation of euro skepticism regionally in the struggle to achieve competitiveness on EU markets;
- re and usage of existing biomass resources not producing new ones.

2) Environmental aspects of the agriculture and forestry:

Main ascertainties:

- In small scale farming often good practices are taken already; this should be supported by RD policy and instruments in which agricultural farming and forestry are integrated;
- Legal framework is a maneuver space for farmers; often it is not supporting small scale farming and forestry and limits opportunities farmers to contribute as well for environmental services (e.g. agro-forestry, planting on agricultural land, wood production for renewable energy). In case of environmental services specific support and subsidy measures should be provided (many examples of this exist in EU countries);
- Forest importance regarding environmental services is large: biodiversity; nature conservation; absorbs water, biomass; CO₂ gasses, climate change, erosion control, recreation;
- Planning is done often isolated for different natural resources. Integrated planning should be done. Secure agriculture and forest management practices addressing market demands and environmental aspects. Good examples: avoid monocultures or fire prevention in forestry; integrated planning of agriculture and forest management to avoid soil and wind erosion, biodiversity destruction, use of fertilizers etc. Smart combination of agriculture and forestry could contribute to: soil protection, fire prevention, prevent evaporation (forest belts - wind break).

Main conclusions:

- sharing experiences and knowledge on practices and policy and instruments is important;

- Really implementing and adjusting legal framework regulations (SEA, EIA, integration of agriculture & forestry, replanting on agriculture land) has to be done;
- Policy need to be made with proper consultation process;
- Integrated planning and management of natural resources has to be done;
- Subsidy if additional environmental aspects are required;

3) Diversification of the economy in rural areas

Main ascertainties:

- The complexity is to keep people in rural areas by opening new occupations otherwise young people will leave the areas.
- LEADER and Local Development Strategies might offer a good range of activities that should be broadcasted in the rural areas. Strong support should come from the government not only local levels, (economic and social) otherwise the process will result off-putting.
- Rural diversification is not a process undertaken only by farmers but also by rural communities who diversify their incomes.
- Mentality in rural areas can be a serious challenge for cooperation.
- Creation of networks would facilitate the process by providing necessary information and giving new ideas to the communities and farmers, helping people to create their local networks and groups (LAGs).
- Being innovative in their own way is the best model rural communities should follow. Considering local context would be the best practice.

Main conclusions:

- Keep people, especially youngsters in rural areas by opening new occupations otherwise young people will leave the areas.
- Community and farmers should take lead of their rural diversification therefore, information flow in the grass root – for farmers, and community at large would be an added value to the process.
- Diversification farmers should cooperate with many actors at the local and central level: central government agencies, municipalities, associations, development agencies etc.
- There should be developed a process creating short chains linking consumers and producers.
- Promotion of the Branding culture and geographical indications.
- Education of consumers for recognizing seasons and products.
- Awareness-raising on diversification is needed for traditional families with a historic know-how. Most of all they are the ones who find it difficult to change; Therefore know-how is needed to be provided on community development programs; education on how to start new businesses , adding value to the local products, etc.
- Capacity building of farmers for diversification on: new businesses; networking; know-how on offering several products by several producers i.e. creating a basket of goods and services.
- Innovative forms of cooperation connecting consumers and producers through cooperatives, development of agro-tourism, etc.
- Visibility and recognition of regions (marketing creation of sub regional and regional identities) are very important for redirecting a specific territory from general production to a specific one.

4) LEADER:

Main ascertainties:

- We distinguish between the LEADER – programme: an EU financed programme for rural areas, with specific characteristics and rules, and the LEADER method or LEADER approach. The later

builds on participation of rural stakeholders, an area-based or territorial approach, and commonly developed strategies for the future development of a region. It is built on and enhances the motivation of local actors to engage in the development of the region and it creates or fosters their ownership for their regions' development. It is crucially based on mutual cooperation. Finally, it needs certain capacities and especially it needs professional facilitation of the process. The LEADER approach or method can be implemented in different contexts, not necessarily in the frame of the EU LEADER programme.

- The LEADER approach can be realised in theory without the specific EU finance and there are positive examples of this. Nevertheless in many situations, the EU LEADER money provides the specific incentive and initial starting point for engaging in those kinds of activities – therefore for many it would be difficult or impossible to engage their region in LEADER type activities without specific finance for this. Specific LEADER finance is important not only for the functioning of the LAG, but it provides a strong factor for initial motivation, and it ensures quick first results (by financing projects and activities) – a major success factor for the continuous functioning of the partnership. Additionally, the group was convinced that EU money aiming at enhancing rural development is best spent through the LEADER approach.
- There are positive examples of the LEADER approach being used in non-EU member states. Several specific examples were mentioned from Bosnia, Macedonia and Serbia.

Main conclusions:

- We urge external donors to finance participatory approaches and LEADER – like measures, as long as those countries do not yet have access to the related EU funds.
- To prepare for future engagement in the LEADER programme in non-member-states, it is vital for us to know as soon as possible how LEADER in the EU will look like after 2013.



Next, there were reports and presentations from the three Travelling Workshops, containing useful comments and suggestions pointing out to the strengths and weaknesses of the partnerships and projects visited.

Afterwards, the participants were given some free time for Ohrid sightseeing. The day ended with a short sightseeing trip to Sveti Naum and a magnificent dinner in a local restaurant in village Vevcani, well-known for its springs.



The last day, on **September 3**, there was short brainstorming for future action of the PREPARE programme, with particular attention to South Eastern Europe. The following ideas emerged from the discussion as potential future actions:

- Prepare a report from the Gathering and disseminate it to both civil society and public administration in SEE countries;
- disseminate PREPARE position about CAP reform;
- dissemination of results from project TEPA – Trainings of European Partnership Animators (Czech Republik, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden) in new countries; Possibility to adopt the trainings to the needs of the countries. More information available at www.partnershipanimators.eu;
- Disseminate the huge potential of Rural Parliaments;
- Feedback from participants through all available tools of communication (website forum, newsletters, e-mails);
- Each country should have at least one youngster in delegation;
- In the next gathering one of the themes should be youth in rural areas.

All material (presentations, photo gallery) about PREPARE Gathering 2010 activities is available at PREPARE website: www.preparenetwork.org