



PREPARE – Partnership for Rural Europe
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Ohrid, 4th September

Mr. Dacian Cioloș

*Member of the European Commission Responsible for Agriculture and Rural Development
Rue de la Loi 200
1049 Brussels, Belgium*

Dear Commissioner,

The participants and organisers of the **PREPARE conference in Ohrid, Macedonia**, send you their warm regards and thanks for your kind letter of encouragement for this year's gathering, which focuses on rural development perspectives in the South East European region.

Your letter was read out in the presence of **more than 110 participants from 20 countries** including the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development of Macedonia, Mr. Ljupco Dimovski, and a number of important representatives of governmental and non governmental organisations taking part in the four days conference.

The tradition of PREPARE gatherings **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. We then move on to thematic workshops which reflect what we have seen and what we know about rural policies.

People and countries in South Eastern Europe are in a special situation. Governments in this part of Europe have applied to join the European Union. They have started to prepare for accession and to adapt to the so called *acquis communautaire*. But the common agriculture Policy for them is a moving target. They will probably join the EU when the next reform of the CAP will be decided. This is why we believe that these specific problems and aspirations should be taken into account when reforming the CAP after 2013.

This years gathering had a special day dealing with **the future of the CAP as part of the ARC2020 process**. 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**. The existing pre-accession programs may help us to understand instruments and mechanisms. But we also would like to get a chance to inform you about our specific needs and proposals.

Representatives from more than 70 non-governmental and governmental organisations spread in 20 countries discussed during the PREPARE Gathering **important aspects of rural development and summarised debates 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 HNV areas, overexploited natural resources, weakening of local food systems, small and traditional



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farmers are out of game, depopulation of rural areas, huge administration for low benefit, limited absorption cap. of disadvantaged areas)

- **CAP reform is the chance for paradigm shift.** Balance between environmental, economical and social measures, for the long term life quality in rural areas; Fair sharing of added-value between farmers, processors, traders and consumers; Territorial cohesion through flexibility and simplification; Stronger involvement of civil society organisations in RD; Integrated rural development based on the sub – regional strategies, steered by local partnerships (LEADER); Complementarity between funds and measures for efficient territorial cohesion
- **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;
- We distinguish the **LEADER programme as an EU financed programme for rural areas**, with specific characteristics and rules, and **as a method or approach** that 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. 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.
- **Regional actors in current and potential accession countries want to prepare for participation in the LEADER programme.** We collected a number of positive examples of NGO or sometimes administration-initiated LEADER-type activities, among others in Macedonia, Serbia and Bosnia. We urge international donors to finance participatory activities and LEADER-type measures, as long as EU funds are not available for this kind of activity yet. **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.**
- **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.
- **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.



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- **Forests are very important for rural development** as they provide products and services to people especially from decentralized and private forests. Forest importance regarding environmental services is large: biodiversity; nature conservation; absorbs water, biomass; CO₂ gasses, climate change, erosion control, recreation. 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.
- **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.

You may find a rich dossier of contributions to the conference on the Prepare website (www.preparenetwork.org) and the various websites of the supporting organisations.

The organisers of the conference wish to be further involved in your discussions and consultations on the future of the CAP. And we are grateful for your open attitude and interest in European civil society.

With kind regards,

Mr. Hannes Lorenzen, PREPARE
Mr. Goran Šoster, PREPARE
Ms. Elizabeta Gjorgjievska, ALKA
Ms. Kinga Boenning, Institute for Rural Development (IROW)
Mr. Peter Kampen, SNV
Mr. Panagiotis Patras, ELARD