

European Network for Rural Development

Minutes of the fourth Coordination committee meeting

8th June 2010, Borschette Centre, Brussels

Note: All presentations are available on the EN RD website (<http://enrd.ec.europa.eu>)

Session 1: Public Debate on the CAP after 2013

Chair: Loretta Dormal-Marino, Deputy Director General in charge of Rural Development, DG AGRI

1 Address by Georg Häusler, Head of Cabinet of Dacian Cioloş, European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development

Summary of key points:

- The public debate, which involves civil society altogether, has so far produced 4,400 contributions (duration extended until 11 June 2010) and displays strong support for the rural development policy to continue as part of the CAP.
- Contributions suggest the CAP to play a more pro-active role in rural areas and to synergise with other EU/national policies, aiming together for a viable & healthy rural economy.
- The objective of a better functioning CAP is regularly found among contributions, in particular in relation to: food security and providing food at reasonable prices; modernisation and diversification of farms, improved local/quality production (reform of quality policy); environmental friendly and more ecologically sustainable measures; innovation and research.
- In addition, agriculture is expected to provide more potential/strong value added in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy, notably for the green growth. The contributions are specifically in areas such as: landscape management by farmers; the employment role of farmers; new challenges/issues such as the potential contribution of agriculture to better acknowledge climate change, and emphasis on innovation and research.
- Next steps: culmination of the public debate at a conference in July this year; Commission legislative proposals in July 2011; co-decision process with EP expected to complete by end of 2012.

2 Overview of contributions from the Coordination committee member organisations

Presentation delivered

- "*Summary of EN RD Contributions to Future of the CAP Debate*", by Haris Martinos, EN RD Contact Point.

First impressions of the contributions received to-date, by Rob Peters, Head Unit G3, DG AGRI

Some details about the organisation and the specific areas of discussion of the July conference on the future of the CAP were provided.

Based on the preliminary examination (still ongoing) of the contributions received, the RD policy must be considered as an important component of the CAP. The main points in terms of objectives of the new CAP, instruments to implement it and management organisation were summarised as follows:

- *Objectives of the RD policy:* many contributions consider the actual objectives adequate, but it is underlined that strong emphasis needs to be put on the new challenges, such as innovation, natural resources (particularly water and soil management) and rural vitality.
- *Instruments to implement the RD policy:* it is considered important to refine the existing tools with particular attention to axes 3 and 4 in order to develop them to further support endogenous potentials.
- *Management organisation:* the simplification of the organisation of the RD policy at EU (EC and Member States) and national (MA and beneficiaries) level is considered as an essential requisite of the new policy. Furthermore the coordination between different policies and different funds that operate in the same territory is considered important.

3 Discussion from the floor (pre-identified speakers)

Full contributions are posted on

http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/cap-consultation-process_home_en/en/debate-contributions_en.cfm

National Rural Networks

Portuguese NRN, Manuela Azevedo e Silva

The debate was held at national and regional level with rural assemblies, through the organisation of several meetings, characterised by the participation of numerous actors and an interesting and rich debate. The main actors involved were agricultural organisations, NGOs, universities, research centres. The main conclusions of the debate were summarised as follows:-

- The importance of strengthening the 2nd pillar of CAP was recognized, in particular in relation to competitiveness and environmental concerns.
- Strategic approach: the needs to improve the governance was underlined as well as the importance of the bottom-up approach as main strategic approach in order to support the creation of better links among different stakeholders at national and regional level. The possibility to return to the multi-funds programming approach was suggested by some participants of the debate.
- The importance of the objectives of axes 1, 2 and 3 was stressed and the need to improve their implementation.
- Research to be inserted in the 2nd pillar.
- Simplification of rules, improvement of coordination between different policies and improvement of evaluation methods (also at project level) were underlined as important elements to support the management of the new policy.
- The transferability of good practice examples needs to be developed.

The contributions of different actors who participated in the debate are available on the Portuguese NRN website and on the EN RD website.

Latvian NRN, Edgars Linde

The Latvian NRN used three main methods to collect opinions about the future of the CAP:

- the LNRN website, through the publication of the CAP debate information together with a questionnaire to be filled in online (approximately 130 responses received);
- dissemination of printed copies of the questionnaire in the regions, through the collaboration of the regional experts of the network;
- organisation of workshops at national and regional level, with the participation of some 700 actors involved in rural development and/or in the development of rural areas.

A meeting at national level was organised in order to summarise the main results of the workshops, which are based on three main points:

- to develop synergies with other policies;
- to create a more balanced direct payment within the EU;
- to insure more support to small family farmers, which are insuring the quality of food and its availability in rural areas.

Netherlands NRN, Henk Kieft

The Dutch NRN developed a provocative proposal for the CAP after 2013 based on the absence of any income support to farmers (this document is at moment available only in Dutch but it will be translated as soon as possible) and sent it to some 100 people, mainly actors involved in agriculture.

Afterwards the document was discussed in two meetings organised by the NRN (average of 25 participants in each meeting) and the main conclusions can be summarised as follows:

- RD policy must be regionalised, because a regional approach is considered to be more appropriate to take in consideration the diversities existing in the different European regions.
- The social aspect of agriculture as well as its role in improving the environmental protection must be taken in consideration.
- Simplification and innovation in the administrative procedures are considered key points to improve the implementation and the efficiency of the policy.

Leader was a very interesting and potential useful concept when it was created, but its inclusion in the RDPs has contributed to make its application difficult. For this reason it seems necessary to improve the implementation of Leader approach and to support a better communication between administrations and beneficiaries.

EU Organisations

COPA (Axis 1), Thomas Bertilsson

The members of the organisation were consulted on the three specific questions about the future of the CAP, in addition to a questionnaire survey started prior to the launch of the CAP debate. The main conclusions of the debate can be summarised as follows:

- to stabilise farmers markets and income (focus on economic wellbeing of farming businesses);
- to insure consumers about food availability and quality;

- to improve the competitiveness in agriculture and forestry through the support to farmers' investments;
- to maintain LFA payments;
- to improve quality of life in rural areas promoting diversification through business development;
- to improve farmers' possibilities to ensure a sustainable agriculture;
- to change measures to help farmers to better access and contribute. Farmers and foresters own three quarters of European land: rural services for mitigation of climate change effects can be provided.

To improve the coordination between different policies that operate in the same rural area, in particular more coordination and coherence with cohesion policy and structural funds is considered crucial to achieve unifying effects such as the EU 2020 strategy.

Birdlife (Axis 2), Trees Robijns

Birdlife is in general very active at national level and national representatives were involved in the debates organised in different Member States. Birdlife is convinced of the importance of a strong overhaul of the agricultural and rural development policy at European level and it sustains this position in the different committees of which it is part. The main conclusions of the debate organised can be summarised as follows:

- The way pillar 2 programming is undertaken can inform the overall CAP development: the support received by farmers must be based on the additional commitments they are able to take, in relation to the protection of the environment and to the sustainability of the agricultural practices. In general it must be clear what any payment is trying to achieve and results should be quantifiable and measurable. Support must not be directed to generic commitments or to commitments that cannot deliver the desired results.
- High nature value farming system should be better supported. Usually this farming system is composed by small farmers able to deliver a lot of public goods and for this reason they should be supported more actively.
- In its specific summary on rural development Birdlife proposes additional measures considered necessary to keep rural areas vibrant.
- Overall consistency with different strategies in place (Europe 2020, water framework directive *et al*).

Prepare (Axes 3 and 4), Goran Soster

The PREPARE partnership for rural Europe was introduced, with a brief overview of the members and purpose. The members are mainly national non profit organisations involved in civil society in rural areas, with the main aim of strengthening civil society and promoting the exchange of experiences in rural development. The main points of PREPARE's position are:

- To implement a broadly-based new approach to development which takes in consideration all the policies that impact on sub-regions, then not only rural development but also education, health, transport, social services, etc. This new approach must consider all the funds performing in a specific region and not only the agricultural fund and promote a more coordinated working relationship between urban and rural areas.

- To support the development of sub-regional partnerships between public, private and voluntary sectors. On this subject the Leader approach should be strengthened, sustaining local partnerships able to use rural development funds and other funds and to work both in rural and urban areas.
- To strengthen the role of civil society, including it as a member of the rural networks and consulting it for the preparation of the development strategies.
- To preserve the vital role of farmers in Europe as they assure food security and provide a wide range of environmental and social public goods. In addition the policy should support strongly farmers who are contributing more than others to climate change (for example organic farming) and small family farms to avoid a further depopulation of certain areas.

4 Open discussion from the floor (main points)

The presentation of the main results of the CAP debate were summarised in three main points / questions on which the discussion was suggested to be concentrated. Namely: i) concrete suggestions on how to improve the coordination with other policies; ii) how to justify the existence of RD policy in front of the EU citizens; iii) governance and administration: how can the governance help to integrate strategic priorities at national and European level?

A more integrated approach should be developed to improve the coordination with other policies and the fact that it involves several actors can create a very positive motivation in rural areas. In addition the coordination can be improved by creating a more balanced relation between rural and urban areas.

Governance: can be improved by involving local territories in the programming phase, strengthening local partnerships and the management of different financial resources. In addition it was pointed out that the “rural and agro-food districts”, well developed in several Italian regions, are a very good example of local development and the adoption of similar approaches should be supported at European level.

The importance of the Leader approach: was underlined by several participants. The Leader approach has been very useful in the past to stimulate the commitments and the participation of local actors in the development of rural areas. It was underlined that the composition of the LAG and its management are the two most important elements to assure a positive functioning of the group itself. In addition a strong management of the LAG can encourage a better coordination between different financial resources in the same region.

Nevertheless it is clear that Leader is experiencing several problems during this programming period: it has not yet clearly benefited from the mainstreaming and neither has the RDPs implementation; the complicated administrative procedures required for the implementation of projects are not feasible for LAGs and they are not working as they could. As a solution to this problem the creation of a third pillar working according to the Leader approach rules was proposed. The creation of this third pillar could allow overcoming the present implementation difficulties. The third pillar should be implemented completely through a territorial approach and the LAGs should be the vehicles to integrate different funds at local level, being able to use not only agricultural funding but also financial resources coming from other EU instruments¹.

¹ The creation of a third pillar was proposed by ELARD as a part of its proposal for the future of the CAP, not submitted yet.

Information point - Organisation of the July conference

Some clarifications were asked about the topics to be discussed in the conference, in particular:

- Agro-food products: it was asked if the discussion will focus only on food security or also on other topics more related to environment and production of renewable energy.
- It was suggested to include in the discussion other important topics such as the development of better links between EAFRD and other funds, the implementation of the integrated approach, the new role of Leader and the improvement of the governance.

It was explained that the main aim of the conference is the discussion about the first results of the public debate, but the agenda was not finalised yet, then there was still the possibility to include new topics. Some 600 persons will be invited, from organisations, Managing Authorities and NRNs.

Session 2: Activity report of the EN RD (July 2008 – June 2010)

Chair: Jose Manuel Sousa Uva, Director of Horizontal aspects of rural development, DG AGRI

5 Presentations delivered

- *"EN RD Activities in Years 1 and 2"* by Gaëlle Lhermitte, Unit G3, DG AGRI.
- *"Participation in fairs – Rural Development Days (jointly organised by DG AGRI and the EN RD Contact Point)"* by Dieter Wagner, EN RD Contact Point.

Note: The discussion of sessions 2 and 3 is presented together below, as in the main the points made did not solely refer to past (Year 2) activities but were also related to future (Year 3) activities of the EN RD.

Session 3: Activity programming for the third year (July 2010 – June 2011)

Chair: Jose Manuel Sousa Uva, Director of Horizontal aspects of rural development, DG AGRI

7 Presentations delivered

- *"Proposed priorities for the third year activity plan"* by Rob Peters, Head, Unit G3, DG AGRI.
- *"EN RD third year activities - inputs from the Leader subcommittee"* by Panos Patras, ELARD.

Synergies between the EN RD and NRNs, C Jochum, Austrian NRN.

The Ministry of Agriculture has prepared a mandate to bring together stakeholders for promoting Axis 2 synergies and in parallel a good practices database is under preparation. Furthermore there are significant constraints in implementing the rural development policy, including the lack of compliance and bureaucracy and these which can affect its future implementation. There is a broader necessity to gather examples of case studies and thus to investigate how the MSs operate and why there are differences. As regards the synergies between EN RD and NRNs:

- It is important to simplify and structure the exchanges at all levels, to ensure the most efficient flows of information.
- It is very positive to involve NRNs in the CAP debate, but it is important to show how these contributions will feed into the process.

- A lot of work is being done. It is important to bring them to their final usable forms: outputs/products which can be used directly (transposed) at administrative levels.

A number of other issues were raised for consideration, relevant to the broader CAP debate.

Expectations from EU organizations, G. Peltre, RED.

- An integrated rural development policy should be the key for future rural development. The CAP should develop as a CARP, and the EU budget should earmark all budget lines targeting rural areas.
- Limited access to private sector and other sources of financing continues to pose a problem, however when there is a more integrated approach additional funds and stakeholders could be mobilised.
- A more direct appeal to civil society will also be required to get it more actively involved in RD policy support.
- Agriculture and forestry are facing many challenges. It is important to have the necessary tools available to mobilise farmers and foresters investments and increased partnership, enhancing their contribution to the development of rural areas.
- Development training was highlighted as a growing necessity which needs to be further supported.
- Considering these points, 3 working groups could be set up respectively on:
 - Integrated rural development
 - Farmers and foresters in territorial local projects
 - Rural development engineering (including training).

It is increasingly recognised that there is no effective EU programme which would actively promote the links between urban and rural areas. This could also be an area to be explored by a new thematic working group that could focus on linkages with rural development through and with Regional Development.

National authorities perspectives, F. Morin, French Authorities

The French Rural Network highlighted that it is very important to allow rural stakeholders to know the work that is been carried out both at National and EU level. It was also explained that thematic groups were established in France and their objective is to help to understand the situation and resolve problems on the ground. For the EN RD thematic working groups, they suggest that a survey should be carried out on the priority themes concerning rural areas and that they should also help to understand the relationship between urban and rural areas. It is important that the EN RD makes links with local actors, as well as NRNs. The French NRN also made a number of more general observations related to the broader CAP debate, namely that:

- The future reform should take into account the extensive experience that has been gained at national level in the current implementation period.
- Space and territorial management should be a priority and where conflicts exist or are created a territorial approach is clearly needed.

- Going beyond the EAFRD to ensure real rural strategies at the national level.

8 Open discussion from the floor (main points)

Forestry: A number of issues were raised for consideration:

- forestry will become even more important and there is a need to broaden the focus beyond the issues closely related to agriculture
- territories with small plots which follow traditional methods should be taken into account when designing the financial support
- forestry investments require a very long period of implementation and this creates many problems in receiving financing from the banks

There is an NRN Thematic Initiative on Forestry on-going. There is also the option to organise other working groups for specific topics. However the proposed approach of the EN RD is to allow the current groups to more fully mature and decide accordingly, based on the results achieved.

Monitoring indicators: It was suggested that the EN RD should assist with the indicators related to "Quality of Life" objectives. The impact indicators still face questions and this is now under discussion within the European Evaluation Network. As the work proceeds and matures the findings on Axis 3 and 4 will be presented. By the next meeting it is intended that there will be an overview prepared to see the progress achieved so far.

Monitoring the Networks themselves: In the CMEF there are no elements on how to measure the Network activities. The EN RD is preparing a concept paper to look upon this issue and there is also a plan to assess existing practices. The outcomes of this work and suggestions on the best ways forward will be a subject of discussion at the next NRN Forum planned for Malta in late June.

LsC Focus Groups: A comment was made that, based on the presentation made of the progress achieved by the three Focus Groups under the Leader subcommittee, the analysis and the initial results suggest limited progress and a lack of detailed analysis at this stage. Each FG is proceeding at its own pace, and in all areas the analysis activities are progressing. Results are intended to be made more widely available at the latest by the end of the calendar year (but most likely sooner). Provisional drafts of their first reports were presented to the LsC. There is a longer version of these reports under preparation which will include much more information and more case studies. As their work progresses the issue will be discussed again. The main purpose being to see how their work can fit into the 3rd year's activities.

TWGs 1, 2&3: The comment was made that is very important to highlight the strengths of the Working Groups and to communicate their results at events. There will be different outputs from each group. For TWG3 a seminar is planned for autumn so that its findings can be presented. This may also be linked to presentation of findings for TWG2. For TWG1 there will be no need to have a specific seminar and other dissemination mechanisms are anticipated to be used.

TWG4: The importance of Thematic Working Group 4 on Delivery Mechanisms was consistently highlighted by several participants, emphasizing the need to use other TWG findings in this area and to ensure the practical outcomes. Due to the wide scope of the work, the danger of the analysis being superficial was raised. It was suggested that the work could possibly be more specific and divided into two main areas namely for targeting of specific approaches and simplification of procedures. TWG4

members have discussed this issue: for the initial case studies, it was actively decided not to limit the scope of work in order not to overlook any important issues. For the further rounds of case studies, this issue will be reviewed again. The many and varied comments on delivery mechanisms were noted and it has clearly highlighted the need to undertake such a review through TWG4 and to use the findings to improve programme implementation, both now and in the future.

TWGs in general: some support was voiced for the establishment of a TWG on Sub-Regional Development. A TWG focussing on the issues and needs of mountainous areas was also proposed. The need to consolidate and complete the work of existing TWGs was recognised as the best way forward in the short term to ensure that any future working groups can build upon and learn from their work. Otherwise there is a danger of creating overlaps or duplicating efforts. The mandates of all current and future thematic working groups will be reviewed and it will be ensured that their tasks take into account the progress made so far and build from the experiences and insights gained. A need to focus on the strategic needs linked to the CAP debate was raised, emphasising that current and anticipated TWGs findings should be used where possible to assist in guiding/planning the future RD policy, by highlighting what works well and less well in this current programming period.

Visibility of the EN RD is an important issue. Visibility will be assessed also through the CP website where the work done by the networks continues to be presented and disseminated. It was acknowledged that it is important to raise the profile and image of networks in the next stage of the work of the EN RD and that this should also be supported at local and regional level

Value added of the EN RD: Concerns were expressed on whether the work done so far will have practical results. The anticipation was also expressed to see how the EN RD web will connect all national networks. The view was expressed that in the current administrative environment the efforts undertaken so far have not significantly benefited the rural population. It was questioned what may guarantee that the future legislation will be helpful. The productivity of the European countryside must be ensured and the rural areas must become more attractive. The CC should look for the best practices for integrated rural development.

The Chairman made the following additional points, in the light of the presentations and discussion:

- the EN RD is providing many ideas, however there is a need to stay focused on the most crucial issues or we risk spreading capacities too thinly.
- the annual work plan is open ended because there is clearly a need to embrace a more holistic approach to the development of rural areas throughout Europe.
- it was acknowledged that there should be more emphasis given to territorial aspects, notably links between urban and rural areas.
- the development of more links with Regional Strategies and policies was also recognised as important for the future to ensure complementarity of support and the need to ensure both a bottom up and top down approaches and to develop appropriate ways in which these can converge to benefit specific rural areas.
- increased synergies between policies and funds were also seen as a necessity. Efforts need to be made to give this more attention in the future programming period.
- it is recognised that Integrated rural development must be more widely promoted.

9 Closing remarks

Closing remarks by the Chairman

It was concluded that it is important to make the best efforts to inform CAP debates aimed to involve all stakeholders. There is 3 years of work ahead of us and there will be positive results, while it must be recognised that it will not be possible to address all problems and issues. The key point to this effort will be trust and all contributions will be taken into consideration.