

PREPARE Partnership for Rural Europe

Summary of Position Paper on CAP post 2013

PREPARE is a partnership of two pan-European NGOs – Forum Synergies and ECOVAST – and national networks of civil society organisations from Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden. Its **aim** is to strengthen civil society in rural areas and to promote trans-national cooperation in rural development, focusing especially on the new EU member states and on the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. This Paper is written from the standpoint of our aims and these countries.

Our **vision of rural areas**, beyond 2013, is of territories which contribute actively to the goals of EU 2020; are resilient in their social structure; have diversified economies; are rich in ecosystems, landscapes and cultural heritage; and contribute massively to mitigating and adapting to climate change.

In central and eastern Europe, **rural areas in general fall gravely short of these ideals**. Local economies are narrow; social structures are not resilient; and many ecosystems and landscapes of exceptional quality are threatened by collapse of traditional practices of farming and forestry. These regions contribute neither to competitiveness, nor to sustainability, and pose a major challenge to the goal of cohesion. These regions cannot be written off. They contain assets that Europe needs. Their weakness leads to problems elsewhere, as people move into cities or other countries.

Rural regions of this sort demand a **bold and broadly-based new approach to development**. This must :

- bring into focus all the main policies and funds that impact on sub-regions, including what is called ‘rural development’, but also education, health, social services, transport etc.
- call down policies and funds related to sectors beyond agriculture and rural development, including those now deployed through ERDF, Cohesion Fund, ESF, EFF etc.
- build on, and strengthen, the working relationship between rural and urban areas.

In terms of **governance**, this approach implies that :

- the EU must provide a clear strategic direction for developmental effort; establish a broad array of major Funds, with clear complementarity between them; and enable Member States to take a broad and flexible approach to development

- Member States and regions should set a clear strategic framework for development activity, with complementary use of different EU and national funds
- the practical effort of development should be mainly handled at the level of territories, embracing (where appropriate) both urban and rural areas.

If these systems are put in place, the precise 'ownership' (in a Departmental sense) of different Funds and policy streams is not of great importance. If rural development remains with the Agriculture Directorate General, it should be given fully equal status with agriculture.

Levels of funding for rural development should be assessed by reference not to what can be taken from agriculture, but to what rural regions truly need to develop their economic viability, achieve social cohesion, protect environmental values, and contribute to the new challenges of climate change, energy security and food security.

We strongly advocate the **delivery of development through sub-regional partnerships** between public, private and voluntary sectors. The EU should promote widespread use of the LEADER approach, with local partnerships able to deliver both rural development funds and other programmes and to work in both rural and urban areas .

Civil society can make a crucial contribution to rural and territorial development. We ask for full inclusion of civil society in the formal National Rural Networks; full consultation with civil society in preparing national strategies and development programmes; and inclusion of civil society people in the structure of sub-regional partnerships, and among the beneficiaries of development funds.

Farming is vital for its role in assuring food security for Europe, providing a large proportion of the food that Europeans eat, achieving substantial exports, producing the raw material for added-value enterprises, and providing a widening range of environmental and social '**public goods**'. Public goods cannot be secured only by market operations, or by regulations : these must be supplemented by financial support systems, designed directly for the purpose.

In **disadvantaged areas**, the sustaining of environmental and social public goods may demand continuance of traditional farming and forestry systems, supplemented by new economic activity. In these areas, Member States should pursue strong local development strategies, implemented through diverse social, economic and environmental measures. An integrated approach at local level is essential in order to prevent a vicious cycle of out-migration, depopulation, further loss of services, decline in ecosystems and landscapes, and adverse impact upon the cities through mass migration from rural to urban areas.

Local development of this kind can contribute to all three of Europe's prime missions – competitiveness, cohesion and sustainability.