

# PREPARE Partnership for Rural Europe

## Position Paper on CAP post 2013

1. **The partnership.** PREPARE is a partnership of two pan-European NGOs – Forum Synergies and ECOVAST (European Council for the Village and Small Town) – and eleven national networks of civil society organisations from Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden, namely :

Croatian Rural Development Network

*(HMRR - Hrvatska mreža za ruralni razvoj)*

Czech National Rural Observatory (*Národní Observator Venkova o.p.s*)

*Kodukant*, the Estonian Village Movement

Finnish Village Action Association (*SYTY - Suomen Kylätoiminta Ry*)

Hungarian Rural Parliament (*Vidék Parlamentje*)

Latvian Rural Forum (*Latvijas Lauka Forums*)

Lithuanian Rural Communities Union

*(Lietuvos Koimo Bendruomeniu Sajunga)*

Polish Rural Forum (*Forum Aktywizacji Obszarów Wiejskich*)

Slovakian Rural Parliament (*Vidiecky Parlament na Slovensku*)

Slovenian Rural Development Network

*(Društva za razvoj slovenskega podeelja)*

*Hela Sverige Ska Leva!* (ALL Sweden Shall Live)

These networks are bottom-up initiatives of civil society, with strong roots in rural communities, based mainly on voluntary participation. Their common interest is to promote the well-being, and to express the voice, of those who live in the rural areas of their countries. Some of them are also involved in promotion and capacity building of Local Action Groups in the context of rural development programmes.

This Position Paper has been prepared in close consultation with all the PREPARE partners.

**2. Aim of the PREPARE partnership.** The aim of the partnership 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 accession and neighbouring countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Since the partnership was created in 2000, we have assisted the emergence in 7 countries of strong rural networks, which are now among the PREPARE partners. We have developed cooperative actions between the PREPARE partners, including internships for young staff members and volunteers. We have organised annual gatherings of people from civil society and government from twenty countries, including accession and neighbour countries in Central and Eastern Europe, in order to help people in those countries to move into active and collaborative rural development. We are currently supporting organisations in the countries of South-Eastern Europe which are in, or aspiring to, the process of accession to the EU.

**3. Links to the European Commission.** For the last six years, PREPARE has had a seat on the Commission's Rural Development Advisory Group. We also have a seat on the EN-RD Coordination Committee. We attended the Rural Development Conference in Cyprus and other events, and made submissions on the Health Check and other issues. Through our national partners, we have good understanding of rural issues and policies in their countries. This Paper is written from the standpoint of our aims and of the countries on which we focus.

**4. Vision of rural areas.** Our vision of rural areas, looking beyond 2013, is of territories, communities and economies which :

- contribute actively to the goals of EU 2020
- are stable and resilient in their social structure, and rich in the values of rural life
- have diversified economies, in which agriculture and forestry are complemented by other thriving sectors, all contributing to the viability of regions, to the competitiveness of Europe and to sustainable ways of life in the countryside

- are rich in ecosystems, landscapes and cultural heritage, with high standards of conservation of earth resources, especially soil, water and biodiversity
- contribute massively to the process of mitigating and adapting to climate change, including capture and sequestration of carbon and generation of renewable energy.

**5. The hard truth.** This vision for the future throws into sharp relief the fact that, in Central and Eastern Europe, rural areas in general fall gravely short of these ideals. In most rural regions :

- local economies are narrowly based, largely dependent on farming or forestry, with low average incomes and limited job opportunities, particularly for young people : this weakness is most keenly felt in areas of subsistence or semi-subsistence farming, for example in Romania and Bulgaria
- social structures are not stable or resilient, in that young and active people are moving away, leaving an ageing and shrinking population, which can lead (by a vicious cycle) to decline of rural services and hence to further depopulation
- in some areas, ecosystems and landscapes of exceptional quality, created by traditional practices of farming, pastoralism and forestry, are threatened by the collapse of these practices : elsewhere, lands affected by collective farming, strip mining and other activities remain despoiled, with serious consequences for soil, water and ecosystems
- as a consequence, from a European perspective, many rural regions are contributing neither to competitiveness, nor to sustainability, and they 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 the cities or into other countries.

**6. The challenge of Development.** Rural regions of this sort, which have their counterparts also in Western Europe, demand a bold and broadly-based new approach to development. This is not 'rural development' in the narrow sense

contained in the EAFRD, Pillar 2 of the CAP, though that kind of activity forms a significant part of it. It must have a broader dimension, in three main senses.

- It must bring into focus all the main policies and public funding streams that impact on sub-regions : these include not only what we now (in Rural Development Programmes) call 'rural development', but also such fields as education, health services, social services, transport, water supply, telecommunications, and support for enterprise.
- It must be able to call down policies and resources related to sectors including, but wider than, agriculture and narrow rural development. At EU level, that means the application of resources which are now deployed through the Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the Social Fund, the Fisheries Fund and some lesser funds. This is not a new idea, in that these funds are now applied in many rural areas, but in ways which lack clarity and palpable coordination.
- It must build upon, and strengthen, the working relationship between rural areas and the urban areas to which they are linked in historic, socio-economic or functional ways. Rural communities need effective services in the towns. A diversified sub-regional economy depends upon intimate links between towns and countryside, for example between farmers and the enterprises which add value to farm products.

**7. Implications for governance.** This broad approach has the following implications for governance at European, national and sub-national levels.

- The European Union must
  - provide a clear strategic direction for developmental effort, within the context of Europe 2020 and reflecting the triple goals of competitiveness, sustainability and cohesion
  - establish from 2013 onwards a broad array of major Funds, between which there is a clearly stated complementarity and potential for geographic overlap, so that all the Funds can (where relevant) be deployed in the context of national and sub-national development
  - encourage and enable, through the Regulations for different Funds, national and regional governments to take a broad and flexible approach to development processes.

- National and regional governments should set a clear strategic framework for development activity, within which different European Funds and national matching funds are deployed, with clear provision for complementarity between the funds and for flexibility to meet the distinct needs of different areas.
- The main practical effort of development should be handled at the level of territories, by which we mean areas which have clear social and geographical coherence, which command a degree of common loyalty among their inhabitants, and which are large enough to tackle sub-regional projects and programmes. Where appropriate, these territories, and the sub-regional development strategies that are applied to them, should embrace both urban and rural areas.

8. **Responsibilities and funding.** If the systems of governance described above are put in place, achieving linkage and integration between many sectors, then the precise structure and 'ownership' (in a Departmental sense) of different Funds and policy streams is not of great importance. If rural development remains the responsibility of the Agriculture Directorate General, then we would wish to see rural development given fully equal status with agriculture. As to levels of funding, these should be assessed by reference not to what can be taken from farming (the modulation principle), but to what rural regions truly need in order to develop their economic viability, meet the demands of social cohesion, protect their environmental values, and realise the great positive contribution that they can make to the new challenges of climate change, energy security and food security.

9. **Sub-regional partnerships.** We are strongly committed to the delivery of development through sub-regional partnerships between public, private and voluntary sectors. The experience of LEADER proves the high value of such partnerships, in terms of focusing the development effort on the particular needs of an area and harnessing the energy of local people and organisations to the common cause. At a time of stringency on public funds, this means of applying human and financial resources in a flexible and locally determined way can bring enormous benefit. We wish to see the flowering of this into a widespread use of the LEADER approach, with the local partnerships being enabled to deliver not only the narrow rural development funds but also other appropriate publicly-funded programmes. This already happens in (for example) Ireland where the

Local Action Groups are also Local Development Companies, France where the Pays or the Regional Natural Parks created by groups of local authorities deploy funds both from the rural development programme and from elsewhere, and many countries where Local Action Groups are empowered to deliver both Rural Development and Fisheries measures. Where appropriate, sub-regional partnerships should be enabled to act both in rural areas and in the adjoining towns.

**10. The role of civil society.** The eleven national networks in the PREPARE Partnership represent, each in their own country, an array of civil society organisations – at national, regional and local level – which are active contributors to rural development. For example, each of the partners from Sweden (Hela Sverige Ska Leva) and Finland (National Village Association) has a membership of about 4,000 village action groups, which are the drivers of voluntary action to sustain and improve the social and cultural services in their communities and to maintain the traditions and values of rural life, to be handed on to future generations. At national level, the rural networks are – or can be – significant allies and partners of government in the shaping and delivery of rural policies. For example, Kodukant in Estonia manages some social delivery programmes for the government. SYTY in Finland was the official Network Unit for LEADER groups in the 2000-6 programme, and acts now as the informal network of these groups. The Slovenian Rural Development Network offers the umbrella for most of the 33 Slovenian LAGs, and contributes actively in the creation of national programmes related to rural development. Such action by civil society can provide a crucial complement to the resources of public bodies, which will come under severe stress during the next decade as Europe strives to recover from the financial crisis.

We therefore urge that future European policies should recognise the crucial role of civil society, as a key contributor to rural and territorial development. This implies :

- Full inclusion of civil society organisations in the formal National Rural Networks
- Full consultation with civil society in the preparation of national strategies and national development programmes
- Inclusion of civil society representatives in the structure of Local Action Groups and other sub-regional partnerships

- Inclusion of village-level action groups and other civil society organisations among the beneficiaries of formal development funds.

11. **Agriculture, and public goods.** Our broad emphasis on rural development in no way diminishes the importance that we place on farming, forestry and other primary land use. 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 enterprises which add value to farm products, and providing a widening range of environmental and social 'public goods'.

These public goods have growing importance in the political agenda related to agriculture. They include :

- the protection and enhancement of soil, ecosystems, landscape qualities and cultural heritage, supported by means such as cross-compliance and agri-environment payments
- the skilled and resourceful management of soil and water resources, particularly in areas affected by flood, drought, aridity, salinity or draw-down of reservoirs and aquifers
- the avoidance and control of pollution, and of runoff of agricultural chemicals
- the observance of standards of hygiene, phyto-sanitary precaution and animal welfare
- management of soil, biomass and livestock in ways that ensure capture, sequestration and storage of carbon and minimising of emissions of greenhouse gases, as a major contribution to mitigating climate change (in this field, there is need for urgent extension and dissemination of knowledge about practical methods for achieving these ends)
- generation of energy from renewable resources such as wood, other biomass, biogas, sun, wind and water
- sustaining of communities and local economies in areas affected by disadvantage through altitude, latitude, slope, poor soil, distance from cities, constraints based on nature conservation, and other factors.

Public goods of all these kinds cannot be secured only by the operations of the market, or by regulations applied to market-based activity. These operations and regulations must be supplemented by systems of financial support which are designed directly to secure the public goods, on the basis of voluntary decision by farmers and other managers of land. These public goods depend upon the continuance of farming and/or forestry, sensitised and adapted where necessary to reflect new elements in the menu of public goods such as carbon capture. The future CAP should give clear priority to sustainable forms of land use, with special support for organic and integrated methods of farming. The fertile soil, which is one of Europe's greatest long-term assets, should be defended from urbanisation through effective spatial planning policies.

**12. Disadvantaged areas.** The public goods agenda poses the sharpest challenge in disadvantaged areas, including the long-term viability of rural communities. In such areas, the sustaining of environmental and social public goods may usually be best secured by continuance of the farming and forestry systems that have been pursued in the past, updated to use modern machines or methods where appropriate and supplemented by new economic activity. These systems include mountain pastoralism, small-scale family farming, common grazing, coppicing and agro-forestry, terracing and associated irrigation regimes such as those introduced in Spain by the Moors.

The present regimes of financial support in the CAP and EAFRD form a valuable starting-point for a future regime for such areas, which must be wider in the scope of public goods that it targets, more integrated in the use of environmental, social and economic measures, and used in a more determined way by governments. For example, the Commission has provided for exceptions in order to help farmers in marginal areas, or small producers generally, such as retention of coupled payments for suckler cows, sheep and goatmeat and exemption from hygiene regulations for small food-processing enterprises. But some governments do not operate these exemptions, and there is very limited use by governments of the measure to offer support to semi-subsistence farmers. Future measures should take into account the fact that many stakeholders at local level cannot cope with complicated rules and reporting procedures.



In a future regime, we urge that Member States be expected to pursue (in these disadvantaged areas) strong and integrated local development strategies, implemented through measures which may include:

- direct payments to small farmers;
- agri-environment payments, recognising the high quality of ecosystems, biodiversity and landscapes that have been created, and are maintained, by traditional farming systems;
- support to semi-subsistence farmers, focused on supporting their economic viability, rather than their competitiveness in a pan-European sense;
- exceptions, where appropriate, from the application of EU hygiene and other standards for the production and processing of local products;
- support, through Rural Development Programmes, but also through other public programmes such as those now co-funded through the ERDF and the ESF, for the strengthening and diversification of rural economies, social facilities and infrastructure, and for improving the quality of life of the whole rural community.

We believe that such 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 the diversity and quality of ecosystems and landscapes, and the adverse impact upon the cities of 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.

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