

| **COMMUNITY SPIRIT WINS** | HOW CIVIL SOCIETY SUSTAINS RURAL EUROPE |

Michael Dower and Hannes Lorenzen

LOCAL MOBILISATION AT THE CORE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Dacian Cioloş, European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development



Europe and the European construction are not exclusive matters for the circles of political decision makers or politics for which electoral legitimacy is sufficient. Building a living democracy capable to carry society's ambitions and its development requires more than that. If the European project is currently in a certain impasse, or at least at a turning point, it may be because European political decision-making has yet to find the most inclusive way to win European citizens and keep them involved in a common effort to improve democracy.

For a long while, mobilizing society on issues of rural development, territorial cohesion, and other issues of common interest, has been regarded by some as an idealistic dream. For me, the illusion is to think that we can promote long-term, effective and inclusive public policies, if they are decided in a small circle, by 'illuminated' heads, and implemented top-down, without consulting and involving people at the grassroots. At the same time, it is a false idea to think that people are not interested to participate in the process of construction and implementation of public policies.

For me, this is the most important idea that the PREPARE network has demonstrated: not only that people expect to be listened to, and rightly so, but that they are also seeking opportunities to get involved. It has also shown that the participation of active networks of civil society in public policy helps emerging a social and territorial cohesion which cannot be secured through guidelines, purchased in a tender or imposed by top-down decisions, but is crucial for the success of economic development projects. Local mobilisation is a must for economic development.

In Central and Eastern Europe, the transition to democracy and the societal transformation that came after the fall of the iron curtain coincided with the preparation of these countries for accession to the European Union. And the accession path was mostly built on new public policies, the transfer of the *acquis communautaire* and institutional capacity building. Very few European pre-accession policies had components assuming and encouraging citizens' participation, grassroots approaches, strengthening civil society and mobilising it for concrete economic development projects. The rural development programmes of the Common Agricultural Policy were among these exceptions. But experience shows that it is not enough to have these instruments. We must also find the

appropriate mechanisms and the spirit of people to get involved, to become active, and to get empowered. For me, the PREPARE network has provided such an opportunity, to facilitate the participation of people living in rural areas in the development of these areas and in their own development.

Moreover, the PREPARE network has not only facilitated the organisation of the development actors at the grassroots level, but also created opportunities for East and West to meet, to exchange ideas and experiences, to challenge deep-rooted concepts and beliefs.

This experience is not at all one belonging to the past. Now, more than ever, Europe needs experiences that bind people together, Europe needs to listen (more), to bring its institutions closer to its citizens and vice versa, and to use policy-making as a development tool, breaking down unnecessary bureaucratic burdens. The current reform of the Common Agricultural Policy shows the enormous interest and commitment citizens have shown when it comes to the development of their rural communities, their food and countryside. This would have not been possible without the mobilisation of civil society.

In rural areas, due to how the rural space is organised and works, the personal stories intertwine, connections and social interdependence are more visible than elsewhere. But also problems like demographic change, migration of many

young people to the cities and insufficient public services in villages can have severe consequences when the critical substance for economical and social well-being is under threat. The role of organised rural movements which tie together the various elements of living rural communities is therefore essential. Bringing these movements together across former insurmountable borders across Europe is the merit of the PREPARE initiative.

Looking into the future it seems that further challenges are ahead. PREPARE has moved further South East, including the South Eastern Balkan countries and Turkey and even starts first contacts in the South Mediterranean region. I appreciate this ambition as it follows the attitude of sharing experiences and encouraging civil action and organisation. It is not just the perspective of accession to the European Union, but also the idea of improving relations with our neighbours and encouraging civil society across new external borders which needs attention and support. The PREPARE experience fits this logic of active pioneering - combining consultation and involvement of stakeholders in their own development, cooperation and sharing of experience between East, West and South.

PREPARE's history, its current work and ambition for the future are proof that the European spirit exists and that there is scope and space for extension.

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Hannes Lorenzen is senior advisor in the European Parliament and its Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development. He is also a leading figure in European civil society. He is co-president of Forum Synergies, and in that capacity was co-initiator and chief moderator of the travelling workshop which led to the launch of PREPARE. He chairs the PREPARE Organising Group, and plays similar moderating roles in sustainable agriculture and rural development networks like Forum Synergies and ARC2020.

COMMUNITY SPIRIT WINS

This is the story about achieving the ‘impossible’.

The European project was once seen as ‘impossible’. After the War nobody believed that a European Community would be able to agree upon principles like cohesion and solidarity and to pursue commonly decided policies. But it did agree, and it has worked for 60 years. Furthermore, the project has been attractive enough to embrace 28 member states through peaceful accession, based on unanimously adopted treaties. It is now undergoing serious tension, but that is no reason to doubt that it will survive and thrive.

The crazy proposal. In the same way, the event that took place in 1999 and which prompted the launch of PREPARE was regarded as crazy and impossible. We proposed to hold a traveling workshop between East and West. The European Institutions and most governments were unable to think of ‘traveling’ and ‘workshop’ together. But we wanted to link the separate worlds of rural people and political decision-makers. We wanted them to take a fresh look at rural policies and rural realities in the EU accession process. We got their agreement, and our stubbornness has helped the emergence of a new kind of European community spirit and a new method of collective discovery and commitment in rural Europe.

Traveling workshop. The traveling workshop took place in 1999 through the rural areas of Estonia and Sweden. People, who would otherwise never have met, listened and talked to each other. Local mayors and project leaders, farmers, teachers and entrepreneurs met informally with regional civil servants, members of national parliaments and ministries, and officials from the European Parliament and the European Commission.

60 participants from 18 countries, including 10 EU ‘candidate’ countries, took part. This curious caravan was accompanied by journalists and guided by an international team of moderators. Teams of 10 participants - from old, recently joined, or candidate EU states, and with all levels of expertise - visited more than 30 local projects, farms and rural enterprises. Every evening these teams reported back on what they had seen to a gathering of all participants, plus their local hosts. They commented on the strengths and weaknesses of projects they had visited; and offered ideas on how to improve projects, procedures and management.

The impact on participants. When joining the group, many may have thought they were experts in rural development. But when they went home they carried memories and ideas going far beyond their expertise, having endured an unprecedented reality check of their concepts and beliefs. Putting their feet on the ground, tasting the food and thoughts of the locals, and looking through the eyes of their travel companions had opened new horizons of European networking.

The spirit emerging during these days was like the one we remember from school excursions – the relief of escaping from daily routines; the excitement of unknown territory; the fun, and the challenge, of being for many days close to people from all walks of life. The programme was not leisurely: it offered hard work, new moderation methods, consensus building, art work and singing, and it revealed the wide range of talents among participants.

We understood more deeply the problems arising from the abrupt political changes in the Central and Eastern European countries. We saw opportunities for new relations between people working in government and in non-government organisations. The non-government participants often found that they were better informed than their own governments about the EU's pre-accession programmes. This gave them confidence in their demand to be included in stakeholder consultation, programming or monitoring. The positive energy and encouraging new friendships were remarkable.

PREPARE. This book describes how this traveling workshop led to the creation of the PREPARE partnership and programme, building upon the method and the spirit of the 1999 event. The aim of the programme has been two-fold. First, we support the strengthening of civil society in the rural areas in the accession countries, many of which have joined the EU since we started our work, and in the neighbouring countries of the European Union. Second, we promote exchange of ideas and experience between all who are in-

involved in rural development in those countries and in other EU states, and we foster partnership between civil society and public authorities in the processes of rural development.

The book is a collective memory of common achievements and a repertoire of future opportunities. Six chapters describe the 1999 traveling workshop and the creation of PREPARE; the activities of PREPARE and the challenges we have faced; our links to the LEADER programme; the partnerships that we have formed; our outreach into a succession of countries; and something of our vision for the future. Each chapter offers a number of interviews, then a reflection on the theme by the editors.

Looking back over the remarkable experience of the last 13 years, and forward to a continuing and expanding activity, I express warm thanks to the PREPARE partners, and their representatives on the Organising Group; to our three successive coordinators Michael Dower, Urszula Budzich-Szukała and Goran Šoster; and to all our members and supporters who have made this extraordinary experience possible.

PREPARE would not exist without the generous support of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, which has not only provided us with continued financial support for managing the network, but also guided us to readjust and focus our activities according to new challenges and needs. We offer them our profound thanks. We are grateful also for financial and in-kind support of many other organizations.

Chapter 1 / Pioneers

This chapter describes, through the voices of five people who were in at the beginning, how the traveling workshop in 1999 led to the launch of PREPARE.

'PREPARE SHOULD STAY THE FORE-RUNNER OF POPULAR MOVEMENTS IN THE EAST'



Staffan Bond is one of the founders of 'All Sweden shall live – Hela Sverige ska leva (HSSL)', the village movement in rural Sweden, which was launched in the 1980s. HSSL has become a guiding example for rural movements throughout Europe. He is today Manager of HSSL, which gathers almost five thousand local community groups. HSSL was one of the hosts of the 1999 traveling workshop.

All Sweden shall live! - sounds as if only part of Sweden was alive when you created the village movement. What went wrong at that time?

I was a civil servant at the Swedish government, working for the 'Delegation for sparsely populated areas', as we called most

of our rural regions. We were aware that our rural policies were not efficient enough and that new efforts were needed. The Council of Europe had been running a campaign for cultural protection in towns and cities and taken the initiative to preserve also our rural culture and heritage. We thought it was a good idea, but stressed that the campaign should also promote local mobilisation and economic development.

You call your movement 'popular movement'. Were rural initiatives unpopular at that time? Were politicians not interested in what happened outside the cities?

Yes, in a sense there was little understanding at government level of the need for action in the rural areas, except in agriculture and forestry. Even worse, there was not much belief in the Swedish administration that rural people could do a lot themselves. HSSL has drawn attention to the potential of rural life and the capacity of people to organise themselves. The aim of the Swedish Village Movement is to vitalise democracy, strengthen economy and improve living conditions all over rural Sweden.

You spread this view also in the Baltic countries and other newcomers in the EU. In 1989 you already had contacts with people in the Estonian administration and you supported the launching of KODUKANT, the Estonian village movement. Did you do that as an official of the Swedish government or as a village mover?

That is difficult to separate. The official contacts were a very powerful starting-point. The key motive was to establish contacts through the ministries and to build trust. I met Mikk Sarv who was an official in Rapla County, Estonia. Like me, he had one foot in the administration and one foot in the village movement. At that time, it was a kind of underground work with village activists who wanted to re-establish their local culture, village schools, music and traditions and so on. We immediately knew what was needed – more communication between the local people and with their governments and administrations.

The Swedish development agency SIDA has spent quite some money in Estonia and other Central and East European countries in rural development projects. Did HSSL pave the way for support of KODUKANT?

Yes, HSSL and the University of Agriculture in Sweden initiated a programme for rural Estonia, financed by SIDA“... a programme for rural Estonia, financed by SIDA, because the conditions for large-scale EU funding were not yet in place. But money was not decisive. More important was building of trust. One important thing was good personal relations between the governor of Jönköping and the governor of Raplamaa: these two provinces in Sweden and Estonia started exchange visits and cooperation. We were able to show to our Estonian counterparts that government can help to start things, but that voluntary work in every village is needed in order to make a movement.

You were among the pioneers of PREPARE, in that you co-organised the first PREPARE traveling workshop in Estonia and Sweden. In many new member states, rural parliaments are organised following the Swedish example. How come that you have so successfully exported the HSSL model to the East?

I believe that it was not exported: it was somehow in the air and people have grasped it. The way people take their destiny into their hands is very different in every country. Political and cultural barriers are very different too. Each time PREPARE has moved on from one accession country to another, we have learned a lot. The process has really developed the way I hoped it would go. PREPARE is and should remain the fore-runner of rural and popular movements in the new neighbour and member states.

“ At that time, it was a kind of underground work with village activists who wanted to re-establish their local culture, village schools, music and traditions and so on. We immediately knew what was needed – more communication. ”



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Swedish Regional Policy Minister
visiting Swedish Rural Parliament 2010

“The EU and its member governments are too much fixed on growth and business. This is needed in rural areas but is only part of the policies that we need. There is too little trust in people’s capacity to manage their rural areas themselves.”

President of Estonia Mr Toomas Hendrik Ilves and chair of the board Kodukant Mrs Liina Saar at Estonian Rural Parliament 2009

You have lately been critical about the ‘mainstreaming’ of the EU LEADER programme. Finland and Sweden are seen as positive examples of lively Local Action Groups and good participation. What is wrong about LEADER?

I think LEADER still is one of the most successful EU initiatives, and it has mobilised people to cooperate and create partnerships from the bottom-up. It still partly works in that way, but it has become too bureaucratic and business-orientated. LEADER should better support the voluntary actions which help to build strong and sustainable local communities. Capacity building among small businesses is very important, but is not the only task for LEADER. Much depends on how communities and municipalities get along with one another. If LEADER does not get closer again to what really moves people, we are going to lose the soul of it.



How should EU rural policies support rural movements in the future?

The EU and its member governments are too much fixed on growth and business. This is needed in rural areas but is only part of the policies that we need. There is too little trust in people’s capacity to manage their rural areas themselves. What we need is seed money for people to organise and to build their capacity for running their own projects. Then the project money must be handled in a less bureaucratic way, not putting too much administrative burden on the local communities. It is very important to include and assist sparsely populated and peripheral parts of our societies. Rural policies, with LEADER as an important instrument, should help to build a structure for rural development, in which the local communities, the first level of society, have a key role. The policies should also better support the national rural movements and the pan-European rural networks within the ‘social’ sphere. The diversity of solutions that we ourselves find in each village is crucial for local development and should be better supported by the EU.

'WE HAVE TO HELP PEOPLE FROM GOVERNMENTS AND AGENCIES TO MEET WITH THE VILLAGE PEOPLE IN ORDER TO IMPROVE RURAL POLICIES AND RURAL LIFE.'



Kjell Roger Karlsson has worked for many years as a civil servant on regional and rural development programmes in Sweden. Before the bottom-up approach became popular, he introduced the concept in the

1970s, before the bottom-up approach became popular, he introduced the concept of animating civil society organisations. He led the introduction of LEADER in Sweden, and helped with capacity-building of European rural organisations on behalf of 'All Sweden Shall Live'. Today he is actively involved in rural development projects in Albania and other Balkan countries.

In 1999, you were part of a bunch of people with a crazy idea to organise a traveling workshop in the countryside of Estonia and Sweden, bringing local people together with regional administration, national ministries and EU officials. You seem to be a serious person, why did you promote it?

Experience from 'All Sweden Shall Live' had already been used to build up Kodukant, the village movement in Estonia.

I thought we should go on to other countries in Central and Eastern Europe to share our ideas which work. Hannes Lorenzen offered this crazy idea of a traveling workshop to bring people together from those countries. I said, 'Let's do it, if we can raise the money'. What we got from the national ministries was not enough, and the European Commission was hesitating. I remember the day when we put our plans for that workshop into the paper bin, and then the same afternoon came a phone call from Margret Schelling of the research unit at the European Parliament to say we could go ahead with planning it. Suddenly, the whole thing turned around. When the Commission's TAIEX unit heard that the Parliament would go for it, they also agreed to put in funds. Then the Swedish foreign ministry did the same, and Mikk Sarv from Estonia got his minister of agriculture to support us. Estonia was still a candidate country, Sweden had just joined the EU, and nobody had heard of something like a 'traveling workshop'; but it happened.

You had much of the workload to get it organised in a very short time after that.

It looked impossible to get a hundred people together from the EU and accession countries within weeks. We gathered all our contact addresses and sent e-mails to people in 20 countries, many of whom we did not really know. We got a lot of quick and positive replies. People in ministries, regional agencies, and local projects were curious. The biggest problems were the visas: to get them for so many

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On the spot Message to the media

“I remember the art session, people in waste bags, painting, making sculptures, poems, using all their senses and talents to express what they saw and felt, far beyond their daily routine: never before or after have I seen such creativity.”

people in such a short time seemed impossible. We used all our contacts – and it worked. It was fantastic!

What was special about the Estonian/Sweden traveling workshop?

It was the mixture of people from so many different countries, professional and cultural backgrounds, levels of responsibilities, of age and of experiences. They were all together traveling hundreds of kilometres, visiting projects, talking, eating, analysing, discussing, yes dancing and singing together in the evenings. I remember the art session, people in waste bags, painting, making sculptures, poems, using all their senses and talents to express what they saw and felt, far beyond their daily routine: never before or after have I seen such creativity.

Even Kaj Mortensen, the representative of the European Commission, took part.

Yes, and I remember he was impressed. He came as a typical agricultural expert explaining everything which was not possible. I believe we put some strange seeds in his mind. At the workshop, he said he could not promise anything concerning participation of civil society in rural development planning. But when he was back in Brussels he supported the next PREPARE traveling workshop in Hungary and the PREPARE Gathering in the Czech Republic and the following ones. He has become a friend of PREPARE's work and is himself now working as a consultant in South East Europe, since he retired.

Did the workshop also change something in your life?

It did. I was convinced that we would have to help people from governments and agencies, the so-called formal sector, to meet with the village people in order to improve rural policies and rural life. It was contagious. This concept of traveling together, bringing our food from across Europe and sharing it - as we did in the Forum Synergies workshop in Portugal with Alberto Melo - that was convincing. I then worked with Jela Trvdonova in Slovakia with the EU PHARE program and in Albania with Mangalina Cane with the support of the development agency SIDA. I am always trying to bring the local people together with government people. They hardly talk to each other, let alone understand what are the concerns of the other side. What has changed is that I see it is worth trying again and again to help people to talk to each other, even in chaotic or totally blocked circumstances.

So you would recommend the young generation – to be as crazy as possible?

Well I don't know whether we should give any advice to the next generation. We have given the best examples we could, and they will find out by themselves what is worth following up and what is not. We might tell our stories if they want to hear them.

Do you remember the story by Winnie the Pooh's author A.A. Milne? The girl in the tale 'Now We Are Six' sang the following song when she had her 6th birthday: 'When I was one, I had just begun. When I was two, I was nearly new. When I was three, I was hardly me. When I was four, I was not much more. When I was five, I was just alive. But now I am six, I'm as clever as clever, So I think I'll be six for ever and ever.'



Michael Fischer of German Radio interviewing young Estonian entrepreneur during the traveling workshop

YOU MIGHT TRY TO GET A FEW MORE OFFICIALS OUT OF THEIR OFFICES FOR A REALITY CHECK.'



Mikk Sarv was a pioneer of KODUKANT, the Estonian village movement. He is a former official of Rapla county administration and former president of Forum Synergies. Today he works as a freelance journalist for TV and radio programmes and as a trainer for 'open space' technology.

You opened and closed the ninth Estonian Rural Parliament in Roosta singing – not speaking – to the audience, to express your good wishes and your thanks. In 1998, when an earlier event, the 'Sustainable Mystery Tour' (see box page 18) started in Estonia, you played the flute to get people's attention. Do you think singing and music are important for good rural politics?

Yes, they are. When we sing, we touch our hearts and we are connected with our cultural heritage. In politics, there is the risk that official language becomes empty with time. Also, much is written but little is really said about our realities. Singing and making music are our reality check – whether we are in good relations with our communities, our values and our roots.

“When we sing, we touch our hearts and we are connected with our cultural heritage. In politics, there is the risk that official language becomes empty with time.”

The traveling workshop through Estonia and Sweden in 1999 was also a kind of reality check for national and EU politicians, and it became the cradle of the PREPARE network. Was it also the starting-point of KODUKANT's success story in your own country?

It was a very moving period indeed. Before all these people came from so many European counties, we had many hopes and fears at the same time – hopes that we would manage the challenge of the rural development programme and convince

International workshop at Estonian Rural Parliament 2009



our own and EU politicians that we were on the right track as village movement; fears that we might not be seen as success stories and that our methods might not work. Putting grassroots people and high-ranking EU and national ministry people in one working group and making them work together in a mode of consensus was a crazy idea: also the art session was quite a mysterious thing for the officials. I still remember the preparatory negotiations with Mr. Huber from DG Agriculture, and the position of defence that Kaj Mortensen got in when we had the so-called 'fishbowl' session – [see Box page 17](#). All in all, it was a great success – but we also took a huge risk.

You must have been used to taking risks. You worked at the regional county administration at that time, you worked with the village movement, you made a film on the event and you had close relations – official and unofficial – with the government and village movement in Sweden. What is exciting about 'doing the splits' between being an official and a grassroots person at the same time?

It is not just exciting: it is a passion to do things which need to be done, whether as an official or as a citizen. For me the key word is trust. When I started in Rapla county administration, I remember there was no trust on either side. Local people were angry that the administration was not taking notice of the changes they wanted and needed in the villages. The officials said these locals were only beer drinkers, unable to make plans or write reports. I was fed up with this non-communication, that's why I worked where something needed to be



Decision-makers at rural reality check, Czech Republic

done on both sides. My grandfather did the same thing: he was a professor at Tartu University, and he still kept very close relations with his home village and their people.

You are now a freelance trainer in good communication and capacity building and a freelance journalist. Have you given up on public administration and governmental work?

No, I am still in good relations with people in official capacities. But I am now concentrating on supporting people in discovering their own ideas and organising themselves. At my workshop on Historic Heritage, here at the Estonian Rural Parliament, we have not talked about history but about our future. We concluded that it is important that a family eats together once a day, that we find out where the food comes

from, that we use our own hands for something other than just writing, and that we rediscover our music and literature as a source of energy for changes which need to come. But I still believe it is important to stay in touch with the political world as we do in KODUKANT and PREPARE. We know the language and the roads through bureaucracy, and we can translate official language into common sense. We have built our networks which cross the borders ... and that is also building trust.

What should PREPARE do in the future?

PREPARE should strengthen its network and continue encouraging people in new neighbour and accession countries to get organised from the bottom-up. Your work gave us and many other people the hope that our dreams could come true. You should continue to do that. Your networks helped us to discover other parts of rural Europe and to come ourselves into a position of training people. We now know how to prepare development plans, even when official recognition and money is still far away. PREPARE is an example how to be well rooted in the villages and their movements but also in ministries and administrations. You might try to get a few more officials out of their offices for a reality check in the countryside and a few more young people into the network to refresh the assembly of shiny bald heads!

Fishbowl Session

This moderation tool helps participants in a seminar to move from general agreements to concrete individual commitments. The format of a fishbowl session is a table, round which a small number of key players negotiate how problems or conflicting interests can be solved and who then takes responsibility to make necessary action or change happen. Other participants of the seminar can intervene in the negotiations of the panel at any time, under the condition that they offer help in making the agreed actions happen.

Sustainable Mystery Tour

A precursor to the Traveling Workshop of 1999 was the 'Sustainable Mystery Tour', organised in 1998 by Forum Synergies. This was a traveling exhibition from Estonia across many EU member states and accession countries to Portugal, including cultural events and public debates as well as visits to the selected local success-stories. In view of the upcoming reform of the European Common Agriculture Policy the aim was to gather clear messages from the local people what kind of policies they needed to improve the life in the countryside.

The 'Sustainable Mystery Tour' was supported by local mayors, the European Commission's DG Agriculture and many national ministries of agriculture. Participants in the tour were invited by the European Parliament and the European Commission to present their 'messages from the countryside' at the end of the tour to political decision-makers in Brussels.

IT WAS THE MIXTURE OF DOWN-TO-EARTH IDEAS AND VERY HIGH AMBITION TO BE INNOVATIVE WHICH PRODUCED THIS HIGH LEVEL OF ENERGY!



Margret Schelling is a former European Parliament official and mediator based in Luxembourg. As representative of the General Directorate Research of the European Parliament, she participated in the traveling workshop in Estonia and Sweden in 1999

and was responsible for publication and dissemination of the Parliament's report on that workshop, 'Creating Partnerships for Pre-Accession'.

For many years you were responsible for studies and background research as support for members of the European Parliament. A 'traveling workshop', as organised in 1999, was not really a routine format at that time. What was different?

Almost everything! We usually asked consultants or university professors to carry out expert studies or to hold a lecture at hearings of competent Parliamentary Committees. Instead, we supported an initiative of civil society and civil servants of EU institutions to visit concerned countries and to gather impressions of rural development problems on the spot. That was a real adventure. I would call it 'politics come to life'. Putting our feet on the ground, and exchanging experiences from very different levels of political responsibilities with local projects, was the fascinating 'reality check' that we were able to do. That was no top-down approach, telling people what to do. It was about listening, mutual respect and recognition which emerged from that workshop.

The organisation and logistics were quite a challenge though.

Why that? I do not remember any problems: on the contrary, I was impressed how skilfully the moderators guided people from so extremely different cultural and political backgrounds

though a sometimes very tiring and demanding programme. We were sharing an intensive experience for a whole week. Every working group was well prepared for their visits to local projects, and every evening they delivered lively reports to the plenary gatherings. It was the mixture of down-to-earth ideas and very high ambition to be innovative which produced this high level of energy. It was one of my most precious professional experiences.

Your ‘hierarchy’ was perhaps not convinced when the idea was first proposed.

Indeed this experiment was first observed with a lot of scepticism. But we were supported by the Chair of the Agricultural Committee at that time, and we could point to the interest in other European institutions like the Commission and national ministries. The fact that our official report on the traveling workshop was quite popular even years after the workshop showed us that it was worth taking the risk.

In this time of crisis of the European project, would you today recommend to the European Institutions to do more such ‘reality checks’?

PREPARE would not have become a success story, had you not continued reaching out to the mind and heart of the people. To me the secret was that people were picked up where they stood. They were listened to and empowered to utter their needs and desires. This was greatly helped by a multi-sensory

approach, mobilising all the participants’ senses and talents, not only talking, but listening, traveling, exploring, tasting, singing, even doing art sessions together or delivering reports in rhymes – [see box for Limericks](#). Everything was about discovering new dimensions of rural development.

You left the European Parliament a couple of years ago and have started a career as mediator. That’s quite a change.

My interest in mediation was sparked during the traveling workshop. I was deeply impressed by the skills of the moderators who managed to create trust and deep involvement among people from so many different historical and cultural backgrounds in a very sensitive and enjoyable way. I wanted to know how their magic worked. Many years later, while cooperating with Luxembourg University to create a European Studies programme, I discovered that they offered studies in mediation. I now have a Masters degree in Mediation and am looking for new ways to use these skills.



“The fact that our official report on the traveling workshop was quite popular even years after the workshop showed us that it was worth taking the risk.”

Estonian Rural Parliament celebrating the living village made from bread and vegetables



(1) Generations moving together
 (2) We love to travel by bus
 (3) Gathering in fresh air



Limericks - 'delivering reports in Rhymes'

One of the places that we visited in Estonia was the Saida Farm Cooperative, which took over some of the farm buildings and 'free' land of a former collective farm. They found they were unable to compete on grain prices with farms in the Ukraine (who sell grain by the train-load) or with long-life meat or other products from western producers. So they settled on a product – soft organic cheese, with a short shelf life – for which they can find a market. Our report included the following limericks:

A wonderful thing is 'free' land:
 you can cultivate it out of hand.
 Should the owner appear,
 you just move all your gear
 and carry on just as you planned.

There was a farm boss from Ukraine
 who found he'd a surplus of grain:
 to put things in order,
 he went to the border
 and sold the Estonians a train.

Now Europe's capitalist ways
 put Estonian farms in a daze,
 but we market with ease
 our organic soft cheese
 with a shelf life of only three days.

The company Chairman, Johan,
 a cheerful, pragmatical man,
 said 'Yes, there are rules
 but you know we're not fools:
 we just do the best that we can'.

On our last day in Sweden, we had to get up at 4am to travel by bus to the airport. Our mood is expressed in this rhyme ...

No happier people than us:
 we love to travel by bus
 at the earliest hours
 'midst the birds and the flowers,
 so please do not make any fuss.

THE LAUNCH OF PREPARE



Michael Dower attended the traveling workshop in 1999 in his capacity as Secretary-General of ECOVAST, the European Council for the Village and Small Town. He edited the report on the workshop which was published by the European Parliament. He was one of the group who worked together, after the traveling workshop, to initiate a programme proposed in the report. He describes below the launch of this programme, in the form of the PREPARE Partnership, of which he was the first Coordinator from 2000 to 2006.

The interviews with Staffan Bond, Kjell-Roger Karlsson and Mikko Sarv show that active civil society movements already existed in Sweden and in Estonia before 1999. The Popular Movements Council in Sweden had developed ‘from the bottom up’ through the reaction of people in villages to the prospect of social and economic decline and the perceived indifference of government to this decline. KODUKANT in Estonia had emerged in the early 1990s, in response to the abrupt rural decline which followed independence: its early activity was supported by the Swedish movement. The Swedish experience also served to stimulate the creation of the Hungarian Rural Parliament.

Those who joined the traveling workshop, from countries in Central and Eastern Europe which aspired to join the European Union, could see with their own eyes the active and enthusiastic rural people in Estonia and Sweden. They grasped the importance of communal action at the village level, and of the mutual support and collective strength which village action groups gained through regional and national associations. They saw the practical results of locally initiated action – schools, village halls, farm shops, saw-mills, jazz festivals. They understood that national movements, like those in Sweden and Estonia, can give people in rural areas a strong collective voice and can (with time and effort) gain the confidence of government and become trusted partners.

It was clear from their reaction that the workshop participants ‘got the message’. They saw the relevance of action by the people to their own countries, many of which were still in the process of emerging from totalitarian regimes. In Staffan Bond’s words, the ‘idea was in the air’.

Report on the traveling workshop. The immediate sequel to the workshop was the publication by the European Parliament of an official report, ‘Creating partnerships for pre-accession’. As Margaret Schelling states, this report attracted much interest. It concluded with a recommendation that:

‘Governments of the pre-accession countries ought to adopt an approach of full partnership with local populations, NGOs and other actors in their rural development programmes; and to

“They understood that national movements, like those in Sweden and Estonia, can give people in rural areas a strong collective voice and can (with time and effort) gain the confidence of government and become trusted partners.”

develop those programmes in a way that would encourage the strengthening of civil society.'

The report stated that the non-government organisations which co-organised the workshop 'expect to submit a proposal



*Estonian Rural Parliament Sharing food
in the forest*

to the governments of the pre-accession countries and others', with the aim to 'help the pre-accession countries ... to create strong partnerships between governments, non-government organisations and people in the process of rural development'.

The launch of PREPARE. So, the voluntary bodies which together initiated the workshop – Forum Synergies, ECOVAST, Swedish Popular Movements Council, the Federation of Swedish Rural Economy and Agriculture Societies, KODUKANT and the Hungarian Rural Parliament – came together in 2000 to plan a programme to promote the strengthening of civil society in the pre-accession countries of Central Europe. The target countries were Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania. Of these, only Hungary had a national rural network, the Hungarian Rural Parliament.

We started to assemble a range of contacts in the target countries, in addition to those who had attended the workshop, and to sound out potential funding bodies. We adopted the name **PREPARE – Pre-accession Partnership for Rural Europe**, and the aim 'to strengthen civil society and to promote exchange in rural development'. By the end of 2000, we concluded that the best chance of funding was from American foundations who are committed to promoting democracy and open society in the former communist countries.

Funding. We shaped an ambitious programme and budget, and submitted this to four American foundations – Ford

Foundation, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, German Marshall Fund, and Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. The first three turned us down. Mott expressed strong interest, for the reasons which is stated in the interview with their Grants Officer Vera Dakova (see page 90). They asked for proof that we had a significant network of civil society contacts in the target countries, as a starting-point for efforts to strengthen civil society there. We provided that proof, and Mott approved a two-year grant of \$200,000. This has proved to be the first of four grants from Mott, which provide the crucial base funding for PREPARE, supplemented by grants and in-kind contributions from many other organisations.

Looking back over the 13-year period since PREPARE was launched, one may see the PREPARE programme as a progressive process, enlisting an ever wider network of people, growing in geographical scope, helping to create an ever stronger civil society and a deeper commitment to democracy in the countries that are involved. Through networking and events – notably PREPARE Gatherings and Traveling Workshops – we have made contact with people in both civil society and government in a widening array of countries; brought them into lively exchange of ideas about the well-being of rural areas; helped them to perceive the potential for positive action; supported them in forming national rural movements; and brought these movements into the evolving PREPARE partnership.

The outcome of this process, to date, has been the creation or recognition of national rural movements in Slovakia, Poland, Slovenia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Serbia and Macedonia, all of which have become partners in PREPARE; a widening network of contacts in the neighbouring countries of the EU; and a rolling programme of annual events which bring together people from all these countries. We continue to follow the moving magnetic field of new EU neighbours. In recent years, our focus has been on the countries of South Eastern Europe, but we have also established new contacts in Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Turkey. Most recently rural organisations in the southern Mediterranean region have expressed interest in sharing experience and collaboration with PREPARE.

PREPARE partners. The PREPARE programme is managed jointly by the partners, who currently number 15 – two pan-European organisations, Forum Synergies and ECOVAST, and the national rural movements or forums of Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden. As new national movements emerge in the accession or neighbour countries where PREPARE is working, they may be invited to join the partnership. Each partner is represented on the PREPARE Organizing Group, which meets regularly in different countries and is supported by a part-time Coordinator. Annex 2 provides a description of each of the partners.

“In recent years, our focus has been on the countries of South Eastern Europe, but we have also established new contacts in Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Turkey.”

Chapter 2 / Challenges

This chapter describes, through the voices of four people, the main activities of PREPARE, and the challenges that we have faced and continue to face.

'PREPARE'S GREATEST SUPPORT TO US IN THE EARLY STAGES WAS TO MAKE US WORK!'



Ryszard Kamiński is President of the Board of the Polish Rural Forum (Forum Aktywizacji Obszarów Wiejskich, FAOW).

You have been involved in the creation of the Polish Rural Forum from the beginning. What role did PREPARE play in that process?

PREPARE's role was essential. Already in the 1990s, rural organisations in Poland were interested in establishing some sort of national structure, but for some years it did not go beyond occasional meetings and exchange of information. With the visit of PREPARE representatives to Poland in 2002 and information about the experience of national rural move-

ments in other countries (e.g. Sweden, Finland, Hungary), the determination of rural NGOs in Poland to set up their own network was strengthened. The Polish Rural Forum was created as an informal structure in 2002, and in 2005 as a legal entity, a 'Union of associations' under Polish law.

What support did PREPARE offer?

It might seem strange, but the greatest support in the early stages was to make us work! The Forum was asked to organise three traveling workshops for the PREPARE Gathering in 2003. This meant that we had to receive over 50 participants from Sweden, Finland, UK, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Germany, Czech Republic etc., and we had to show them activities and projects on their way to the Gathering, which took place in Pocuvadlo in Slovakia. In this way, we managed to identify many strong rural actors and to learn about interesting projects being implemented in different parts of our own country. Also, in responding to questions from our visitors, we learnt to look at our countryside from a new perspective. This experience was of great importance in building the foundations of our network.

We also appreciated very much the opportunities to establish contacts with rural communities in other parts of the EU, to find similarities and differences with other candidate countries (remember that Poland and other CEE countries were still in the accession process at that time!), and to learn about policy debates that were going on at the European

level. A PREPARE representative took part in some of our first meetings, providing advice and helping us to establish our position with the Ministry of Agriculture. We also had visitors from other PREPARE partners, for example a representative of KODUKANT took part in the initial discussions about setting up the Polish Rural Forum, and this experience had a very positive effect on our organisation.

How has the situation changed since the Polish Rural Forum was created?

We have been an active member of PREPARE from the very beginning. In the early period we were mainly learning from the others, but quite soon we were able to share our own knowledge with less experienced partners. The lessons learnt by us turned out to be of interest to rural communities elsewhere, for example in Turkey, Ukraine and the western Balkan countries. In 2011, we were asked by the Serbian Rural Network – which has since become also a partner in PREPARE – to share with them our experiences on such themes as local products, LEADER and networking, through a capacity building project financed by the Serbian government.

The Polish countryside has changed as well in the course of these ten years. In the beginning our key task was to make sure that civil society in rural areas was animated and supported, so we undertook many activities aiming to help in the creation and training of rural organisations. This process

is still going on, for example in a new Rural Forum project financed by the European Social Fund, focused on providing information and advice to small rural NGOs. But we are now also actively involved in the policy debate, making sure that the voice of rural communities is heard at regional, national and European level. We also carry out awareness raising, reminding people in the cities that rural development is not only about agriculture and that rural areas have much to offer to urban communities.

LEADER has from the beginning been a very important theme for the Polish Rural Forum, and also for PREPARE. Is it still the case?

Very much so. One of the first actions undertaken by the Polish Rural Forum was to write a letter, signed by all the

Panel discussion at PREPARE gathering in Przemysl, Poland 2007



PREPARE Gatherings

Each year, PREPARE organises a 'Gathering' of up to 100 people from about 20 countries, with the aim to stimulate thinking about the role of civil society in rural Europe and to strengthen the informal European network. Participants come from countries of PREPARE partners and from accession states or neighbour countries, the European Commission and other key allies. Each Gathering has a major theme.

It is usually preceded by traveling workshops within the host country, and also sometimes within neighbouring countries..

*The **PREPARE Gathering in Slovakia in October 2003** was a remarkable 'family' event. 95 people from 17 countries converged on the village of Pocuvadlo in the forested hills of central Slovakia. Of this total, over 70 took part in the 6 traveling workshops, lasting two or three days before they reached Slovakia. Each traveling workshop came from a different starting-point – one from Budapest, one from Prague, one from Bucharest, one from Ljubljana, two from Warsaw. Each group was of mixed nationality. En route to Pocuvadlo, they visited local action groups, rural enterprises and village communities, picking up new friends and ideas on the way. In Pocuvadlo, the three-day Gathering included a first day of introductions and of reports on the traveling workshops, followed by general discussion; a second day of workshops, on subjects chosen by the participants, plus an afternoon visit to the World Heritage town of Banska Stiavnica; and a final day of presentations and discussion about the PREPARE programme and about what the participants would like to do in their own countries or more widely in Europe. The whole event was a remarkable feat of organization, and offered a strong feeling of fellowship among people from different countries.*

active rural NGOs of that time, requesting the Polish government and the European Commission to agree that LEADER could be applied in the New Member States right from accession. Originally, the LEADER approach was considered 'too complicated' for these countries. However, in late 2002, shortly after the Rural Forum wrote this letter (what a surprising coincidence!), the European Commission agreed that governments of the new member states could choose a 'LEADER-type measure' in their Operational Programmes, and thus allow their rural communities to experiment with the LEADER approach right from the beginning.

Most of these countries, including Poland, decided to benefit from that opportunity. Now we have in Poland a strong and thriving LEADER community, with about 340 Local Action Groups, active LEADER networks in all regions and participation of LAG representatives in various advisory bodies to ensure that the LEADER point of view is taken into account. All this was to a large extent initiated and supported by the Polish Rural Forum. Most of the 80 organisations that are core members of the Forum are involved in the LEADER approach one way or another. The Forum is at present supporting the establishment of a national representation of LEADER groups. Now we have contact with LEADER groups and networks across the EU; we have access to information about policy discussions at EU level; and we are recognised at the national as well as local level in Poland. To a large extent we owe it to PREPARE!

'OVER TIME, THE RELATIONS BETWEEN AUTHORITIES, PRIVATE SECTOR AND CIVIL SOCIETY WILL BECOME STRONGER AND THE TRUST IN ONE ANOTHER WILL GROW.'



Viviana Vasile is Team Leader in the National Rural Development Network of Romania. She was previously Head of the Rural Development Department in the Romanian Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

What is your perception of the strength of civil society organisation and their role in rural life, in Romania?

Civil society in rural Romania is at the very beginning. We hear the sounds of enthusiastic people who are very committed to what they believe is good for rural communities: but these sounds are not yet an articulated voice and cannot be easily heard. More than 20 years after our new society began, rural civil society somehow reflects our rural life – unstructured, bipolar, brilliant with individual values but colourless with community ones.

Non-government organisations are very important. They can link communities and authorities: they can trigger change, both in attitude, through advocacy on issues such

as protecting the environment, and in providing public services. In Romania, they are particularly needed in rural areas, because people living in villages have greater needs than those in cities. In rural areas, there are few clinics; there are no day centres where children can spend their time creatively; many people can get no help in finding a job or training or information about state support for starting up small businesses.

However, a 2010 report by the Civil Society Development Foundation showed that only about 13% of Romania's NGOs are registered and work in rural areas. It can be difficult to register an NGO in a rural area, because it involves going to a public notary and to the court. NGOs need accountants and other experts, who tend to be based in towns where they can earn more and find better facilities. So, NGOs who are active in rural areas should be valued even more, because they manage to help people to improve their lives despite difficulties in financing their activity and in cooperating with authorities.

How does this relate to the political change in your country since 1989?

More than twenty years ago, there was no civil society in Romania. The collapse of communism and then accession to the EU allowed the emergence of NGOs. They have begun to be heard, though authorities sometimes do not seem to listen to them or understand their potential as partners. I believe this is about to change. In recent years, local partnerships between authorities, the business sector and NGOs

“More than 20 years after our new society began, rural civil society somehow reflects our rural life - unstructured, bipolar, brilliant with individual values but colourless with community ones.”

Formal national and European Rural Networks

Each member state of the EU is required by the Rural Development Regulation to create a formal National Rural Network, to assist the implementation of its Rural Development Programme by processes of information, training and exchange.

The Network brings together representatives of all the main actors in rural development, including local authorities, farming unions, non-government organisations in the social and environmental field, trade unions, research institutes etc. At European level, the European Commission creates and funds the European Network for Rural Development, which promotes exchanges between the 27 National Rural Networks

have been set up in rural areas, with funding through the Rural Development Programme. Many of these partnerships were not built because the parties saw the value of cooperating, but because they wanted to access EU funding through the RDP. But I believe that this exercise in working together will strengthen the involvement of rural communities in decisions about their own well-being. Over time, the relations between authorities, private sector and civil society will become stronger and the trust in one another will grow.

How are these civil organisations represented within your National Rural Development Network?

What opportunities do you provide to civil society organisations (a) to work together on common interests and projects, and (b) to relate to national government in the shaping and implementing of rural development policy?

The National Rural Development Network began to function in 2012. It now has over 1,500 members, of which about 10% are NGOs. The Network offers its members the chance to meet each other, to share experiences and plans, to look for partners to develop joint projects: thus people in rural areas can get information that they did not previously have. The members can present their activities to each other. For example, CARITAS described its training projects for farmers, including on-the-job experience abroad. PACT supports the setting up of farmers' associations, voluntary work among young people, community-based tourism and the creation of community foundations.



Romania, local sheep fair 2007

There are NGOs supporting Roma communities, such as PAKIV which supports entrepreneurship. The ADEPT Foundation is active in Transylvania, supporting small farmers and traditional agricultural practices, beneficial for preserving biodiversity. Active also are environmental organisations, like the Romanian Ornithological Society, which is working successfully with authorities in drafting agri-environment schemes, which help to sustain high nature value landscapes and to protect species of birds and butterflies.

What do you hope to achieve through your Network?

We hope to intensify the dialogue between civil society and the authorities, leading to a more dynamic and substantial participation of NGOs in designing rural development policies. Participation in our seminars and working groups enables NGOs to advise on the needs of people who live in rural areas, using

their expertise and experience. We submit to the authorities the conclusions of such debates and the recommendations of civil society from rural areas. We promote the idea of setting up producers' cooperatives in rural areas, which could offer real opportunities to small farmers, small producers and craftsmen. We believe that NGOs can help in this process. At present, unlike many other European countries, Romania has a weak presence of farmers' associations. Agricultural land is divided into small plots, and producers are often reluctant to form groups, remembering the days of communist cooperatives. With the support of civil society, we aim to show the benefits of forming associations and to find the best solutions to stimulate their creation.

From what you know of the activities of PREPARE, do you think that PREPARE could help in the evolution of effective partnerships between government, civil society and other stakeholders towards the well-being of rural areas in Romania?

I think that PREPARE could contribute to the strengthening of partnerships between authorities and civil society in Romania, by offering concrete examples from other countries which show the benefits of working together in that way, but also the difficulties encountered and the way they were overcome. Shared experiences could lead to new ideas in people's minds: people could adapt a model to fit their own reality. It is very useful to find out from others how their pattern of cooperation was drafted and how they managed such partnerships.

We would like our Network to become a member of PREPARE. We know that the PREPARE partners are mainly networks set up within the civil society of the countries represented. Our Network includes other entities, such as local authorities and the private sector, but we would like to work together with the civil society networks in PREPARE. In this way, civil society in Romania's rural areas will benefit from a transfer of know-how and expertise, and this will help strengthen the role of NGOs in shaping development policies for Romania's villages.

Romania subsistence farming



National rural movements

National rural movements are in operation in over 20 European countries. They are rooted in civil society, and act – in each country – as a network and voice for rural areas and for the many civil organisations working for rural development. They work at village, regional, national and international levels and cooperate with each other in order to influence every level of decision-making. Many of them are partners in the PREPARE programme.

‘WE NEED TO SEE THE BIG PICTURE IN ORDER TO FIND OUR PLACE IN THE MOVEMENT.’



Vanessa Halhead is author of the book “The Rural Movements of Europe”, published by PREPARE and based on her research during a traveling scholarship supported by the Winston Churchill Trust. She worked for many years in the Scottish Highlands and Islands Forum and is a co-founder of the European Rural Communities Alliance (ERCA).

Your book ‘The Rural Movements of Europe’ provided a revealing insight into the emerging rural movements. Which were the most impressive discoveries when you visited the various places and organisations?

When I did the first research on KODUKANT in Estonia and then on the rural movements in Finland, Slovakia and Denmark, I discovered how many village and local rural initiatives had appeared in the preceding years. I come from the rural movement in Scotland. We had travelled a lot with the European Network of Experiences in Sustainable Development – now called Forum Synergies – trying to put local initiatives in contact with each other throughout Europe, and then to sensitise political decision-makers to improve rural policies. But

we were not aware how many organised village movements already existed, also in the EU accession countries. I was impressed that there was something bigger going on, and I was keen to get a more intensive insight and a more systematic approach to this new energy.

What did the movements have in common?

They wanted to be recognized as rural players in their own right. Of course every movement came from a different history, for example the tiny municipalities in Slovakia and much bigger ones in Denmark. But they all wanted their place in the process of making rural development happen. My interest was to write about the various methods that the organisations had used to empower local people, to identify where

The Storr, Isle of Skye, Scotland



© Lee Duguid

the gaps and barriers were to achieving that empowerment, and which were the good examples for success.

What kind of message would you draw from your studies, including more recent work you have done within ERCA?

The book says, 'This is the response of civil society to the many problems we face throughout rural Europe: this is the way we organize ourselves and this is where we want to have a say in the future'. The book included 18 short descriptions of similar movements, many of which have now developed into national networks, and some of which are partners in PREPARE. I must say, from a Scottish perspective, that I was very inspired by the energy in the newly independent countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the discussions about the best way to reorganise civil society. The idea of independence is intriguing: we have discussed whether we should be independent from governments and public agencies and even from our own history.

ERCA as an organisation has concentrated on working with national village movements which are strong in Sweden and the Baltic countries but also in other parts of Europe.

What are your plans for the future?

When we started as ERCA, we wanted to do mainly networking between the movements: this has worked out fine. We also wanted to help creating a European rural voice, which



Romania, conserving smoked fish

would bring the European networks together in order to be heard by our governments and in Europe. We wished to put the accent on the social aspects of rural development rather than the agricultural ones. We are not quite there, because there is little money for European work and the platform of cooperation still needs to be built. ERA (the European Rural Alliance) and ERCA have now decided to merge, and we hope that we can together strengthen the movements.

Having participated in the art evening and the so-called fishbowl session, Kaj Mortensen from the European Commission said he had very much enjoyed these creative methods of finding agreements in practical terms. 'I would like to test these methods in the European Commission, he said, because the focus is on mutual understanding first and then on clear commitments to find common solutions instead of turning around problems.'
(quote from journalist Michael Fischer's report on the traveling workshop)

What is your vision for the coming years?

I think unfortunately our rural voice in Europe is still too weak to be heard and respected by decision-makers. It will certainly not be enough to merge the two organisations. Maybe we first have to solve problems linked to personalities, power games and money. But it is more important to keep the social rural agenda together and support the people in their initiatives. With all the difficulties and crisis in Europe, including in our organisations, it is perhaps useful to take a step back from time to time. We need to see the big picture in order to find our place in the movement.

"PREPARE IS NOT VERY VISIBLE IN THE EX-YUGOSLAV REGION"



Kaj F. Mortensen is a Senior Consultant in EU affairs, working mainly in East and South East Europe. From July 2004 to February 2010, he was Head of Unit at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, responsible for the management of pre-accession assistance programmes in agriculture and rural development.

You were one of the key initiators of SAPARD, the European Union's pre-accession programme in agriculture and rural development. Looking back ten or fifteen years, would you call SAPARD a success story?

I was very much involved in conceiving and implementing SAPARD. I would say yes, it was a success. I remember an informal Council meeting in 2004 at the Special Committee on Agriculture (CSA) when the eight new Member States from Central Europe said that SAPARD was the best of all pre-accession programmes because of its decentralised nature. With SAPARD, we trained the national administrations in the new EU policy and financial management frameworks. That helped the candidate countries to have the paying agencies timely in place, and to understand that serious preparation for CAP requirements was important in order to make EU farming and rural development policies work under new conditions.

You took part in the traveling workshop in Estonia and Sweden in 1999 which gave birth to the PREPARE network later. I remember some of the participants saw your presentation about SAPARD rules and the role of civil society in rural development as quite a tough and demanding message. Was that a kind of shock therapy?

When you represent the Commission, you have to be clear about the rules and try to avoid misunderstandings. I did not want to play the arrogant, but I also did not want to tell fairy tales about the possibilities. Some people believed that they

could negotiate about the rules which EU member states had agreed, the so-called 'acquis communautaire', and that they could have more flexibility in implementing SAPARD. Looking back to those years of pre-accession work, I think that perhaps we sometimes treated the newcomers as if they were already member states. It takes time to introduce new and very different principles of budgeting and financial management. Today I would say: We should maintain the approach of decentralised management for pre-accession assistance, to allow the candidate countries to use instruments similar to those which apply when they become Members, but we should do it more calmly and stepwise and allow for more 'learning by doing', while maintaining strict disciplines to ensure sound financial management.

You participated in two more PREPARE events in Hungary and the Czech Republic before you retired and started work as consultant in South East Europe. What is your impression about the role of civil society in rural development in that region?

I think that civil society has a very important role to play along with the public sector and private business. From the European Commission's side, we promoted this cooperation a lot. Many governments did not even want to have dialogue with NGOs or even with farmers' organisations before setting up rural development programmes under SAPARD. I think it was right that the Commission 'carried the stick' for civil society, and insisted on consultation with all stakeholders and

on the monitoring system which involves stakeholders in the ongoing basic management of programmes. That has raised confidence and has mobilised local people to participate: I believe it was seen as a positive development by the governments when it started functioning.

Guests welcome in Macedonia



“A combination of scholarships, capacity building, opportunities to volunteer will create the spirit of innovation and involvement that we need. The most important thing is that our support must be long term. You cannot do short-term action in a region and then leave again without creating a lot of frustration.”

What role do you see for PREPARE in South East Europe and Turkey?

There is no doubt that PREPARE has made a tremendous contribution in networking and exchange of experience. It has helped to give local people a sense of confidence that they can influence their own situation, can offer their own experience to help people in other areas, and can even have an influence on government policies of importance to them. But PREPARE does not seem to have the same attraction to people in countries like Albania, Macedonia and Bosnia. I have the impression that PREPARE is not very visible and active in the region.

I am involved in area-based and cross-border projects. We try to revitalise weaker rural areas. They need long-term perspectives, and the Commission urges us to cooperate with people in the field. This is where I see a continued and maybe reinforced role for PREPARE. Your rural networking, gatherings and traveling workshops are very good and useful tools to help in activating rural areas. I do not know how your relations are with the government-based Standing Working Group for South East Europe ([see Box in page 87](#)), or with other NGOs or operators in the field of local development: but I believe there are substantial synergies to be achieved if the various players try to get beyond competitive thinking and join forces in the region. This is even more important in the next EU planning period, when the new Territorial and

Regional Cooperation Policy will be initiated and the EU will put much effort into promoting regional cooperation and creating better living conditions in rural areas.

There is a lot of talk about the urgent need for generational renewal in farming and rural development. Do you see possibilities to get more young people involved in local and rural development in pre-accession and neighbouring countries?

Much depends on the spirit and ambition among those who are responsible for the development and implementation of such programmes and projects. When you have a number of countries on the move, with a common aim to join the European Union, then you have a good starting-point for making young people enthusiastic about their region and their opportunities. In such a situation, there is a need for a movement like PREPARE which can facilitate cooperation among regions, and I am sure that there will always be many young people who will seize the opportunity to take part and to contribute. A combination of scholarships, capacity building, opportunities to volunteer will create the spirit of innovation and involvement that we need. The most important thing is that our support must be long term. You cannot do short-term action in a region and then leave again without creating a lot of frustration.

REFLECTIONS ON ACTIVITIES AND CHALLENGES (Hannes Lorenzen)

PREPARE's programme, which has evolved over the last 12 years, has focused on four related activities:

- Supporting the existing national rural movements in our partnership
- Encouraging the emergence of civil society movements in other countries
- Promoting exchange of ideas and experience
- Campaigning for a stronger status of civil society in European rural affairs.

Support to rural movements. When we started work in 2000, our partnership included the national rural movements of Sweden, Estonia and Hungary. At that time, non-government organisations in Poland were coming together to form the Polish Rural Forum, and those in Slovakia were moving towards creation of the Slovakian Rural Parliament. We were able to help both processes, and the Polish and Slovakian movements joined us as partners when they were formed. We also brought into partnership the Finnish Village Association SYTY, which had a longer history parallel to that in Sweden.

Over the last ten years, we have encouraged the emergence of further national rural movements, which have joined PREPARE as partners. The partners are in constant touch



*Rewarding «the village of the year»
by KODUKANT*

with each other. Through this partnership they gain mutual support; 'running intelligence' about EU policies and programmes and other aspects of rural development and civil society; and opportunities to collaborate on projects which lie outside PREPARE's main programme.

Emergence of new rural movements. A key aim of PREPARE, from the beginning, was the strengthening of civil society in what were then the pre-accession countries of central Europe – Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania. Estonia and Hungary already had rural movements, and Poland and Slovakia quickly created their own. Our focus was on the others in this list. In each country, we wanted to support emerging voluntary bodies to come together, and to work towards creation of a national movement. Marko Koščak, in his interview (page 70),

describes the process which PREPARE supported in Slovenia – a national workshop, where participants agreed that a national initiative should be explored; a series of 12 regional workshops; agreement to form a national rural network; gradual strengthening of the network; and the recent holding of two successive National Rural Parliaments.

In some other countries, the process of nurturing civil society and building a national network has been more slow and complex, particularly in states which have a recent history of inter-ethnic conflict or tension, such as some of the ex-Yugoslav republics. In these countries, PREPARE has worked with a lower profile, supporting the gradual building of self-confidence within civil society. This explains Kaj Mortenson's fair observation that we appear to be less visible in these countries.

Exchanges. Our main methods for promoting exchange of ideas and experience between people from different countries, and between people in civil society and in government, are Traveling Workshops and Gatherings. We believe that traveling workshops offer a vital link between people – Margret Schelling (page 18) sees them as 'politics come to life', Vera Dakova (page 90) as 'a fantastic invention'. We try to hold one major event each year – usually a Gathering, accompanied by traveling workshops within the host country and sometimes within adjoining countries. Each time, the host is one of our partner movements or a national body in a country where we have been working.

"PREPARE made us work!" says Ryszard Kamiński from the Polish Rural Forum. Organising a PREPARE gathering is a major challenge for a national rural network and for local organisations. They must deal with the demanding logistics of travel, accommodation, food and interpretation for around 100 people, local fundraising, inviting government representatives and media, organising volunteers and much else. We apply the principle of co-financing, with travel and accommodation for international guests mainly covered by PREPARE, and food and local events by the host organisation. Most of the PREPARE Partners have gone through this kind of initiation, learning by doing, newly discovering their country and regions through other peoples' eyes.

Sharing knowledge during gatherings and workshops is capacity building for free. It helps voluntary bodies in learning how to convince decision-makers to come; local mayors and project leaders to present their work and visions; journalists to understand the importance of rural development; and participants from many countries to understand and learn from the places and projects they visit. These events also enable networks and individuals to make new contacts and to agree upon bilateral projects or cross-border activities.

A Pan-European event can increase public attention and government recognition of civil society initiatives within the host country. Our national networks and their member organisations have endured times of low interest or even negative attitudes in government. But they have gained recognition

through sharing knowledge within PREPARE on how to interpret European legislation, how to apply for financial support and how to communicate constructively with decision-makers. PREPARE's strength lies in building bridges between government and civil society. It is a long process of improving communication and building trust between bottom-up movements of rural people and mainly hierarchical structures of governments.

PREPARE has stayed in the informal sphere of rural civil society organisations. Compared to formal structures like the national and European Rural Networks, PREPARE has preserved its pioneer's role, mainly working in new member states or in pre-accession or neighbourhood countries. In some cases – as Viviana Vasile describes for Romania – the creation of the formal structure has drawn some energy and attention away from the informal sector. But in general cooperation has prevailed over competition.

Campaigning. The growing strength of civil society in the central European countries, and of national rural movements which can claim to represent rural populations, has given those movements the self-confidence, the courage, and increasingly the expertise to contribute to the on-going debate about policies and programmes for rural development in their countries and at European level. For that reason, PREPARE has become increasingly active in this debate. We sit on the European Commission's Rural Development Advisory Group; and on the Coordination Committee and the

LEADER Sub-Committee of the European Network for Rural Development. We contribute to the activity of ARC 2020, the alliance of 150 rural non-government organisations campaigning for a sustainable future Common Agricultural Policy. The influence of this campaigning is acknowledged by Dirk Ahner in his interview (see page 57).

ARC2020 Civil Society Conference 2012, including PREPARE contributions: Commissioner Ciolos, Council Presidency and President of EU Parliament listening.



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“PREPARE's strength lies in building bridges between government and civil society. It is a long process of improving communication and building trust between bottom-up movements of rural people and mainly hierarchical structures of governments.”

Chapter 3 / LEADERship

This chapter describes, through the voices of five people who have been much involved in the creation and activity of local action groups within the context of the LEADER programme, how PREPARE and its partners have contributed to that activity.

'IT'S FRIENDSHIP AND COOPERATION ON THE LOCAL LEVEL WHICH MAKE EUROPE TANGIBLE FOR PEOPLE.'



Hans-Olof Stålgren is a long-standing rural developer in Sweden, and was one of the moderators of the traveling workshop in Estonia and Sweden which gave birth to PREPARE. Today he works for the Swedish National Rural Network and is responsible for international contacts.

You have been around for a long time in international networks for rural development and you seem still enthusiastic about Europe. How come? Hasn't there always been some critical distance in Sweden towards the EU which seems even to be growing with the diverse crises we are in right now?

You are right, there is critical distance. But if we are honest about rural development in Sweden, we must admit that we would not have had such a strong rural and village movement if we did not have the EU policy framework and economic support from Brussels. Ironically, the EU brought us the LEADER approach from the top down and that has strengthened our initiatives working from the bottom-up at local level, in our villages and communities. We have learnt a lot from European networking, which helped us to meet and exchange experiences and get to know each other. For me, the human factor is decisive: it is friendships and cooperation on the local level which make Europe tangible for people.

What happened to your project idea to sail with young people across the Baltic Sea to discover what sustainable development could be? Is that still in the making or did the idea sink before the boat started?

It takes time: the idea is not dead. You remember we called it "Take sustainable Europe on board". The idea was to sail the Baltic Sea with an old-fashioned sailing vessel, visit the various harbours, and organise fairs and exhibitions about sustainable development in the region. We also thought it would be good to do an environmental survey of water quality, fishing etc. and then to move on to the Mediterranean Sea and share our ideas with young people there. It would be learning and team-building at the same time, being close together, finding out how to tackle the problems and how to attract publicity.

Have you given up on it?

No, not at all. I believe we have good chances to make it happen. The Baltic Sea strategy is adopted. The Nordic Baltic Network has launched a so-called 'flagship project' for sustainable rural development. Sweden and Poland can cooperate and could take the lead on it. Two issues of sustainability are being discussed, namely youth involvement in planning, and innovation towards climate-friendly development. We need young people thinking in new categories, trying out new methods which we haven't thought of.

Innovation is currently a buzz word in Brussels. How would you define it?

I would say it should be a process which leads to solutions to the new challenges that we face, uses new methods, creates new products that people will look for and buy. But it must include social aspects, to improve people's capacity to cooperate and to find common solutions. Otherwise it's just a question of growth and markets: that's not enough.

Why is it so difficult for the Swedish rural movement to find common ground with farmers? Is it true that there are allergic reactions between the two?

There is some truth in it. Farmers' organisations over here have always objected to the use of rural development funds for anything outside the farming sector. They say. "It's our

money, and it should not be used for things like environment or rural enterprise". But the more we look into the results of our rural projects, how much employment, capacity building and – yes – innovation they have created, they have indeed made rural Sweden live. The current figures put a question mark behind the distribution of money between farming and rural development: 85% of the CAP budget is allocated for agriculture, providing only 4% for the jobs in society. It is time to change priorities.

Do you think the European project can again become attractive for young people?

I think it still is ... but only for those who have had the chance to discover what they have in common with other cultures and people. I remember the shout of surprise from a girl I met recently who discovered that European voluntary service is an EU action programme: she said: "Oh, that is for me!". She had not known about any of these European opportunities and had only experienced holiday traveling. I believe there should be much more active promotion of European capacity building and coordination of education, scholarships and internships. Young people can then find out what they have in common, instead of believing the old stories about national differences and conflicts of interest.

“We need young people thinking in new categories, trying out new methods which we haven't thought of.”

'THE PREPARE GATHERING SHOWED THE POWER OF INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL SUPPORT IN A CONCISE WAY.'



Olda Čepelka is Director of Tima Liberec, a research and consultancy unit based in the Czech town of Liberec. He took part in the traveling workshop to Estonia and Sweden in 1999, and has contributed

strongly to the creation and training of local action groups (LAGs) in the Czech Republic and to the international exchanges on rural development in Central and Eastern Europe.

You took part in the Traveling Workshop to Estonia and Sweden which led to the creation of PREPARE. You said, then, that the Workshop gave you ideas which you could use in your work as adviser and trainer in rural renewal, and helped you to find ways to involve people in the Czech Republic in planning rural and village development. Looking back at the last 10 years or more, have the rural people in the Czech Republic become more actively involved in rural development? If so, how has this been achieved?

“This expansion of LAGs has involved many people. The process was pushed, in the first place, by rural mayors and freelance consultants, and then taken up by local civil organisations and entrepreneurs. Only the farmers have stayed out of the process, being able to gain EU funding without help from a LAG.”

When the Czech team came back from the traveling workshop, one shut his door against any follow-up, another refused ‘the European way’ and the idea of local partnership, preferring the tool of public administration. It was left to me to pursue the LEADER idea and the involvement of NGOs in planning for rural communities. In 2001, our Ministry of Regional Development published my study on LEADER, which was the first book on this issue in Czech and which helped to provoke a LEADER movement even before the country joined the EU. In 2002, the first few LAGs were formed, mostly on a platform of municipality unions. From 2003, the Czech ‘LEADER movement’ developed rapidly: the number of registered LAGs rose to 26 in August 2004, 79 by December 2005, 137 by May 2006, 150 by April 2009. LAGs now cover 93% of the Czech rural area.

This expansion of LAGs has involved many people. The process was pushed, in the first place, by rural mayors and freelance consultants, and then taken up by local civil organisations and entrepreneurs. Only the farmers have stayed out of the process, being able to gain EU funding without help from a LAG.

PREPARE helped Omega Liberec in 2003, and again in 2005, to secure funds from the Mott Foundation for a programme of activity to encourage the growth of local action groups and to move towards the creation of a national rural movement. How influential was that programme?

The support from the Mott Foundation, plus a grant from the European Commission, was crucial for the role of NGOs in rural development in Czechia. We were able to raise the awareness of the LEADER idea among rural people. In 2003, we pioneered the creation of local partnerships, development strategies and LEADER-type projects in four pilot micro-regions. We organised a national rural workshop in Prague: as a sequel to this event, various interest groups came together to promote the idea of rural development based on local initiatives.

The second phase, launched in 2005, had even greater impact. It included creation of a national rural information centre; training of rural animators; and cooperation with other countries through PREPARE. We began to publish regular Rural Newsletters, which continue to this day. We provoked the Ministry of Agriculture to start a new course for rural managers. We created the National Rural Observatory, on the initiative of 12 people active in rural development at regional or national level. Its aims were to support rural actors, mainly within LAGs; to initiate a National LEADER Network; and to spread information to the people, media and public bodies about rural issues and LEADER principles. The Observatory became a PREPARE partner.

In 2006, the National Rural Observatory hosted the PREPARE Gathering at Velehrad. What impact did that event have upon the relations between government and civil society in your country?

The Gathering showed the power of international non-governmental support in a concise way. It helped our links with the Czech public administration, although for the event itself we got support more from the Ministry of Regional Development than from the Ministry of Agriculture. It provided a very useful stimulus for the creation later that year of the National LEADER Network, with 23 LAGs as the initial members. The Network now includes 140 LAGs, and has taken over the role of the National Rural Observatory.

“The Gathering showed the power of international non-governmental support in a concise way. It helped our links with the Czech public administration, although for the event itself we got support more from the Ministry of Regional Development than from the Ministry of Agriculture.”



Moderators at work: Olda Čepelka and Jela Tvrdonova of the Slovakian Rural Parliament

What do you think PREPARE should do over the next few years?

PREPARE might go both along the main stream, and towards niches.

By **main stream**, I mean that PREPARE should continue its support to new member and pre-accession states in the context of the EU programme for 2014-20. It might usefully focus on two fields – the transfer of ideas; and partnership. The transfer of ideas could focus on the EU priorities of fostering innovation and the knowledge base in rural areas; supporting diversification, creation of new small enterprises and job creation; and fostering local development in rural areas. The partnership theme should focus on **Community Led Local Development** and on continuing the LEADER method, which every member state should support. Czech LAGs are preparing for this new phase of European thinking. PREPARE might also highlight the theme of rural-urban partnership.

As to **niches**, PREPARE might become a think tank, to provoke thought and action on particular aspects of rural development. For example, it might focus on the diversity of Europe's cultural heritage, broadly interpreted to include things like authentic meadows, herbal recipes, local foods and the use of this heritage in local development: this could be done in cooperation with the Slow Food movement and with many national and local NGOs who work in these fields. Or it might focus on innovations in all aspects of rural devel-

opment, by gathering and disseminating examples. Local action groups would be a good channel for this activity, as they manage many small and clever innovations: funding for such work might come from the European Social Fund and from foundations. PREPARE might even set up a 'venture culture fund' to support the activities, perhaps in co-operation with Mott or another foundation; or at least provide support for such activity by its national partners.

'WE ARE VERY PLEASED TO SEE THE WIDENING POLITICAL SUPPORT FOR THE LEADER APPROACH.'



Petri Rinne, from Finland, is president of ELARD, the European LEADER Association for Rural Development, which is an international non-profit making association set up to improve the quality of life in rural areas and to maintain their population through sustainable, integrated local development. The members of the Association are national associations of Local Action Groups (LAGs), or individual such groups, operating in the context of the LEADER method of delivery of rural development programmes co-funded by the European Union.

You are familiar with PREPARE's focus on the strengthening of civil society, and the role of civil society in rural development? What is ELARD's view on that role?

ELARD is keen to see civil society bodies involved in the development process, alongside the public and commercial sectors. But the strength of civil society bodies varies greatly between different countries, and is sometimes still too weak to play an active role. Many governments and local authorities perceive the non-public sector, which by EU rules must nominate at least 50% of the members of LAG boards, as being mainly commercial firms, rather than civil society. And now, in the discussion about the next EU programme period, the Committee of the Regions is proposing that the rules change to give the public sector more than the present maximum of 50% of LAG board members. ELARD is supporting the European Commission in urging that this maximum be retained, because we think that Local Action Groups should not be dominated by any one sector. We believe strongly in partnership between different interests in each LAG area, so the skills and resources of the private and civil sectors can be applied to the development effort, alongside those of public authorities.

ELARD is currently working to expand the geographic base of its membership, especially among the new Member States and the pre-accession countries, which is exactly where PREPARE is most active. How do you approach that work?

We cannot send missions into countries where we do not now have membership. But we do respond to invitations to go and speak about the EU model of rural development and the LEADER approach. For example I have myself recently visited Serbia, jointly with Jimmy Armstrong the senior adviser on rural development in Northern Ireland, at the invitation of a senior official in the Ministry of Agriculture there. There is strong political interest in Serbia in development of its disadvantaged rural regions. People from Serbia will be visiting Finland to see how the LEADER model works there. We are in touch with networks in Bulgaria, Romania and other countries.

Looking further afield, there is very strong interest in the LEADER approach in some South American countries, in parts of Africa and elsewhere. Our member associations in France, Spain and Portugal are responding to this interest where they can, and are sometimes able to draw on the support of multilateral or bilateral agencies. For example Minha Terra, the grouping of LAGs in Portugal which is a member of ELARD, is advising on approaches to rural development in Mozambique, alongside a LEADER pilot project that my own LAG has been running in the Zambesia Province since 2008, supported by the Finnish Development Aid funds (Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NGO unit).

“There is strong political interest in Serbia in development of its disadvantaged rural regions. People from Serbia will be visiting Finland to see how the LEADER model works there. We are in touch with networks in Bulgaria, Romania and other countries.”

Community Led Local Development (CLLD)

CLLD reflects the new territorial approach of EU policies and programmes intervening through the EU structural funds. It replaces the spirit of policies which have dealt separately with urban, regional, social or rural affairs. From 2014 onwards, national governments include the CLLD approach in the regional and social funds (in addition to the rural and fisheries funds), and they may enable Local Action Groups to draw money from different Funds, if their local development strategy integrates the various aspects of development on a territorial level.

The LEADER approach has already been applied in the field of fisheries, and the European Commission is now proposing that Community Led Local Development should be used in the delivery of the regional, cohesion and social funds. How do you see this affecting LAGS and ELARD?

We are very pleased to see the widening political support for the LEADER approach, and are seeking to help our LAG members to prepare themselves for what may be a challenging new era of sub-regional partnerships, able to draw funds from different major sources and perhaps to cross the urban-rural boundary. At the moment, ELARD is definitely rooted in rural development. We have had talks with Fisheries Local Action Groups and with FARNET which supports them, and we would be open to cooperation with them. But the interests and specific needs of LAGs and FLAGs are rather different, and we do not expect any FLAGs to join us in the present programme period. Looking further ahead, we will be open to possible change in our scope as the EU funds and the approaches to Community Led Local Development evolve. (See **Box re Community Led Local Development**)

ELARD and PREPARE are different in character: ELARD is a formal Association, PREPARE is a less formal partnership. But we share many objectives, and there is some overlap in membership, since the national rural movements in Croatia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia are members of both. Could we work more closely together?

We would be fully open to that. We salute the work that PREPARE is doing.

'WE ARE PAID NOT FOR DESCRIBING PROBLEMS BUT FOR SOLVING THEM.'



Josefina Loriz-Hoffmann is Head of a Unit in charge of the policy development and coordination of the Rural Development Policy in the Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Commission.

PREPARE is a member of the Commission's Advisory Committee on Rural Development, the ENRD Coordination Committee and the LEADER Subcommittee. Does the General Directorate for Agriculture feel well advised, specifically concerning rural development in the new member states and accession countries?

European networks like PREPARE play an important role in bringing the European spirit of rural development down to the local level and for transmitting the expectations of rural societies to the national and regional authorities. Furthermore, these organisations help to identify the possible impact of policy proposals on the regional/local level.

This allows us to judge how the political framework we are offering to member states reflects the real needs in regions and at local level. So we are happy that we get feedback from these informal networks.

The bottom-up LEADER method was in fact a top-down approach initiated by Brussels. The Commission proposes that the method be exported to all structural funds as Community Led Local Development (CLLD). LEADER was not always a love story of national administrations with local action groups. Are you confident that the territorial approach which the EU is now promoting will be carried by Member States in good cooperation with civil actors?

LEADER raised the attention of member states towards the potential of partnerships between local authorities, private initiatives and non-governmental organisations. National and regional rural development programmes are written by central bodies and negotiated with the competent authorities at EU level. But finally, the policy is implemented and must be accepted by the citizens concerned. That is why we have insisted that stakeholder consultation must be part of the programming and implementation of the policy, so that interested citizens are well informed about all opportunities provided by the policy. The new territorial dimension and CLLD after 2013 carried by all Structural Funds will need the same attention and efforts by governments and civil society as LEADER if it is to become another European success story.

Civil society groups in new member states and accession countries like Croatia and South East European candidate countries often feel excluded from consultations or not enough included in measures of rural development programmes. Do you see possibilities to improve this?

It is the responsibility of authorities in Member States and accession countries to inform about, and offer support for citizens interested in participating in, rural development programmes. This is carefully done in most cases. The Commission also provides information on support under the Rural Development Policy, in particular through the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) (see **Box re the European Network on page 28**). Here again, organisations like PREPARE are important partners and transmitters in the process. They contribute to spreading the information to potential beneficiaries. The Rural Development Policy also helps with training to improve administrative capacities in Member States and to improve management of projects and measures. It is true that civil society groups are often underestimated and looked at with some suspicion. But once they prove their good faith and competence they become easily trusted partners of governments. Official and formal processes alone do not solve the rural challenges we face. Networks and good cooperation between citizens, administrations and private initiatives are as important.

“The new territorial dimension and CLLD after 2013 carried by all Structural Funds will need the same attention and efforts by governments and civil society as LEADER if it is to become another European success story.”



Creative stakeholder consultation

Some rural development NGOs believe that LEADER has become too institutionalized and should be re-invented. Administrations and controls are sometimes perceived as far too burdensome.

Why re-invented? It may be true that in some cases governments have interpreted the mainstreaming of LEADER in a very restrictive and limiting way. On the other hand, LEADER had in the past limited possibilities due to the small amounts of money which were available in the first periods. Meanwhile, the LEADER budget (EU and national) has increased to €5 billion in the period 2007-2013. This change in dimension requires clear rules which allow the Commission and the Member States to prove that the money has been correctly spent and that there is value for money. The European Court of Auditors audited LEADER and made a number of findings which showed insufficiencies in the

management. The new legal proposal tries to give an answer to remedy these difficulties and to further develop LEADER for the future. Main development features are the possibility for multi-fund application of LEADER, the importance put on private participation and the requirement for better cooperation between the management authorities, the paying agencies and the LAGs. And again, communication and cooperation between all partners, including NGOs, is a key for successful implementation.

PREPARE is now present in South East Europe and Turkey. We still face much unease and mistrust between governmental and non-governmental organisations but also much progress in networking and capacity building. Could the Commission also actively promote more cooperation between civil society networks and governmental bodies?

Mistrust is indeed a barrier, for historical and sometimes cultural reasons. Our experience is that it takes time, so you must accept small steps and be patient. There are different ways to make progress in this area. Exchange of experience between different actors is key. The networks can play an important role, but trust can also be built by inter-governmental exchange. Estonia and Poland have been front runners in this aspect. They have proactively invited colleagues from candidate countries to visit their LAGs and LEADER success stories and have encouraged them to support their local initiatives to join the LEADER process. Governance is as important as the purely material and economic aspects of rural development.

Civil society, civil servants and private initiatives can learn from each other. For civil servants like myself, the further development of LEADER is an extremely interesting challenge. We have to try to open up new and interesting perspectives, while at the same time consolidating the approach and making it more robust. Of course, we may sometimes feel frustrated and insecure as regards the future. However, we are paid not for just describing problems, but for solving them.

‘OUR ROLE IS TO CROSS-POLLINATE PARTNERSHIP ACROSS EUROPE – BETWEEN PEOPLE, CIVIL SOCIETY MOVEMENTS AND ADMINISTRATIONS IN NEW AND OLD MEMBER STATES.’



Urszula Budzich-Szukała was a co-initiator of the Polish Rural Forum and was the second Coordinator of PREPARE from 2006 to 2009. She works today at FARNET, the European Fisheries Areas Network, promoting the LEADER method in fisheries areas of the Union.

From the Polish Rural Forum, via PREPARE to FARNET – your professional career seems to be inspired by capacity building for civil society and participative development. What is exciting about that?

Capacity building sounds a bit technical. What I find fascinating is not teaching how rural development should be done, but rather raising people’s awareness of what they can achieve together to improve their lives. During the accession process, but also later in the new member states, the potential of LEADER and the need for capacity building at all levels (including the public administrations) was at first dramatically underestimated. In the Polish Rural Forum, and in PREPARE, we tried to make sure that the spirit of partnership is not dominated by rules and formalities. This is not easy since many people in the administration are used to top-down thinking and controls: so, there was a growing discrepancy between the ‘LEADER concept’ (i.e. the principles of the LEADER approach) and the ‘LEADER practice’ (how it was actually implemented). On the other hand, there is a great need to develop social capital and to build trust at the local level.

So I believe that our role is to cross-pollinate partnership across Europe – between people, civil society movements and administrations in new and old member states, in order to facilitate these learning processes at EU, national, regional and local level.

“Capacity building sounds a bit technical. What I find fascinating is not teaching how rural development should be done, but rather raising people’s awareness of what they can achieve together to improve their lives.”

What is FARNET?

Since 2007, the European Commission has offered Member States the possibility to apply the LEADER approach also to fisheries areas, through Axis 4 of the European Fisheries Fund. FARNET (Fisheries AREAs NETwork), initiated and funded by the European Commission, facilitates learning and exchange between all stakeholders interested in local development in coastal and fisheries areas.

“For me the heart of Europe is that local people have the freedom to do what they want, can cooperate and exchange their ideas, and can make things happen without waiting for permission to do so.”

It seems that ‘cross-pollination’ across Europe is not very popular in political circles these days, at least in some old member states. Also bottom-up rural development loses out against farm subsidies. Is that also true in new member states?

Participative processes certainly require open and flexible political institutions and administrations. Governments must be willing to include people’s creativity and engagement. Maybe in the new member states we are still discovering our potential and we appreciate the new freedom, while in old member states people are focussing on what they believe goes wrong in the systems that they have had for decades. For me the heart of Europe is that local people have the freedom to do what they want, can cooperate and exchange their ideas, and can make things happen without waiting for permission to do so.

You are strongly involved now in promoting the Community Led Local Development (CLLD) approach, both in Poland and in the EU. Why do you think this important?

I think CLLD is one of the few examples where people from rural areas have developed something that can be transferred to other types of area, e.g. urban or coastal. The LEADER approach has not only proved to work well in rural areas, but has also been transferred with success to fisheries areas. I believe it is important for the future of Europe that all local communities, urban as well as rural, can benefit from it.

You are today working with fishermen. What is different from working with farmers?

We are not working only with fishermen – just as I did not work only with farmers when I was active in rural development and LEADER. FARNET is also about the wider fisheries communities and all business and social initiatives linked to it. I would say there are more similarities than you would expect. When the FARNET programmes started, fishermen –like farmers in rural development schemes – were worried that they could lose “their” Fisheries Fund money. So the job was again about building trust, discovering the potential of cooperation, seeing the social network as social capital and not as a limitation on individual progress. What is different maybe is that – in comparison to farmers – many fishermen have been adversely affected by the EU’s fishery policy and have found it hard to accept limitations of catch and increase of controls: so, the process of building trust is perhaps even more difficult among fishermen.

At our PREPARE gatherings, you have invited us to sing during the evenings and, in addition to your own talent, you had quite a success in animating people to sing. Was that your secret to reach people beyond the undeniable language barriers?

I think that, with so much commercial music on offer, people have given up their own musical capacities and traditions and have become consumers of what is permanently pre-produced. When I was singing at our gatherings, people immediately joined in and we heard a great variety of songs from their own localities. Like our traveling workshops and cultural events, it was like revealing another hidden dimension of every person, a moment of pride in one's own songs and the discovery of another culture. We began to make a PREPARE songbook. I think the most important aspect of the singing evenings was that we understood each other without necessarily understanding the language.



Urszula Budzich-Szukala at FARNET conference

LEADER: A REFLECTION FROM PREPARE'S PERSPECTIVE (Michael Dower)

The LEADER approach to rural development was initiated in 1991 by the European Commission, in order to stimulate action at local and sub-regional level by people and organizations based directly in the countryside. Through a Community Initiative, directly funded and managed from Brussels, the Commission encouraged the formation of local action groups, in the form of partnerships between the public, private and civil sectors. Each partnership, working in an area between 10,000 and 100,000 population, was expected to produce a local development strategy, and then to implement that strategy by offering funding to local development projects in the social, economic or environmental field.

Over the last two decades, the LEADER approach has evolved, and in the current programme period has been 'mainstreamed' as an element in the rural development programmes managed by national governments. There are currently over 2,300 local action groups, widely spread through the rural areas of the EU, deploying a total of over 5 billion euros during the seven-year period 2006-13.

LEADER and PREPARE. The central principle of LEADER, namely direct action by rural people through a partnership process, is very close to PREPARE's own commitment to the strengthening of civil society and promotion of partnership

between civil society and government. As Staffan Bond says (see [interview on page 11](#)), 'LEADER has mobilised people to cooperate and create partnerships from the bottom-up', which is close to PREPARE's own purposes.

So, the PREPARE partners – both individually and collectively – have strongly supported the LEADER approach, including its application within the 'accession' countries of central Europe even before they joined the EU. Olda Čepelka describes in his interview how his book about LEADER was published in the Czech Republic in 2001, and the first local action groups in that country were created the following year. He and others in the civil sector took the lead in training potential leaders of local action groups, and in forming the national LEADER network, which became a partner of PREPARE.

Ryszard Kamiński describes in his interview (see [page 24](#)) how the Polish Rural Forum, after it was created in 2002 with support from PREPARE, pressed the Polish government and the European Commission to agree that LEADER could be applied in the accession countries. In late 2002, this was enacted by the European Commission. So, by the time they joined the EU in 2004, several of these countries had laid the groundwork for a LEADER programme. Now, the Czech Republic has 150 local action groups, covering 93% of the nation's rural area, and Poland has about 340 local action groups.

Exchange of ideas and experience. A key aspect of the LEADER initiative, since its creation 20 years ago, has been the exchange of ideas and experience between local action groups throughout the EU. The high value of this exchange is emphasized by Josefine Loriz-Hoffmann in her interview in this chapter. Marta Marcziś (see [interview, page 99](#)) describes how the Hungarian micro-regions were able to use LEADER ...

'to support small projects at local level, such as schools and kindergartens, and to offer capacity building and exchange of good practice. This bottom-up self-organising was very inspiring, and we gained good ideas from Swedish communes, British parishes and German Gemeinden.'

PREPARE has contributed directly to this exchange of ideas and experience, by including visits to local action groups in most of its traveling workshops, and having LEADER as a key theme at several of its annual Gatherings. In his interview, Marco Koščak from the Slovenian rural development network, describes the value of this:

'Our participation in PREPARE Gatherings enabled us to gather ideas; to discuss the rural challenges that we share with other countries; and to find partners for transnational projects. Our Local Action Groups now have many exchanges with those in other countries. Contacts made through PREPARE also enabled us to export Slovenian expertise in rural development, notably to other parts of the former Yugoslav Federation.'

Strengths and weaknesses. PREPARE's close contact with the LEADER programme has enabled us to publicise the strengths of the programme. But it has also alerted us to the weaknesses of the approach, as applied in some member states. In some countries, the local partnerships are dominated by public or commercial interests, with little involvement of the 'third sector' of civil society – a point emphasised by Staffan Bond (see page 11) and confirmed by Petri Rinne in this chapter. Some governments restrict narrowly the types of project that local action groups can support; impose cumbersome procedures upon them; or prevent them from seeking funds outside the formal rural development programmes. So, as Urszula Budzich-Szukała says, the LEADER practice sometimes falls short of the LEADER concept.

PREPARE and its partners have therefore campaigned – directly or through ARC 2020 and other platforms – for a wider and more flexible approach to the use of sub-regional partnerships. As Urszula Budzich-Szukała says, these have already been successfully introduced into the field of fisheries. PREPARE and others have warmly welcomed the idea that is now being brought forward by the European Commission for the wider application of Community Led Local Development within the EU's Rural and Structural Programmes from 2014 onwards. In his interview (see page 57), Dirk Ahner, Director General of Regional Policy 2007-2011, acknowledges the role that civil society campaigning has played in persuading the Commission to bring forward this more flexible approach.



Leadership workshop

Our hope, in PREPARE, is that the period beyond 2014 will see the creation, throughout rural Europe, of a family of Local Action Groups or other sub-regional partnerships which are able to operate flexibly as local development agencies and to deliver all relevant measures within the Rural Fund and relevant measures and resources from other EU and national funds. We will continue to work closely with this 'LEADER family'; and to respond to the interest in the LEADER idea which is growing in the EU neighbour countries, as is shown by the interviews with Dragan Roganović of Serbia and Sanaa Moussalim of Morocco (see pages 68 and 80).

Chapter 4 / Partnership

This chapter describes, through the voices of five people with widely varied experience, the significance of partnership in rural development, and PREPARE's own role in using and nurturing partnership.

'IN EUROPE THERE IS MONEY AND WELL EDUCATED PEOPLE ENOUGH - BUT WE ARE USING BOTH IN THE WRONG WAY.'



Kaja Kaur started her professional career as a rural animator in Viljandi County in Estonia. She was president of KODUKANT, the Estonian Village Movement, from 2001 to 2005, and one of the pioneers of the PREPARE Network. She continued her work on rural civil society as a civil servant in the Estonian Ministry of Internal Affairs and at the National Foundation for Civil Society in Estonia. Today she works as teacher in Sweden.

Among PREPARE partners, KODUKANT's success story is often taken as an example of the power that civil society can achieve. If you look into the future, is there still space for improvement?

Of course, there is never an end to processes which include people in making their own future. It is true, KODUKANT has a strong position now in our country. The organisation is well known and recognized. Kodukant is represented at every public debate or round table on rural affairs, and the government counts on our expertise and know-how. That was not always so; and, believe me, it was hard and long work to get there. The government did not take us seriously at the beginning. Moreover, the state was very young after we gained independence, and many officials had no clue of what the role of civil society could be.

Nowadays, politicians are proud to talk about our strong Estonian civil society in the media. But it would be better if more politicians were aware what they really talk about, and if they would continuously improve their knowledge of civil society.

You have been active on local, national and European levels, and you gained a governmental perspective in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Would you consider becoming a politician?

I have no such ambition right now. But I believe that more women should be involved. In that sense we have a non-balanced society. There are hardly any women in key positions, although they are well-educated and professional. The gap between the average wages of men and women in Estonia is the widest in Europe. Women's hourly wage is about 30% less than men's, and this gender pay gap is a major problem in Estonia.

The government looks at many signs with rose-tinted spectacles. We got on board the Eurozone when the ship was already sinking. People feel that the costs of life are increasing but salaries stay very low. And Europe? Well, is it fair that a teacher in Estonia earns €640 on average and a teacher in Greece €1,900? And on top of that our country is supposed to help the Greek government out of a crisis! Many Estonians are leaving for Finland and elsewhere to gain a decent income. We will soon finish an official census of our population: that might wake up our politicians from their dreams.

Has the European project become unpopular?

Yes, it has. But I still believe there is no better alternative. It is worth fighting for a more fair and democratic way of governance. There is money and well-educated people enough, but we are using both in the wrong way. The big challenge is the great difference between countries in our culture and history, and in the way we communicate between civil society and decision-makers. Doing this the right way has been the real and practical added value of working together in PREPARE. We had plenty of possibilities over the years to meet, exchange ideas and opinions, learn about other countries and support each other through capacity building. At the beginning we learned a lot from our neighbours in Finland and Sweden. We became self-confident as rural movements, because we could see and learn how people with a long democratic history communicate and cooperate with their decision-makers, and we made our own politicians listen and

respect us. Finally, we now have the pleasure of sharing that great new knowledge with the rural movements in countries which joined the EU after us.

One explanation of the KODUKANT success story I heard was that you are a small country and that relations between government and rural people is like family life ...

Maybe a small country allows for a more intimate policy-making culture. But I think we have succeeded thanks to

Kaja Kaur at PREPARE gathering in Serbia with Margus Vain, Estonia Adrian Neal, from European Network for Rural Development (left) and Aivar Niinemägi (right).



“There are hardly any women in key positions, although they are well-educated and professional. The gap between the average wages of men and women is 30%-the widest in Europe.”

committed work and caring people. Like everywhere in Europe, rural areas are dying out and people are tempted to move to where they may have an interesting life and well-paid jobs. It is true that KODUKANT has taken special care of our young generation. The youngsters play an important role in the organisation. They take responsibility and have their own projects and programmes. At our big biennial gathering – the Maapaev or Rural Parliament – each county delegation must include young people. I believe also that if, at the beginning of your life, you have good experience of the place you come from, you will take care of it and perhaps come back or at least keep good contact to your village, even if you go abroad and work there for a while. We are lucky that we have a very good internet access all over Estonia, and that our people are well into remote learning and internet work. But the key thing is good relations and good economic and cultural inclusion. That is not yet guaranteed: we still need to do much more to keep rural Estonia young and alive.

‘WE ARE LUCKY THAT OUR PEOPLE HAVE GONE ABROAD, GATHERED SKILLS AND RETURNED: THEY LOOK FOR PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS, INSTEAD OF WAITING FOR MIRACLES TO HAPPEN.’



Dr. Andrzej Hałasiewicz is responsible for rural development in the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland. He was formerly Deputy Director at the Polish Foundation for Assistance Programmes in Agriculture, and has strongly supported the Polish Rural Forum.

From a perspective of a high level advisor to the President of the Republic of Poland, do you believe that Poland can play a significant role in keeping the European Project alive?

I believe we can contribute to creating a new spirit of understanding why Europe is our common destiny. As a new member state, we could take a fresh view of the challenges we face together and the values we share. Citizens in old member states may have forgotten how fortunate they are to belong to a community of democratic states and to share peace with their neighbours for more than 60 years.

From that perspective, Poland can indeed contribute to a revival of the European project, and I think we already do.

Agriculture and rural development have played a key role in accession negotiations. Polish farmers opposed joining the Common Market, and many were fearful of what would happen to rural Poland. Has that changed?

There were, and still are, good reasons to question the Common Agriculture Policy. But the attitude of farmers and rural people has changed, not only because they receive money from the Union. At the beginning, we had really hard times when the markets opened and many cheap products flowed in. Now, people can compare and have found that our own local food has very good quality compared to imported products. Some farmers have chosen to compete in the European market and are successful. But the great majority now turn towards local quality products and seek closer relations to consumers.

What about jobs in rural areas and demographic change?

There is much hidden unemployment, and we see a trend to move to the big cities. But that is not the right solution. We need to keep our villages and small towns alive for a more balanced development of the whole country. In fact, migration in and out is happening all the time. Some people go working abroad and many are now coming back from the UK, Germany, and France and wish to settle, often in their home

village. We are lucky that our people have gone abroad, gathered skills and returned: they look for practical solutions, instead of waiting for miracles to happen. We have a generally good economic situation in Poland, but rural areas need to be made more attractive: that is the role of rural policies.

Many new member states including Poland have opted for the possibility of shifting money from the rural development fund to agriculture. Is there no lobby in Poland for a wider rural development policy?

The agenda of ‘competitive agriculture’ has created ‘hunger for land’ among the bigger farmers, because they want to grow and to reach ‘economies of scale’. But many smaller



Working hard for rural tourism in Poland

“Citizens in old member states may have forgotten how fortunate they are to belong to a community of democratic states and to share peace with their neighbours for more than 60 years.”

farmers are reluctant to sell their land. Also, there are closer relations now between farmers and consumers. The European Commission's new proposals for rural development include 'cooperation' between rural partners. Despite their rejection of 'forced cooperation' in Soviet times, people are now getting interested in cooperation, especially because they see that rural development is much more than agriculture. We have rediscovered the taste of our traditional cuisine, and the beauty of our horse carts for rural tourism. This might not yet be official policy, but it is a growing spirit.

What do you consider to be the main value added of PREPARE in rural development?

PREPARE helped to initiate rural movements in the new EU Member States, when they were still candidate countries. It has contributed strongly to the creation of Rural Parliaments in several countries, or national NGO platforms such as Polish Rural Forum. Also, it is largely due to the efforts of people involved in PREPARE that the LEADER approach has taken root in the new Member States and – for the most part – can be considered a success there.

You took part in one of the PREPARE Gatherings as a representative of the public sector. What did it mean for you?

The idea to bring together people from both NGOs and the public sector at PREPARE Gatherings helped to create a 'culture of cooperation' between public administration and civil society. This has been important in Poland, where the public

administration was initially very sceptical towards rural civil society: this attitude has gradually changed and become more positive. PREPARE's support to the creation of the Polish Rural Forum as a voice for rural communities, and its consistent efforts to promote dialogue and cooperation rather than conflict, have played an important role in this process.

Very important also is that PREPARE played this role at European level, by facilitating links between various civil society organisations and by helping these organisations to enter into dialogue with decision-makers. This was the idea behind the AgriCultural Convention in the early 2000s and it is continued now with the ARC 2020 initiative, supported by many people linked with PREPARE. These initiatives helped to strengthen the two-way communication process between rural civil society and public officials, and to create an organisational platform to lobby for rural interests at the EU level.

What are your personal impressions from the PREPARE events you attended?

I have very positive memories of active, motivated people, trying to make a change in rural Europe. The meetings helped me to better understand the needs of rural areas and the processes that are happening there.

'THE EU'S REGIONAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES CAN ONLY BE SUCCESSFUL, IF THEY ARE UNDERSTOOD AND SHARED BY PEOPLE ON THE GROUND.'



Dirk Ahner is a wholehearted supporter of the European project. As an EU civil servant, he contributed to the conception of the EU's rural development policy, from the Commission's communication on the "The future of rural society" in 1988 and the 'Delors Packages' to the 'Fischler Reform'. He was Deputy Director General of Agriculture and Rural Development from 2003 to 2006; and Director General of Regional Policy from 2007 to his retirement in 2011. He remains active in teaching and advising.

As a leading official of the European Commission, you have successfully promoted local development strategies in rural, urban and regional policies. The LEADER method will soon be applied on a territorial level across all structural funds. Does Europe need to promote bottom-up development as a top-down strategy in order to become more visible and graspable for its citizens?

Local development policy can only be successful if it is understood and carried by the people on the ground. People are usually concerned about their jobs, education for their children, medical care and a healthy environment ... in a word, about the quality of their life. This is exactly what local or regional development should provide. We may have brilliant ideas in the European institutions or national governments about how economic growth or environmental sustainability might work. But to make it happen we must listen to the citizens, learn about their needs and expectations, and explain the action that they can take with our support. We need good communication in both directions, and we must be ready to learn from past experience, from good and bad practices.

Why learn from bad practices?

In EU publications, we prefer to speak about good practices and success stories, because we hope that this will inspire and encourage people. But, to be honest, I have learnt much more from the mistakes I made than from successes. So, what about a brochure on bad practices which we never want to see again, with analysis of where and why things went wrong? For example, it is not sensible to build regional airports which attract very little traffic, to build dams without water, to install bicycle paths and barbecue areas in rural places which have no attraction for tourists.

“It is not sensible to build regional airports which attract very little traffic, to build dams without water, to install bicycle paths and barbecue areas in rural places which have no attraction for tourists.”

Maybe those cases are not just errors but conflicts of interests.

That is possible. We must respect the difference between the spheres of public and private interests, and ensure that there is no space for 'corruption' in the broadest sense of the word. But we must also take seriously the fear of failure. This fear can block innovation, and can divert public money into types of investment which are seen to be of low risk, which may be exactly what we do not want to see. Many small enterprises,

*Bottom-up decision making
PREPARE gathering in Velehrad
Czech Republic 2008*



research institutes and civil groups turn away from EU support because they fear their applications will fail. Some civil servants prefer to stay on the safe side to avoid any risks. All this impedes the generating of new ideas, turning them into innovative products and services, improving competitiveness and sustainability and stimulating the 'smart growth' which the Europe 2020 strategy requires. We have to be more courageous as individuals, as citizens, at all levels - local, regional, national and European. I am convinced that the chances to succeed through engagement and partnership across European borders are much higher than the risks of failure.

Agreed. But you know how difficult it is for citizens and NGOs to be recognised and supported by governments and administrations ...

That is true ... and that is why European networks like PREPARE have such an important role to play. You bring people together from different backgrounds and countries, so that they can share ideas and learn what is possible. You offer capacity building and scholarships which encourage people to take responsibility for their own future. You promote good communication and building of trust between citizens and governments. In my view, associations, foundations and networks - whether they work in formal or informal ways, or at European or national, regional or local level - have been essential in mobilising the potential for necessary change at the local level. They have given us feedback about where our policy frameworks are useful and where they are not.

The fact that Community Led Local Development and the so-called territorial approach in the Structural Funds is increasingly recognised as adding value to the EU's regional and rural development policies is a success for civil society and its organisations.

However, a word of warning. Action at local level is not enough, taken alone. In an integrated Community like the EU, it is essential to have a common framework with agreed objectives, priorities and rules that are known to and respected by all. Without such a framework, local initiatives may neutralise each other through pursuing divergent or even opposite objectives.

The EU encourages its civil servants to spend one work day per year at their former school in order to bring Europe back home. What about a day on local, territorial or rural development?

I think we need much more face-to-face contact between officials and citizens. We need a continuous process of learning and explaining, not just one-way information about the EU, but a well-organised exchange about the problems and opportunities in a given region, its vision for the future and its ideas for turning that vision into reality. Face-to-face meetings can give us a 'reality check' on our policies and programmes. Local people often feel limited in their activities by administrative rules, and they may be told by their own administrations - rightly or wrongly - that these rules are 'made

in Brussels'. We should be ready to talk openly about these things; to seek ways to improve the process; and where possible to achieve a mutual commitment to make change and development happen. This demands courage on both sides, but is far better than just creating a good dialogue and then leaving people alone with their problems.

The EU's financial framework and reduced financial means of Member States may lead to reduced money in the structural funds, especially in rural development. In this context, where do you think investment should be focused?

Good policies do not necessarily depend on money. LEADER was not expensive, and has mobilised much innovation and cooperation in rural areas. The main focus should not be on the absorption of subsidies, which can lead people to focus on measures which consume lots of money with little benefit in terms of development. I would focus on capacity building, and on partnership and cooperation between rural communities in fields such as water management, renewable energy, nature protection, education and other services. Such cooperation, based on a common strategy and action plan, can secure a development process which is sustainable and improves the quality of life in the area.

I suppose you will still be available for good advice as a pensioner. What kind of vision would you suggest to us for the coming ten years?

“The main focus should not be on the absorption of subsidies, which can lead people to focus on measures which consume lots of money with little benefit in terms of development. I would focus on capacity building, and on partnership and cooperation between rural communities.”

Local Action Groups (LAGs)

Local Action Groups are at the heart of the LEADER method, the bottom-up rural development approach initiated in 1991 by the European Commission. Each LAG is based on a partnership between public, private and civil society actors and is funded through Axis IV of the national rural development programme. It supports a wide variety of development projects in its area, within the framework of a rural development strategy agreed by the partners and approved by the national government. LAGs can exchange experiences through the formal National and European Rural Networks (see box on page 28); and also through informal networks and the European Leader Association for Rural Development (ELARD) see interview with Petri Rinne, President of ELARD in this chapter.

I would like to see a critical mass of good practices emerge, new forms of capacity building, good public-private partnerships, constructive cooperation with foundations and banks, sharing knowledge and responsibilities. Good practice and thus good use of public money should be the rule for all, not just for exceptional examples that you use in order to show that it can be done. This is not easy to achieve without the participation of citizens and civil organisations. Networks like PREPARE should therefore continue to play their role of information provider, as a clearing house of offers and demands for rural actors and animators in the process of capacity building and constructive dialogue. I think the idea of common reality checks between all shakers and movers is excellent. We need to overcome the barriers for balanced and sustainable development - the fear of incapacity, of failure or even of being second-class citizens. It is worth trying to make this vision real. If I can help I am happy to do so.

Capacity building on the spot



'GOVERNMENTS ARE OFTEN AFRAID OF GIVING MORE POWER TO COMMUNITIES, BUT THEY SHOULD TRUST US: WE HAVE THE KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT IS NEEDED IN RURAL LIFE, AND ARE OFTEN BETTER INFORMED.'



Guoda Burokiene is co-founder of the Lithuanian Rural Communities Union and represents her organisation on the PREPARE Organising Group. In 2005, the Union co-organised with the Latvian Rural Forum a PREPARE Gathering at Birstonas Spa, with cross-border traveling workshops. Guoda is a project leader of the Lithuanian Women Farmers' Association and an accredited LEADER consultant.

Rural Communities 'Union' sounds a bit like a farmers' union or political party. Why did you choose that name for a rural movement?

It was a popular term for us at that time, perhaps because there was not much union between the various rural groups and people. 'Union' was popular also because we wanted to be recognised by the government as a serious partner. We are not political in the sense of parties or trade unions,

but in the sense of uniting people and empowering them. Governments are often afraid of giving more power to communities, but they should trust us: we have the knowledge of what is needed in rural life and are often better informed.

When PREPARE gathered in Lithuania in 2005 with your support, the EU had just started shaping its new generation of rural development programmes for the period until 2013. Seven years later, we are now entering a similar phase of planning future rural development strategies. What has changed for you during this period?

We have achieved the recognition we wanted. We feel like being on a level playing-field with politicians. They know that we know a lot and they want our advice and our support. We started with seven rural communities in membership of the Union, and we now have 1600 members. We are involved in planning and advisory procedures. Some of our leaders became members of Parliament or of local authorities. But we are very careful not to be drawn into political party business, because that would ruin our position and our influence.

Looking ahead, the EU proposes to encourage member states to apply the LEADER method to all structural funds and to use a more local and territorial approach in both rural and urban development. Do you think this would work also in your country?

In principle this is a good idea. But there is a difference between formal and informal networks and processes. There is even something like competition between our Union and the formal structures like LAGs and LEADER projects. The question always is: who gets the official support? Power and influence goes where the money goes, and that is usually to the formal structures. However, ministries, agencies and the LAGs themselves also need our long-standing experience. We try hard to bring together our Union's experience and the capacities that are needed in the formal LAG networks. I must say that we would not be in such a strong position without being part of PREPARE. Through PREPARE, we are often much

*Lithuanian Rural Communities
Union's gathering*



“What I like most is that we really share our experiences and support each other in gaining recognition and power from the bottom up. If that is the spirit of European Union for the future, I am happy to be part of it.”

better informed about EU legislation and we have contacts throughout Europe. That gives us an outstanding position in our own country and in our regions.

Your country has borders with Latvia in the North, Belarus in the East, Poland in the South and Kaliningrad in the West. How do you get along with your neighbours?

We feel closest to the Latvians. We have many similar words in our languages and are historically and culturally attached. Some say we are the Italians of the Baltic. With our Polish neighbours we are becoming more friendly in spite of the history of occupation by them. We have partnership programmes with movements of both those countries, and we sometimes act as a bridge between North and South. We have also learnt a lot from the Finns, the Swedes and the Estonians. With Belarus and Kaliningrad we have no contact, for political reasons: they have shut all the doors. We work much better with people from Georgia.

What about young people in your organisation?

Well, there are not too many unfortunately. Of our three and a half million people at the time of independence, half a million have left the country, most of them to England and Ireland. Each family has someone who left: if they succeed in finding work there, others in the family may follow. Very many of them are young people. What we try to do is to concentrate on keeping schools in the countryside and improving the ed-

ucation. Many schools have recently closed as young people moved first to the cities and then abroad. But there are small signs of return, for example some who went to America are starting to return.

What is your vision for the future of your Union and of PREPARE?

We would like to see our rural communities' networks and the Union keep a strong and attractive position in our country, in order to strengthen the voice of civil society and civil rights in our country. PREPARE has very much helped us in that, and should continue to do so. The knowledge in European affairs and the learning from other good and bad practices, which we gain through PREPARE, make the difference. What I like most is that we really share our experiences and support each other in gaining recognition and power from the bottom up. If that is the spirit of European Union for the future, I am happy to be part of it.

'I THINK PREPARE HAS CREATED THE SPACE THAT CIVIL SOCIETY NEEDS TO CARRY A NEW SPIRIT OF DIRECT DEMOCRACY.'



Goran Šoster is director of Prlekija Development Agency, LAG manager and passionate wine grower in the Region of Prlekija in north-east Slovenia. He was a co-founder of the Slovenian Rural Development

Network. He has been Coordinator of the PREPARE Network since 2008, and he edited the booklet on Rural Parliaments in Europe, published by PREPARE in 2011.

Slovenia was long regarded as the small brother of Austria and the most Western-oriented country of the former Yugoslav federation. It was the first new member state to join the EU and the Euro. Does your country play a fore-runner role in the region?

It certainly did so in the second half of 20th century. After 2000, I am not so sure: it depends for what it could have been a fore-runner. Yes, we had higher GDP per capita, higher living standards, higher level of freedom and an overwhelming hunger for democracy after the Iron Curtain opened. And yes,

we belonged to the same Middle European culture as Austria. The Slovenian territory was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (which, by the way, our ancestors perceived as a 'prison of the nations'). We are like Austria in geography – mountainous, with small farms, fruitful valleys, village architecture, potential for combining rural tourism and nature protection. We had a leading role in becoming independent and then pressing for accession to the EU. But we also discovered, earlier than others, that the new system has devastating effects on our entire economy. We are now facing an economic and political crisis in Slovenia.

What do you mean by the economic and political crisis?

During the first ten years after independence, we enjoyed the new opportunities offered by capitalism – easy loans, imports, new enterprises, high growth rates. But after 2000, it became clear that democracy and collective responsibility had not followed those trends. Politicians were still thinking and acting in left-right ways: they played their power games, and sought private advantage in ways that were even more ruthless than before. So, we are in a double crisis – an economic one because we missed many opportunities to use our specific Slovenian advantages in both town and countryside; and a political one, because corruption has grown and citizens are increasingly frustrated with a political class which fails to follow its own declared principles and values.

“ I believe that the PREPARE partners have not only filled many gaps in democratic practices and values, but have also built our own new competences of governance from the bottom up. ”

As coordinator of PREPARE, you were happy that we dropped the subtitle ‘pre-accession’ partnership for rural Europe’. You felt this was discriminating. Why is that?

The term ‘Pre-accession partnership’ was relevant during the early phase of PREPARE’s work. But after intensive exchange and cooperation throughout Europe, the word ‘pre-accession’ still implies outsiders and insiders. I believe that enthusiasm, and the ability to strengthen civil society, are often much greater in the neighbour countries and new member states, because civil society is not yet established and looks for its place. So, some of the old member states might be regarded as ‘pre-accession’ countries to our energy and creativity. However, the PREPARE partnership became stronger with new members, and the disparities between old and new EU members slowly decreased. PREPARE became stronger and broader, so pre-accession was no longer the main focus.

With PREPARE being very active in South East Europe and Turkey, some of its partners have already suggested that the speed of moving South and enlarging rather than consolidating the network could become a problem ...

We are consolidating the network in both directions. Our bilateral capacity-building and exchange programmes are not just a West-East or North-South development aid. We are gathering a common wealth of experiences and know-how, and we gain strength collectively as an widening European movement. It is true we have been pressing, with intensity

and speed, to include more national movements and to establish a good dialogue with public officials. But we have made sure that the lead and the intensity of that dialogue were decided by the national movements. We have all learned from the excellent Swedish and Finnish rural development examples and the LEADER method. Our members have chosen and mixed those ideas and practices, discovered at workshops or PREPARE gatherings, which were most convincing and exciting for their needs.

You are writing a PhD thesis on local economies in Europe, with a focus on the role of civil society. Dany Cohn Bendit, the French-German Member of the European Parliament from the ex-68 generation, has recently declared that the old European party-based democracy is dead. From your experience as PREPARE coordinator, would you agree?

It is true that political parties throughout Europe and across political colours have lost not only members, but also the trust of many citizens. The ruthless impact of capitalism has ruined the social relationships in many countries, and society has changed very rapidly. Financial capitalism has penetrated the poorer countries and caused social polarization, creating almost (neo) colonial dependencies. National states mainly have not found the answer to that challenge. So, the role of civil society becomes even more important. I believe that the PREPARE partners have not only filled many gaps in democratic practices and values, but have also built our own new competences of governance from the bottom up. That

often gives us more influence, even at government level. It makes our role in new forms of democracy stronger. Being a European civil rural movement may put us ahead of many national governments in Europe, which are still defending their national interests against a common one. I think PREPARE has created the space that civil society needs to carry a new spirit of direct democracy.

PARTNERSHIP: ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT (Michael Dower)

Chapter 3 focused on one very significant type of partnership, namely the local action groups which operate under the LEADER programme. But partnership, as a feature in development processes, takes many other forms.

PREPARE itself is a partnership between two pan-European NGOs and 13 national rural networks or movements, which themselves are partnerships between different civil organisations. These national partnerships vary considerably in form, as is vividly shown in the report 'Rural Movements in Europe' by Vanessa Halhead, which PREPARE published in 2005. Some of them – for example in Sweden, Finland and Estonia - are built from the bottom up, as the national grouping of many hundreds of village-level action groups. Others – for example in Poland and Croatia - take the form of forums or alliances between different national, regional and local non-government organisations. They vary also in activities,

though there are many common features such as information systems, seminars, training, exchanges and the like. Some of them organise – typically, once every two years – a 'Rural Parliament', essentially a gathering of all their members, which may also offer the opportunity of direct dealing with senior politicians – see box 'Rural Parliaments' and the report on 'Rural Parliaments: emerging participative democracy' published by PREPARE in 2011 following a workshop on that subject organised by PREPARE.

Partnership is vital, in the field of rural development, for a simple reason. Action in that field is diverse: it depends upon public authorities at different geographic levels, private enterprises in different sectors, voluntary bodies with varied interests, local communities and individuals. No single sector can alone do what is needed. So, if coherent action is to be taken, the energy and resources of many different bodies must be focused on cooperative efforts.

Cooperation. This need for cooperation is clearly expressed by Dirk Ahner in his interview:

"Local development policy can only be successful if it is understood and carried by the people on the ground ... We may have brilliant ideas in the European institutions or national governments ... But to make it happen we must listen to the citizens, learn about their needs and expectations, and explain the action that they can take with our support ..."

Rural Parliaments (RP)
Rural parliaments are gatherings organised by some national rural movements, with the aim to exchange experiences, to join forces and to influence policies at local, regional and national level. They are often large gatherings, attended by many rural people. Rural Parliaments first emerged in Sweden and Finland and have spread to the new member states, now being organised biennially also in Estonia, Slovakia, Slovenia and the Netherlands.

We need much more face-to-face contact between officials and citizens ... a continuous process of learning and explaining ... a well-organised exchange about the problems and opportunities in a given region, its vision for the future and its ideas for turning that vision into reality. Such face-to-face meetings can give us a 'reality check' on policies and programmes."

Government and civil society. PREPARE, in its own activity, seeks to promote such face-to-face contact between officials and citizens, for example by inviting both national governments and civil society networks to its annual Gathering. The value of this is acknowledged by Andrzej Hałasiewicz in his interview. But we are very aware that many public officials are still averse to such contact; that citizens or small enter-



PREPARE in Macedonia: building partnerships across regions and countries

prises may be too shy or constrained to welcome such exchanges; and that, in some countries, civil society is still at an early stage of development.

Thus Viviana Vasile, in her interview, comments that:

"Civil society in rural Romania is at the very beginning. ... The collapse of communism and then accession to the EU allowed the emergence of NGOs. They have begun to be heard, though authorities sometimes do not seem to listen to them or understand their potential as partners."

Kaja Kaur and Guoda Burokiene, for their part, record the difficulty – and the time that it can take – to establish trusting relationships between civil society groups and governments. It can take both time and courage for both citizens and public authorities to “climb the ladder” of contacts which leads through simple information to genuine consultation and so (if all goes well) to participation in decision-making and eventually to true partnership. Mikk Saav, **on page 15**, emphasises the crucial importance of trust.

Capacity- building. The creation of viable partnerships may therefore depend upon a deliberate process of learning and capacity-building, as Dirk Ahner emphasises towards the end of his interview. He recognises and salutes the work which PREPARE and other civil networks are doing to “promote good communication and building of trust between citizens and governments” and to “mobilise the potential for necessary

change at the local level". From the other side of the government/civil sector relationship, Staffan Bond ([see interview, page 10](#)) calls for the EU and governments to "trust in people's capacity to manage their rural areas themselves". He calls for "seed money for people to organize and build their capacity", and for "policies which better support the national rural movements and the pan-European rural networks".

This plea from Sweden – a country with 30 years' experience of a national rural movement – suggests that even there the partnership between government and civil society could well be further strengthened. Looking more widely at the 27 member states of the EU, there is clearly great scope for further strengthening of civil society; for building of capacity within, and trust between, the public, private and civil sectors; and for wider patterns of partnership in regional and local development. The same point may well apply to the neighbour countries outside the EU, as is indeed suggested by the interviews with Dragan Roganović and Marko Koščak ([see pages 68 and 70](#)).

Dragan Roganović is very clear about the learning process that his Serbian Rural Network needs to pursue, and about the help that he hopes to receive from PREPARE:

"We are an organisation of volunteers with no paid or professional structure. We hope that from next year we will have funds for one or two persons for capacity building and coordination. We will work on applying LEADER ideas and creating local action groups; and we aim to become, like others in PREPARE, an active partner in policy-making in our country. We see PREPARE as our support structure for collective European capacity-building, and for understanding what is possible for rural initiatives on local, regional or national level and how to influence the political framework on the European level. It might take us ten years to get there and play our full role in the network, but it is worth sharing experience and coordinating our efforts."

Chapter 5 / Outreach

This chapter describes, through the voices of seven people who are working in EU accession countries and neighbouring countries, the challenge of strengthening civil society in those countries, and what this implies for PREPARE.

“THE INTERNAL PROBLEMS OF THE EU ARE NOT WORRYING US TOO MUCH COMPARED TO THE CHALLENGES WE WENT THROUGH IN RECENT YEARS AND WHICH ARE AHEAD OF US.”



Dragan Roganović is a member of the Management Board of the Serbian Rural Development Network, which is now a PREPARE partner. He has been active since 1998 in rural development initiatives in Serbia and the Western Balkan region, particularly in the Ibar Development Association in Southwest Serbia.

The Serbian Rural Network has recently joined PREPARE as our 13th national member organisation. What do you expect to achieve and how do you see your own role in working together in a European dimension?

In Serbia, we are in a special historical and geographic situation, moving like others from a planned economy to a market-oriented economy, but with the background of an ex-Yugoslav model of development. In a sense we are lucky to have as neighbours other ex-Yugoslav republics such as Croatia and Slovenia, with whom we share not only the same language but also part of common history and economic experience. Without language barriers, we can communicate more easily and do not have to explain too much to be understood. So we expect to learn from a broad experience of a European civil society network in rural development, but also to contribute to better collaboration especially in our South East European region. We have not much experience in organising civil society around rural development challenges, whereas others have that experience. But we know about our experience and history with our neighbours, which other European partners are not familiar with. It is an opportunity for mutual learning.

Serbia is in the process of accession, Croatia is joining in 2013, Slovenia is already an EU member. The EU struggles with economic and political turbulences. Is it still attractive to apply for EU membership?

Public support in Serbia for joining the EU has gone through major changes in past years, depending on political issues which are rather independent from the challenges we face in rural areas. Croatia and Slovenia had similar periodical ups and downs in positive and negative reactions in the public opinion. The internal problems of the EU are not worrying us

too much compared to the challenges we went through in recent years and which are ahead of us. I think during the coming seven years or so when we prepare for accession we can determine our own goals and ambitions, what is best for our own people, independently of whether or when we finally join the EU and how the EU solves its problems. We look into good policies and methods for our rural areas, such as LEADER and other participative and mobilising approaches, so that we can improve our administration and management: that in itself is the progress we want to achieve.

You have participated in a number of PREPARE and Forum Synergies workshops, gatherings and conferences. What was useful for your work in Serbia?

I participated twice in the Slovenian Rural Parliament and was impressed by the outreach and influence that such co-operation between civil society and government can have on rural policies. I have also learned from the very well organised LAGs in Sweden and Finland, for instance that they are allowed to calculate contributions “in kind”, not just their own money, to co-finance EU projects. We could use that example to tell our own administration that this is legal and possible. So the very important lesson for us was – you must know about opportunities, but you must also fight for them. Nothing just comes to you by itself.

Your network seems to be interested in farming and agricultural policy, not just in rural development. In the farm and rural policies of other national rural movements, there seem to be certain tensions and contradictions. Do these contradictions exist in Serbia?

We are supporting small farmers in order to improve their income and livelihoods in the rural areas. As in Poland and other central and East European countries, we have a very small-scale farming sector which struggles for survival with very few alternative sources of income. We were very impressed by the power and social life in rural Poland and have learned a lot about income alternatives in tourism and other fields. To be honest, we have difficulty to understand the discussion about the reform and future of the EU com-

“ I think during the coming seven years or so when we prepare for accession we can determine our own goals and ambitions, what is best for our own people, independently of whether or when we finally join the EU and how the EU solves its problems. ”

Drvengrad (Kusturica wooden town), Serbia



“ We see PREPARE as our support structure for collective European capacity building in understanding what is possible for rural initiatives on local, regional or national level. ”

mon agriculture and rural policies. We have no experience in anything comparable that we can relate it to. We had no such process of discussion and debate about policies and cooperation across borders in the past. But we have the ambition to prepare ourselves to get to the same level of knowledge and participation in shaping future policies which also take into account our specific farming structures and geographical and political conditions.

What is your vision for the Serbian Rural Network and the role of PREPARE in the coming 10 years?

As the Serbian Rural Network, we are an organisation of volunteers with no paid or professional structure. We hope that from next year we will have funds for one or two persons for capacity building and coordination. We will work on LEADER groups and local action groups and become – like others in PREPARE – an active partner in policy-making in our country. We see PREPARE as our support structure for collective European capacity building in understanding what is possible for rural initiatives on local, regional or national level and how to also influence the political framework on the European level. It might take us ten years to get there and to play our full role in the network, but it is worth sharing experience and coordinating our efforts.

‘THE COUNTRIES OF FORMER YUGOSLAVIA ARE HUNGRY FOR ACTION, FOR IDEAS, FOR THE FRESH WIND OF EUROPEAN EXPERIENCE, IN ORDER TO IMPROVE THEIR LIVELIHOODS. BUT TIME WILL BE NEEDED TO BUILD RURAL MOVEMENTS THERE.’



Marko Koščak was our main contact in Slovenia when PREPARE started. After Slovenia's independence in 1991, he worked in the Ministry of Agriculture, bringing government support to local projects through the CRPOV programme for Integrated Rural Development and Village Improvement. He joined PREPARE Coordinator Michael Dower in the first steps towards creating a national rural network in Slovenia.

What do you recollect about the process of forming the Slovenian Rural Development Network?

From 1991, those who worked at local level in Slovenia were scattered, and ill organised in terms of lobbying. The PREPARE initiative was very timely and helpful in conceiving a structure. First, we organized in 2000 a national workshop in Kranjska Gora, with about 30 people who had been active

in the CRPOV programme. They decided ‘Yes, we need this: but since Slovenia is diverse in geography and in needs, we should seek views from each region about so crucial a step’. So we ran a series of regional workshops, one in each of the 12 regions. These supported the idea, and it was agreed to create a network, because there was no existing body to bring together national and local partners.

So, the Network was set up at a formal meeting of about 40 people. Our national legislation did not then allow legal bodies to join a formal association, so the founding members were individuals: however, legal bodies joined in later when the legislation changed. From the start, we focused on three types of action – information, training and networking – with a two-year plan and a budget. In the first year, we had some money from PREPARE, and some from the Ministry of Agriculture and the British Embassy.

What has happened with the Network over the last 12 years?

Everything depends upon people. We started very well, with a strong personality as the Network’s President; an enthusiastic Board of eight people with professional experience in rural projects; and a very good Secretary based in a regional development agency. But difficulties emerged when the Ministry of Agriculture failed to produce the funding promised by the State Secretary. Then the President was appointed to a government post, and had to resign. The Network activity continued: however, some tensions developed be-

tween the Network and the Ministry, some momentum was lost, and it proved difficult to secure funding for the day-to-day operation.

When Goran Šoster became President, he was able to provide some secretariat for the Network at his Regional Agency in Prlekija, and to find some funding through PREPARE. He established good working relations with the Ministry of Agriculture: with their support, the Network now acts as the link between the Local Action Groups set up under LEADER. In December 2011, Goran organized a very successful meeting to launch the Slovenian Rural Parliament, with an afternoon session addressed by the President of the Republic dr. Danilo Tuerk.

What was the role of PREPARE?

First, without PREPARE we would not have held the national and regional workshops which laid the foundation. Everyone involved respected the detailed and participative approach, and began to believe in the idea of a network. We were greatly helped by modest funding from PREPARE, which we used as matching funds when seeking money elsewhere. Our participation in PREPARE Gatherings enabled us to gather ideas; to discuss the rural challenges that we share with other countries; and to find partners for transnational projects. Our Local Action Groups now have many exchanges with those in other countries. Contacts made through PREPARE also enabled us to export Slovenian expertise in rural development, notably to other parts of the former Yugoslav Federation.

“First, without PREPARE we would not have held the national and regional workshops which laid the foundation. Everyone involved respected the detailed and participative approach, and began to believe in the idea of a network.”

Slovenians have linguistic links with former Yugoslav countries and good knowledge of them. Is it timely and practicable to assist the strengthening of civil society there?

Yes, such action is very timely. These countries are hungry for action, for ideas, for exchange, for the fresh wind of European experience, in order to improve their livelihoods. Often, people at local level are better informed than the civil servants at national level, for example in their understanding of the LEADER idea. But civil society is less well-developed than it was in Slovenia when we started the Network. In Serbia or

*Razkrižje, 2009 traveling workshop
in Slovenia*



Montenegro, for example, very few people are active in local development or understand what it is really about. There is no tradition of participative democracy and the bottom-up approach. So, time will be needed to build a movement there.

In these countries, the approach should be at both national and local level. PREPARE should approach both public bodies and the non-government sector, helping them to come together. The two sides are active in different ways but do not cooperate enough. Governments need to be convinced that they should put more money into rural development, and should encourage action by the private and voluntary, not only the public, sectors. They should recognise that partnerships need time to build and to gain internal trust and understanding before they can effectively serve the needs of local people. PREPARE is very good at bringing people together from different sectors and geographic levels, for example through traveling workshops, round tables and study visits. This is what is needed. People like taking part in such events, seeing good practice and case studies: they gain valuable experience in this way.

'WE NEED *PREPARE* IN THE WESTERN BALKANS TO DRAW THE ATTENTION OF OUR GOVERNMENTS TO OUR RURAL DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL.'



Petar Gjorgievski was a co-founder, and is now president, of the National Rural Development Network of the Republic of Macedonia, which has become a PREPARE partner. The Network is working with rural stakeholder's associations to identify needs, to build their capacities, and to promote the introduction of rural development and LEADER principles at national and local level.

Your Network has recently joined PREPARE as the third member from the Western Balkan region. How would you describe the role of Macedonia and of your Network in the region?

I believe the countries in this region have much more in common with each other than most people from other parts of Europe would believe. It is not only the common history, our language and mentalities which tie us together invisibly. We share also many common values, and even treasures, which may be not very apparent but which give us strength to solve



the many challenges in social, economic and financial terms. We also share the feeling of running behind developments in Europe which are attractive to us, such as the recognition of civil society and the role it can play in policy-making and programming, or the opportunities to organise partnerships between private and public sectors. These opportunities still seem very far from our realities: they are interesting and attractive but not within our grasp, like a carrot in front of your nose but too far to reach. So our role as a network is first to raise awareness of our own values and potential, and then to reach out for possibilities to find our place in the wider Europe.

PREPARE gathering in Macedonia. Here comes the next generation.

Macedonia negotiates for EU accession in parallel with your neighbour countries. Do you think that there is also a common strategy among the governments in preparing for accession e.g. on rural development issues?

Agriculture and rural development are certainly part of the Macedonia's overall EU accession process. All the countries are trying to get their homework for accession done in time: it would improve our position and our inner strength if this was done collectively, but that is not really happening. In general, the process of linking our regulations and mechanisms to EU requirements is very slow. As for LEADER methods and programmes, we are far behind and just watching what is possible in EU member states. Also multi-national cooperation, using existing EU cross-border funds and EU capacity-building of regional CSO Networks of the IPA countries, is not at all easy. We have tried that with partners in Bulgaria, Montenegro, and Albania, but there are many technical and logistical barriers. The Standing Working Group for the Western Balkans (see Box on page 87) has tried to create a Balkan network. That was a good initiative, but it did not really work out yet on the government level and is even less effective within the informal sector.

What is missing in terms of support for civil society?

The biggest problem is that we have had very little space to develop our capacities and to gain experience in organising ourselves. Also, we became very dependent on donors

in past years, but many donor organizations are now leaving our region and are not being replaced by other sources of support and encouragement. I believe we have to get closer together with other social movements, and to build a kind of umbrella of civil society organisations so that we are heard and respected by our governments. We should reach out more to potential partners like small farmers' organizations, rural women and youth associations and others. Finally, we must be aware that, in Macedonia as in most countries, there are two different ideas about rural development - the top down thinking of governments and the bottom-up thinking of civil society. The top-down approach is often politically influenced and less stable: the bottom-up approach like LEADER is better rooted in rural communities and more sustainable. We have to understand both ways of dealing with rural development, and try to strike a good balance.

What kind of role do you see for PREPARE in the coming years?

We need PREPARE in the Western Balkans to draw the attention of our governments to our potential for rural development. PREPARE can use its many years of experience to increase the awareness of governmental institutions and bodies that civil society can play a major role in making rural development work. PREPARE can help to widen the narrow thinking of all rural stakeholders, including national and local administrations and the civil and business sectors on all levels. It can help us by interpreting the possibilities which

“ I believe we have to get closer together with other social movements, and to build a kind of umbrella of civil society organisations so that we are heard and respected by our governments. ”

lie within the EU legislation, rather than imposing something on a 'one to one' basis which does not make sense in our countries. We need help in perceiving and realising the treasures of our potentials and linking these to the needs and values that we share in this region. If you live in rural areas, it is not good to feel that you are behind everybody else and far away from what people call the good life. But if you become aware that many people in Europe share the same problems and challenges and try to solve them in the same way, that is indeed encouraging.

'TURKEY DOES NOT 'BELONG' TO EUROPE. IT HAS ITS OWN IDENTITY AND LIES SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN THE MANY DIFFERENT CULTURES AND HISTORIES OF OUR REGION'



Aylin Ornek is one of the initiators and animators of a national rural network of local initiatives, rural organisations, academics and foundations in Turkey. She has studied urban planning and nature conservation. She runs a coffee & food shop in Istanbul, where she sells the products of small farmers directly to consumers.

Why does an urban planner like you get so engaged and excited about rural development in Turkey?

I like connecting people. Part of my engagement is the coffee shop in Istanbul which I run with my partner. Small farmers from around the city bring their fruit and vegetables here, so that city people can come and buy it directly, and know where their food is coming from. I am also one of a growing group of people who care about Turkey's rural future and who are seeking better policies and living conditions in our villages and countryside. I worked professionally in Turkish NGOs and in the Böll Foundation based in Istanbul, where I learned a lot about the challenges and opportunities of rural development. Running a coffee shop in a big city and engaging in a national rural development network are the two elements of my own history.

Turkey builds the bridge between Europe and Asia. But negotiations on accession to the EU are currently stuck and will probably not be concluded soon. Is there a problem of constructive communication?

Turkey is a very big country. It does not 'belong' to Europe. It has its own identity and lies in between the many different cultures and histories of this region. We also have many different ethnic and political realities within our own country, so constructive communication is often difficult. I feel that the EU, or those who negotiate with our government, have not yet realised this. It is impossible to copy/paste the existing Common

“ I like connecting people. Part of my engagement is the coffee shop in Istanbul which I run with my partner. Small farmers from around the city bring their fruit and vegetables here, so that city people can come and buy it directly, and know where their food is coming from. ”

PREPARE workshop with Turkish rural movements 2012 Kizilzhamam



Agriculture and Rural Policy into our country. It would ruin most of our farmers and put most of our rural regions into a very bad position. I am not saying there is no perspective to join the EU. But the EU must substantially change its policy for farmers and rural areas, before there can be a common future: our own government, too, should change its policy. So yes, more constructive communication is necessary.

What are the rural development ambitions of the Turkish government?

There is no such thing as rural development policy for Turkey yet. The government tries to implement the EU's pre-accession programmes without adapting them to Turkish realities - and that cannot work. At the workshop which we co-organised with PREPARE, the government blamed the EU for everything which goes wrong wherever the IPARD programme is implemented. Top-down thinking is still dominant: the

general excuse is that 'The EU tells us to do so'. Our government and its agencies must learn to involve the rural people more into rural development planning, and to respect the proposals coming from organised civil society like our group. So many good initiatives are ignored, and so many projects are going in the wrong direction, because of this one-way top-down thinking.

The bulk of Turkish pre-accession money seems to go into more intensive milk and meat production, and orientation towards exports. Rural infrastructure projects are focused on improving the equipment of farmers. How does your rural movement network get along with Turkish farmers' organisations?

The error lies in the concept of EU's pre-accession programmes, which focus on bigger and more competitive farms and economies of scale. Most Turkish farmers are small or at subsistence level, and they cannot become 'competitive' in European terms. If they are not supported on their own terms, within a broader approach to the rural economy, they will lose their land and livelihoods and migrate to the cities, creating further problems of poverty there. So, as a movement of rural people, we cannot separate rural policies from farm policies. Rural development is completely linked to what happens to farmers and how they can get a fair income and living. There may be regions in Europe that can live without farmers, but in Turkey that is impossible. The very great natural diversity of our countryside exists because of

“The error lies in the concept of EU's pre-accession programmes, which focus on bigger and more competitive farms and economies of scale. Most Turkish farmers are small or at subsistence level, and they cannot become 'competitive' in European terms.”

the diversity of agriculture. If our kind of farming is replaced by large-scale agriculture, also our villages and the treasures of biodiversity and natural resources would disappear.

The workshop of the Turkish rural network was moderated by women. Is that the secret of success of the Turkish rural movement ?

Maybe - women work harder sometimes! But seriously, not only the leader of the nomad people in Turkey is a woman but so are many active members of our network. We do give high attention to gender issues in our group, and we are challenging the government's policies from this point of view. Education and farming are largely in women's hands, and their involvement in decision-making must be improved, especially in order to train and support young people.

How would you like to see relations develop between Turkey and Europe, and between their rural movements, in the coming years?

First, we need to accept that economic and cultural realities, both within Turkey and within the EU, are very different and sometimes conflicting. We should not underestimate the barriers which we must remove in order to realise our dreams of a more sustainable and democratic rural life. We must mount effective opposition to ill-conceived political concepts, so that governments learn to listen to us. But we must also be constructive and competent enough to build trustful

alliances with certain people in governments and institutions and to take responsibilities ourselves. We believe it is good to support and learn from other people within and beyond Turkey, and we will soon be deciding whether the time has come to join PREPARE as a member or whether we should first consolidate our own national network.

The EU's paradox, as seen from Turkey

"I need no hectares I need neighbours!" These words belong to a French farmer complaining to a European Commission registration official checking his farm to see if it meets agricultural subvention requirements. It is the concise and tragic expression of under-populated rural areas and diminishing agricultural population in Europe. European countries are yearning for re-invention of the art of living in rural areas which they lost after the industrial revolution. The European quest has peaked lately by concerns about climate change and biodiversity loss. However, in EU candidate countries, harmonisation works in farming are inspired by the very paradigms from which the EU is trying to save itself. On the one hand, the EU is struggling to quit the productivist "green revolution", and on the other side it is imposing pure competitive reasoning and decrease of population in rural areas as the outcome of this old paradigm to candidate members as clearly seen in examples of Poland and Romania.

What one should do is obvious. Turkey sits on a peerless treasury in terms of biodiversity and farming knowledge. China and India might be its tough competitors in textile and other industries but definitely not in farming. However, we blindly envy the developed countries and repeat the mistakes which kill our farming and rural areas in Turkey.

Dr. Cengiz Aktar in Turkish Daily News 23 October 2007 (hl)

“The modern state is obsessed with economic growth, and tends to treat the biological diversity of rural regions as a standardized economic commodity: this is a serious problem.”

‘RURAL PEOPLE WHO COME FROM DIFFERENT POLITICAL STANDPOINTS CAN MEET, DEBATE ISSUES OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT, AND BUILD SOLIDARITY.’



an M.A. Degree in woman's studies.

Yonca Verdioğlu has been working for Heinrich Böll Foundation since 2009 as project coordinator for its rural development programme. She studied German at the Istanbul University and is still pursuing

For many years, the Turkey Representation of the Heinrich Böll Foundation has facilitated the dialogue between rural civil society in Turkey and has supported NGOs engaged in rural areas and in small scale farming. Given the enormous size of the country and the diversity of cultures, how do you see the prospects for rural development and policies in the country?

Turkey with its young population structure, different ethnic groups and cultural diversity is an extremely dynamic country. The rural regions in which 25% of the population lives, have a unique structure in both, biodiversity and agriculture. In biodiversity, Turkey is one of the richest countries in Europe and the Middle East, hosting three of the most important ec-

ological regions of the world. Each of its seven geographical regions has a different character in climate, flora and fauna. 78% of its farms are small scale.

How does the Turkish government deal with small scale farms and rural development?

As in other fields, the policy for rural development is very much determined by top-down decision making. To my mind, this highly centralized policy-making can hardly address the differing needs that emerge at the local level. Most of the rural development programs implemented in the past had failed since they did not take these differing needs into account. With the EU adjustment process, several reforms were implemented concerning rural development, but these policies also were not able to give an adequate answer to the local and regional differences in Turkey. The modern state is obsessed with economic growth, and tends to treat the biological diversity of rural regions as a standardized economic commodity: this is a serious problem.

What would you think could be a better approach?

We need a rural development approach, built upon ecosystems and social structures, which embraces all entities and gives priority to decentralized decision-making and small farmers. The present development framework is unlikely to deliver any good for the small scale producers who still dominate the farming sector. New policies directed towards

the re-structuring of the rural areas are not based on an adequate analysis. Villages will be dissolved and integrated into big cities hereby for example abolishing the system of communal areas used by small scale farmers. This will lead to a new wave of rural-urban migration leaving vast areas abandoned. The key question now is whether villages and villagers can survive in the face of continued migration to the cities, consequent ageing of the rural population, and the trend towards capitalist agriculture. On the other hand, the migrants will encounter difficulties to find income opportunities as in the past and transfer support to the villagers left behind. The Heinrich Böll Foundation aims at supporting alternative ecological initiatives, and bottom up approaches that include gender issues and problems of young people in the countryside.

You are working closely with Turkish foundations and international organizations active in rural areas. How do you see the role of foundations in bottom-up rural development initiatives in Turkey?

There are only a few Turkish foundations that are funding activities in rural areas. In general they run their own projects or co-operate with local NGOs as long as it benefits their own projects. Some of these foundations try to make a need assessment based on information from local actors. International foundations in general are not active in this field. Companies like BTC support rural development projects, but are criticized for not taking local needs suffi-



Aylin Örnek and Yonca Verdioglu at PREPARE rural civil society workshop in Turkey 2012

ciently into account. Other international actors act without knowledge of the demands of rural NGO's or the needs of the rural population. They seem to have an approach of "one size fits all".

The broad network of NGOs, which you have supported in gatherings and dialogue, is growing fast. Where do you see the strength and challenges in this dialogue and the potential to lift their role in wider rural development?

There are many national and especially local NGOs who work in the field on rural development without knowledge of each other. At our gatherings these NGOs get to know each other, share their experiences, their knowhow and start to co-operate. This is a very new experience especially for the grassroots NGOs. It is also not easy for the NGOs to manage such a network. Still, our organization takes the main responsibil-

“The key question now is whether villages and villagers can survive in the face of continued migration to the cities, consequent ageing of the rural population, and the trend towards capitalist agriculture.”

ity of organization and managing the meetings. International networking is far more difficult for these NGOs, for reasons of language, organization and finances. We are supporting the dialogue between the NGOs so that they become aware of each other, share their experience and knowledge, and learn about good practices and different approaches to issues such as gender or ecology. Further, NGOs which are in contact with international networks can transfer the ideas and experiences from other countries to the participants of the gatherings. The advantage of the gatherings is also, that rural people from different political background can meet, debate issues of rural development, and create solidarity among each other. But due to the very diverse political background, it takes more time to develop into a national platform that will define common demands towards the national political level. It is a challenge to establish a national platform of NGOs, in which the diversity allows different wordings and opinions while lobbying on the national level.

REMADEL

Remadel is a rural development network comprising 33 associations, mainly working in local projects of marginalised rural areas in the Maghreb countries - Algeria, Morocco, Mauretania and Tunisia. REMADEL was founded in 2008 and has since supported local and territorial partnership projects with exchanges organised between the national networks of the countries.

‘THE ARAB SPRING WAS AN INVENTION OF WESTERN MEDIA. DEMOCRACY DOESN’T FALL FROM THE SKY AFTER A REVOLUTION. WHAT COUNTS IN OUR VILLAGES IS THAT PEOPLE CAN ORGANISE THEIR LOCAL LIVELIHOODS.’



Sanaa Moussalim is coordinator of REMADEL, the Maghreb network of rural local civil society organisations including thirty-three associations from Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Mauretania. She works as advisor to the ‘Agence de Développement de l’Oriental’ in Rabat, Morocco.

As one of the founders and now executive secretary of REMADEL, you have gathered 33 civil society organisations working together on rural and local development in four Maghreb countries. What are the key concerns and needs of rural people in the Southern Mediterranean region?

We created REMADEL in 2008, at the end of a seminar in Tunisia. The gathering dealt with problems like marginalisation of rural economies in our countries and a certain disengagement of governments in rural affairs. We tried to encourage non-governmental organisations and networks

to strengthen local and territorial initiatives organised by the people themselves. At that seminar, we were surprised to discover that we had almost identical problems in our countries ... but more than that, we had already found similar solutions. If we had known about our common problems and initiatives earlier, we might have been able to move on faster and to support each other in making rural development stronger.

How long did it take to set up such an impressive network?

It was quite an uphill struggle, with very little means but much passion and good will. It took us five years to get to know each other, to make ourselves known in our regions and countries, and to thrash out a common working programme. We had much support from various universities, experts and governmental institutions. But we were never able to employ anyone for coordination, animation or capacity building work. We also had some exchange with Local Action Groups from Italy, France and Spain participating in EU LEADER programmes, but this exchange has reduced as their projects came to an end.

You also tried to convince the EU Commission to extend the New Neighbourhood Policy to the South of the Mediterranean Region ...

Indeed, with active support from Pierre Campagne, a friend from the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute (IAM) in

Montpellier, we had suggested a programme for cooperation in rural development between the EU and the Maghreb countries. The EU Commission welcomed the idea and launched a call for proposals for the so-called ENPARD programme - European Neighbourhood Policy for Agriculture and Rural Development, which included all the Maghreb countries and also Georgia, Moldova and Armenia. This clearly built upon the positive ideas of bottom-up rural development like LEADER. Our problem was that REMADEL has no legal entity and we were not eligible for running EU-financed projects.

Rural tourism in Morocco



The emergence of NGO's in the three countries of the Maghreb

Historically, the Maghreb countries came up at the time of independence with incentive policies, even if in different ways, to encourage production following a productivity model. These include the policy of one million irrigated hectares in Morocco, the concentration of agricultural development on self-run fields in the Algerian Great Plains and the hydro-agricultural projects as well as large water and soil conservation sites in Tunisia...

These policies have led to the development of particularly advantaged areas while marginal areas have developed a dual system in which the low incomes of agriculture and animal husbandry are balanced by important migrant remittances.

The mid 80s was the death knell of this dual system for two reasons. On the one hand, the slowdown in the global economy has caused the decrease of emigration and its incomes. On the other hand, the impact of globalization and economic adjustments led to the disengagement of the State and to increasingly open economies, free from any regulatory economic and social constraints. Thus the State dropped out some important economic functions it used to exercise in rural areas. In parallel, and given the lack of empowered local communities, the civil society proliferated in the area of local economic development.

These initiatives have mainly been aimed at primary needs (production, health, education) but could not really consolidate market-driven economic activities.

Thus the rural world is being restructured in the Maghreb countries. With the failure of the public policy to address the challenges of a sustainable rural world, spontaneous or decreed new forms of organization, and specific to rural development emerged many years ago. These organizations are of various types: sectoral (for water management, production, etc...) or generally related to the management of local development. (Sa/hl)

So you are not involved in ENPARD?

Well, we hoped to be involved through IAM. They applied and they got the funding. But it turned out that IAM wanted to work from the top down, with programmes to be implemented without really involving the local civil society. The project then fell into the hands of the Agriculture Ministries, and we lost the chance of mobilising people from the bottom-up.

Experts suggest that almost half of the rural and agricultural areas in the Maghreb countries are excluded from development measures, in the sense of not receiving any financial or advisory support, nor being able to keep people from migrating to urban or intensively farmed areas. Has the so-called "Arab Spring" changed anything?

First of all, in my view the "Arab Spring" was an invention of Western media. Democracy doesn't fall from the sky after a revolution. What counts in our villages is that people can organise their local livelihoods, which they do. There is a long tradition in Morocco of action by family tribes, nicknamed "Les Ait Debrouille". We take our own initiative to keep our schools, medical services and roads in good shape. As there is not much money, emigrants send money from Europe which is invested in their home villages. I am working for a development agency which co-finances bottom-up initiatives in rural areas. Morocco also has an important programme, launched in 2005 and called the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH), which organises calls for proposals and

offers support to projects selected from the very many that are submitted at local level. In Morocco we have a strong civil society and many local organisations: in Algeria and Tunisia it is a bit different, for historical reasons.

How do you see the future of REMADEL and rural civil society in the countries where your network is based?

We are quite confident that we will make further progress in local and territorial organisation of civil society. We have successfully applied for support from the EU for exchange of experience, capacity building and publicity about our work. The grant is managed through Oxfam Italy, but we have made sure that 90% of our approved work programme is taken up in that project. We are also interested in re-making contact with the Mediterranean LEADER projects, and to get to know PREPARE and your work. We wish to learn from Rural Parliaments and your working methods. And we are quite sure you can learn from us too. Working together across cultural and historical borders with the same spirit of making life in rural areas better is a chance for all.

‘EUROPE WAS BUILT AND IS CARRIED BY CIVIL SOCIETY – WE SHOULD NOT FORGET THAT.’



Henk Visser works at the Directorate General for Enlargement of the European Commission. He is responsible for relations with civil society in accession countries.

Would you describe your work with civil society in EU accession countries as routine work or as an uphill struggle?

It should be routine, because support for civil society is part of EU legislation. But in reality it's not an easy job. Europe was built by civil society - and we have to make sure that our governments do not forget that. Good governance never works against the people, but rather helps them to find their place in society. The knowledge and enthusiasm of civil society is the energy that we need to make so many necessary changes happen, especially when we welcome more countries and people into the Union. Therefore, in DG Enlargement we try to support countries such as those in the Western Balkans and Turkey in creating a situation that is friendly to Civil Society, using our Civil Society Facility instrument.

“The knowledge and enthusiasm of civil society is the energy that we need to make so many necessary changes happen, especially when we welcome more countries and people into the Union.”

“Many CSOs are good missionaries, but they are not necessarily good project writers or project managers. So we try to help in building capacity for such work. On the other hand, we do not want civil society to get ‘hooked’ on EU money. We do not want them to be so occupied with writing project proposals year after year that they lose touch with things on the ground.”

Potpecka cave Serbia

You cannot force governments to take civil society seriously. What are your means to support local initiatives and civil society movements?

We as EU should lead by example, and we try to do so by entering into partnership agreement with main Civil Society Organisations. We are mainly offering information and training in better communication. The key barriers to bottom-up involvement are often the lack of information about opportunities and the lack of know-how and experience in dealing with governments and institutions. Civil society groups often



start from very diverse stakeholder positions and are seen as being in opposition to governments. Diversity, which is the beauty of civil society, is also a handicap, because it is hard to agree a common position. We offer technical aid and facilities so they can get access to know-how on planning and setting up projects, writing project proposals and managing projects. Our ‘People to People’ programme is a tool to draw civil society together so that they can speak and negotiate with a common voice. The aim is that all these great voices of the Civil Society Organisations come together into a ‘close harmony’ song.

Calls for proposals from the EU for financial support to civil society are known to be extremely complicated, which discourages people even to get in contact with you ...

That is not the case for the ‘People to People’ programme. But where CSOs respond to calls for proposals on projects and their management, it can get difficult. Many CSOs are good missionaries, but they are not necessarily good project writers or project managers. So we try to help in building capacity for such work. On the other hand, we do not want civil society to get ‘hooked’ on EU money. We do not want them to be so occupied with writing project proposals year after year that they lose touch with things on the ground. I have seen many civil society initiatives appear and thrive without needing EU project money, for example in Bosnia and Croatia. We need to make these good practices known, by informing citizens of the good work that CSOs do. This will take time.

PREPARE is working in the rural areas of new member states, accession and new neighbour countries. The key problems is almost everywhere the same – demographic change, weak rural economies, out-migration. It seems often to be part of the EU dilemma, a competitiveness agenda versus cooperation in rural and in urban areas ...

That is true. First we encourage people to meet, exchange experiences, learn from good practices and cooperate with partners in their region and across borders: that is the cooperation agenda. But when they apply for funding, they have to compete with others, which often lead to exclusion of the weaker ones. It is essential that the strong CSOs do not forget their smaller brothers and sisters, since after all they do share a common agenda. Therefore, with the Partnerships we try to get the managers to manage and the campaigners to campaign.

I personally believe that enhancing cooperation is more important than competition, especially in fragile democracies. And I think governments have an interest in strengthening cooperation, because they need civil society as the base for building democracy. Even if they nurture pressure groups this way, they can identify where the problems are and support the people to solve these problems themselves. This might sound normal, but is still to be discovered in many countries. It is a friend who tells you what you need to do differently: your enemy will make sure you continue to make the same mistakes over and over again.

People to people

The People to People programme (P2P) of the Civil Society Facility of the EU Directorate-General for Enlargement provides opportunities for civil society organisations, in the EU candidate and potential candidate countries and territories, to exchange and expand their capacities and knowledge about the accession process through visits to the European Institutions, meetings with European civil society organisations, and international or regional networking. The P2P programme organises and finances EU study tours for civil society organizations on a wide range of topics. The Civil Society Facility also provides grants for longer-term partnerships between the EU and Civil Society Organisations from the enlargement region. More information at:

http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/tenders/support-for-civil-society/index_en.htm

REFLECTIONS ON PREPARE'S OUTREACH TO ACCESSION AND NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES (Hannes Lorenzen)

Following rural movements

As a European network of informal national civil society organisations, PREPARE has followed the rhythm of self-organisation of rural development initiatives and movements where they appear in accession candidate countries. PREPARE also takes initiative to identify key people or organisations in neighbour countries which have no perspective or interest in joining the EU. In many countries the energy to get organised from the bottom-up is a reaction to the weakening of social

“We had no such process of discussion and debate about policies and cooperation across borders in the past. But we have the ambition to prepare ourselves to get to the same level of knowledge and participation in shaping future policies.”

and economic structures in rural areas, out-migration to urban regions or abroad, or the low interest of governments in these areas. Often it was the experience of being ignored or sidelined by their governments which brought rural civil society organisations in contact with us and into further exchange and cooperation.

People in the countries of former Yugoslavia are “hungry for action, for ideas, for exchange, for the fresh wind of European experience, in order to improve their livelihoods”, says Marko Koščak. Such interest in learning how civil society operates in the European Union shows that people may be ahead of their own governments. “Often, people at local level are better informed than the civil servants at national level, for example in their understanding of the LEADER idea”, Koščak adds. The eagerness of getting in touch with civil society abroad also helped to establish a new culture of public debate about policies and decision-making. “We had no such process of discussion and debate about policies and cooperation across borders in the past. But we have the ambition to prepare ourselves to get to the same level of knowledge and participation in shaping future policies”, says Dragan Roganović from Serbia.

In **Southeast Europe**, we have been working country by country, ‘feeling our way’ through political sensitivities, seeking collaboration rather than competition with the many different bodies already working in these countries. Dirk Ahner and Kaj Mortensen, with their experience in the

European Commission, have drawn our attention for the need to join forces between all those who are active and passionate about rural development in the region. We have so far established a formal agreement with the Standing Working Group, but we know that the potential for working together is much greater than what we have achieved so far (**see box on the Standing Working Group, page 87**).

We know that it takes time for civil society structures to emerge, to gain confidence and expertise, as described by Dragan Roganović from Serbia and others in their interviews. But this is not a reason for us to stand back and wait. On the contrary, we have been impressed and encouraged by the passion and enthusiasm that we discover in the region, and as a European network we have received a fresh wind of energy to move on. Our Gathering in 2009 was hosted by the Croatian national network, in 2010 we were received by the emerging national networks in Macedonia and in 2011 by the Serbian National Rural Network. All these gatherings showed the high level of thematic and organisational competence in these countries and contributed not only to recognition at the national, but also on the European level.

Our outreach to accession and neighbouring countries is also facilitated through contacts and cooperation with international organisations like UNDP, representations and support structures of member states and the European Commission. We can also rely upon activity of individual PREPARE partners. Marta Marcziś describes the potential for such cooperation in her in-

interview on page 99. The scope for networking without diplomatic or political restrictions is wide and sometimes opens up windows of opportunity towards distant neighbours. Guoda Burokiene from Lithuania (on page 60) feels close to civil society in Georgia, Ryszard Kamiński from Poland (on page 24) enjoys close cooperation with colleagues in Serbia.

Turkey has offered a complex challenge. It is nominally an accession country, but – as Aylin Ornek points out – “has its own identity and lies somewhere in between the many different cultures and histories of its region”. It has undergone a massive movement of population from rural areas to the cities, but still has a large rural population whose lives are affected by narrow economies and limited social services. There are inter-ethnic tensions in the east of the country. Civil society seems to be still relatively weak in looking beyond specific stakeholder interests, although the workshops we participated in or co-organised with the Turkish rural networks and foundations showed the high level of communication and vivid national debate about agricultural and rural policies and the potential for a strong voice of rural civil society in that process. We share the criticism expressed by Aylin Ornek that in many cases EU policies are not flexible enough to fit the realities in rural regions, and that national governments should have the courage to question certain rules if they do not fit. PREPARE, or its individual partners, having taken part in several meetings and workshops in Turkey, remain keen to support the gradual strengthening of civil society there, and will continue to invite Turkish participants to our Gatherings.

Changing European Neighbourhood. Beyond our mission to strengthen civil society in new member states and accession countries, PREPARE continues to reach out to civil initiatives and networks expressing interest in exchange of experience and collaboration. For many years, we have invited organisations and individuals to join our gatherings and workshops, thus bringing in experiences from (for example) Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia and Armenia. While continuity was difficult to achieve, we have made repeated efforts to offer contacts and support where needed. We see opportunities to use the philosophy and instruments of the European Neighbourhood Policy (see box on page 88), which remains distinct from the process of enlargement although it does not prejudge, for European neighbours, how their relationship with the EU



Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group of South-Eastern Europe (SWG)

SWG is a network of representatives of government agencies in the former Yugoslav countries plus Bulgaria and Romania. It carries out studies, research and assessment; supports planning and programming; and facilitates communication in rural development. SWG is supported by ministries of agriculture in SEE, the FAO and other international bodies.

Visit by PREPARE to Pottery in Zlakusa, Serbia

European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) of the EU was launched in 2004 to promote closer relations with the new neighbour countries after the accession of new member states. At present, 16 countries are addressed by the ENP – Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, the Republic of Moldova, Morocco, the Palestinian territory, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine. The ENP includes support for civil society. The policy is based upon agreement of common values – democracy and human rights, rule of law, good governance, market economy and sustainable development. (<http://eeas.europa.eu/enp>)

may develop in future. Also potentially useful is the People to People programme (P2P) of the Civil Society Facility of the EU Directorate-General for Enlargement, described by Henk Visser.

Recent contacts with rural civil society networks in the Southern Mediterranean like REMADEL (see box) show many parallel experiences made in Morocco, Mauretania,

Algeria and Tunisia. The network of 33 rural development associations has already had intensive exchange with North Mediterranean LEADER LAGs in Italy, Spain and France and currently establishes a new programme of capacity building and training in the region. Saana Moussalim, the animator of REMADEL, expresses a clear interest in exchanging experience and collaborating with PREPARE.

Village in Morocco



Chapter 6 / Visions

This chapter offers, through the voices of five people, perspectives on the future work that the PREPARE may do in a changing Europe.

'THE TASK OF SUSTAINING DEMOCRACY CANNOT BE LEFT SIMPLY TO A FEW ENLIGHTENED PEOPLE. PREPARE AND OTHERS MUST CONTINUE TO WORK ON THE EDGES OF THIS VERY DIFFICULT POLITICAL CLIMATE.'



Vera Dakova is the grants officer of the C.S. Mott Foundation responsible for the liaison with PREPARE. She took over this role from Shannon Lauder, who was our contact at the Foundation for the original grant. Vera has overseen the approval of the subsequent grants to PREPARE, and has given shrewd advice to the succession of PREPARE Coordinators. She came to the PREPARE Gathering at Velehrad in the Czech Republic in 2006, and later attended a meeting of the PREPARE Organising Group.

Which element in Mott's broad agenda did PREPARE's original application relate to?

Actually several elements in PREPARE's work are relevant to the Mott mission. Over the years, the emphasis in that mission has changed. You were setting out to help civil society organisations in Central and Eastern Europe to learn more about the European Union, to find contacts and create relationships, and to take part in the process of accession to the European Union. We saw PREPARE as a vehicle to make organisations more effective in that process of joining the Union. In addition, we liked the 'movement' aspect of PREPARE, whereby you were reaching out to the grassroots in rural communities, away from the big cities where information and skills related to the European Union are more generally available. That was very much in line with Mott's philosophy that everybody – wherever they were, and at whatever level of education or social status – should be given access to processes and decisions which affect their lives.

PREPARE was ready to reach out to countries which were not that much on the map, and which lacked civil society and leadership. You were building a bridge between the West and the East. Over the years, we really appreciated your effort to balance West and East, and to give space for people to take part in the dialogue and to express themselves. They were made to feel welcome within the network. We appreciated the helpful and caring attitude which made newcomers feel comfortable within PREPARE.

How do you feel, looking back, about what we have achieved, and the succession of countries that we tried to help, with the gradual moving of the agenda eastwards towards a new set of accession countries?

We have appreciated PREPARE's ability to connect people, and particularly the way that you have maintained the tradition of traveling workshops, which is a fantastic invention. These workshops encourage personal relationship between people from different countries, and promote first-hand knowledge of each country they visit. Those who take part can share the experience and argue about it so that everybody knows what they are talking about. To organise this year after year is a great achievement.

We recognise that finding new members, and building the network, is not always easy: one has to keep the vision, and keep trying. We are happy to see a proactive Organising Group at the heart of PREPARE, always seeking to find suitable entry points in new countries. For example, your current initiative in Turkey coincides with Mott's own interest in that country.

We appreciate also the work that you do on policy. Mott is not passionate about this, but we recognise its value and are not worried by you having an advocacy role. When I attended a meeting of the Organising Group, I recognised that PREPARE understands the European Commission and I realised why so much work is needed on that side of your programme. But I would be worried if that deflects you from the efforts to build

the rural movements, and I think you should beware of losing touch with the grassroots.

You attended the PREPARE Gathering at Velehrad in 2006. What impression did you gain of the network and the PREPARE campaign?

I had just taken over from Shannon Lauder. Mott wants to know grantees in person, and we need a direct relationship with those who have our long-term funding. Mott already gives grants to some organisations in your network, for example from Romania or Hungary, so I had some contacts with you, but I wanted to see PREPARE in action. I couldn't take part in the traveling workshops before the Velehrad gathering, but I picked up the shared jokes and stories from those who had taken part. The shared experience had obviously helped people to shape their questions and topics for discussion and to avoid misunderstanding, which is very important when people come from different backgrounds and different languages.

I thought the meeting was balanced, offering food for thought. It was impressive that public officials were there, as well as those from civil society: it is not always easy to get government people to come to such events, particularly from Central Europe. The discussion was good, with questions, answers and feedback ... and it was a lot of fun, with singing, dancing and drinking, and the concert in the cathedral, with music varying from classics to pop. Without doubt, my

“ We appreciate also the work that you do on policy. Mott is not passionate about this, but we recognise its value and are not worried by you having an advocacy role. ”

experience there gave us reassurance, and we continued our funding. There was a moment of difficulty immediately after that, when the Organising Group wished to move the role of PREPARE's treasurer from Sweden to Latvia, a country where Mott does not operate: but I persuaded my colleagues to accept this.

Looking ahead, what changes and challenges do you see in this field?

The key challenge is the huge crisis in the European Union itself. We cannot tell when and how it will be resolved. As a result, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which used to have a clear understanding of the Union and what they had to do in order to join it, no longer have that clarity. They face political and ethical questions of a new kind, new uncertainties. This helps to explain the current reassessment in Turkey, and the re-assertion within Ukraine of ties to Russia. Opposition to the Union, or to its growth, is getting stronger, based on the hard realities of today, and politics is becoming more pragmatic and populist.

“The key challenge is the huge crisis in the European Union itself. We cannot tell when and how it will be resolved. As a result, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which used to have a clear understanding of the Union and what they had to do in order to join it, no longer have that clarity.”

“YOU MUST TAKE YOUNG PEOPLE WITH YOU WHEN YOU DO YOUR JOB. THAT IS HOW THEY CAN BEST LEARN TO BECOME LEADERS”



Kaija Koiv is on the staff of the Estonian village movement KODUKANT. She is youth representative and leads the Kodukant Youth Projects since 2010.

The presence of young people at the ninth Estonian Rural Parliament in Roosta was quite strong. Why is KODUKANT so attractive for young people?

I became part of the movement when I was 15 years old. I had interest in what was happening in my village Adu, and I was supported by KODUKANT in organising our own local workshops. KODUKANT works in a project-based way. It ran a series of youth camps, which were fun and which focused on rural issues which were part of our youth lives. I think the success of youth participation in KODUKANT goes back to the natural way we were treated as young members of the movement, being part of the village movement's history and also part of its future. By running our own projects today, we can turn our ideas and dreams into action and find our place in the community.

You have made a rapid career. At age 22, you are on the professional staff of KODUKANT. You have been abroad and you are engaged in different networks. Was the early start at KODUKANT the reason for your success?

Yes, it is so!. I decided to join the staff because I hoped to be able to share the knowledge I had gathered as a volunteer throughout the projects and the country. I had learned to gather and organise young people around their ideas and wishes; and also how to make and write projects out of that, and to present these projects to the people who could eventually support and finance them. Sometimes it is important to put ideas on paper, to write down expectations and visions. If you get young people involved that way, it becomes easier to convince authorities that it is worth investing.

Still many people in leading positions in KODUKANT are over 50. How are your relations with the elder people, the pioneers and the leaders of the organisation?

They are natural and normal. Our internal communication is special. It seems that our adults have well understood that they must find young people who could become leaders of the movement in the future. We never felt excluded, we were guided to the movement's projects, we had the freedom to launch our own, we were accustomed to coming together and talking between young and old, we learned the methods of organising gatherings and workshops. KODUKANT is young today mainly because it decided in 2005 to start a youth programme.

What do your projects look like? How do you organise them?

We have many different projects. One of them is a national youth exchange. What we usually do is to build groups of people who are interested in a specific problem or an idea for improvement in a village. We may invite 30 young people from all over Estonia, and those youngsters will go to two different villages and they will act there in a best interest of the village and based on a self-organised agenda. In 2010 we had a multi-cultural event with Estonian and Russian-speaking village inhabitants. We organised games, sports and music events and we had meetings with the village representatives to talk about problems that the young people wanted to get solved. We organised an auction of self-made products from the village in order to get contacts within the village and to get some important things done. As currency for this auction, we used voluntary works in the community, not Estonian crowns: for example, the buyer of a cookery course had to take rubbish out of the clubhouse. The important thing is that something tangible and visible is changed, so that the youngest people see that they can make things happen.

What would you recommend to PREPARE to get more young people involved in the movement?

It must come the natural way - learning by doing, not special treatment. Look, here at our Estonian Rural Parliament we have lots of young helpers doing voluntary interpretation for

“It must come the natural way - learning by doing, not special treatment. Look, here at our Estonian Rural Parliament we have lots of young helpers doing voluntary interpretation for our international guests. They have a responsible position: they learn how difficult it can be to concentrate over a longer period and to translate while listening.”

our international guests. They have a responsible position: they learn how difficult it can be to concentrate over a longer period and to translate while listening. It can be hard work and sometimes frustrating: but they are part of the event, they get contacts to interesting people, they see how other people see and appreciate what we are doing. I think the best that PREPARE or any organisation can do, in order to stay young and involve young people at an early stage, is that the elder people take the youngsters along and show them how they do it. That's also how you train young leaders for the future. You must take young people with you when you do your job. That is how they can best learn to become leaders.

'THERE IS NO PLACE IN EUROPE TO ESCAPE FROM THE CRISIS'



Aris Adlers is a member of the Latvian Rural Forum since 2007 and has been active in rural development initiatives in various roles. He is NGO representative at the Committee of the Cabinet of Latvian Ministers and a member of the Monitoring Committee for the Latvian Rural Development Programmer 2007-2013.

The financial crisis has hit Latvia exceptionally hard in 2009. Many people lost their jobs and homes in the cities and moved back to the countryside. What was the role of the Latvian Rural Forum during this urban-rural migration?

During that very difficult period, we started many initiatives involving small farmers and small businesses, with the aim to help unemployed and disconnected people in finding practical solutions. 2009 was also the official 'European year against poverty and for inclusion'. So we tried to use that coincidence to launch many social activities and trainings in our Forum. In a sense the crisis turned out to be an opportunity for us to look at our countryside in a different way, from the point of view of possibilities rather than limitations.

What kind of possibilities?

During and after that time, people have learnt that it doesn't work to just wait for a job: you have to take initiative yourself. We supported farmers and young people to start their own business and to cooperate, which – because of our country's history – was not very popular at that time. It was a time of discovery of their own capacities, of getting through the crisis, not waiting for some government or state agency to employ people and to overcome poverty.

Did many people also leave Latvia?

We quickly discovered that there is no place in Europe to escape to. Ireland, Greece, Italy, Spain seemed to have similar problems, and had to find their own way out. We also discovered that money was not the main problem, but how we make best use of what we have over here. I believe we have come out of our own Latvian crisis story pretty well. We are more self-assured and creative since then.

You are one of the youngest members of the PREPARE community. Is it the younger generation that has made the Latvian Rural Forum punchy and creative?

When I started in the Latvian Rural Forum, we were not a very young bunch of people. Today that is different. Our managing team and our office are all young people, also member organisations are quite young. But that does not mean that older people are out. We can rely on their experience but we also create our own visions and dynamic.

Do you have rules, like KODUKANT the Estonian rural organisation, which insist on a minimum number of young people in each member delegation?

No, we work in a less hierarchical and structured way. We do not need quotas. Everybody can participate in the way they want, as farmers, rural enterprises, women, men. If you are



with us, you can have everything you want. We are present all over Latvia, activating people in their territory.

How do you organise the rural movements and initiatives in Latvia?

Normally we meet once a month, summer and winter, for a two-day forum. We go to different places where members want us to be. We choose themes according to their needs

Latvian Rural Forum unlimited

“Rural life is not just about money and subsidies. We recently organised a very important conference on “local identity products”, to boost short food chains. That brought together the economic, cultural and social aspects of rural development and farmers’ interests. That is how we get farmers on our side instead of keeping them out of our movement.”

and the topics they want to deal with. Then we also offer different training and education. But we also insist that we get our say on official levels and the government. We are involved in national rural development planning in all ministries. In this sense, we are very straightforward and structured to be heard and respected. We are both moving people and doing policy work.

In the CAP reform debate in Brussels, the main message from Latvia is “more money for farmers”. Rural development does not seem to be a priority for your government. How is your relation with Latvian farmers’ organisations?

We have never drawn lines between rural and agricultural policies and interests. We are more interested in the broad rural picture, and we object to lobby efforts which would play farmers’ interests against the rural. Rural life is not just about money and subsidies. We recently organised a very important conference on “local identity products”, to boost short food chains. That brought together the economic, cultural and social aspects of rural development and farmers’ interests. That is how we get farmers on our side instead of keeping them out of our movement.

You are one of the most visible faces of the Latvian Rural Forum in PREPARE gatherings. How do you perceive PREPARE’s role?

We have learned a lot through PREPARE’s networking, training and exchange of good practices. We are trying to follow the best practices but not to copy anything. At the moment the trend in various countries seems to be adopting the format of Rural Parliaments. But that is only one tool of strengthening people’s participation. We just finished our 3-year analysis of our performance. It was exciting to discover that our rural forum is just a back-up office for many totally independent initiatives which are going on. We are part of a very positive energy in the movement.

What would be your vision for PREPARE’s role in the future?

I think PREPARE plays a very significant role on the European level in strengthening the rural popular movements from the bottom-up, but also in building trust with governments. I personally have learned a lot through participating in PREPARE gatherings and workshops like the recent one in Turkey. Our role in the future should be to deepen our cooperation and exchange of best practice on both movement and policy-making level. But we should not just move on to more countries. We must not forget to consolidate the work in countries that have joined us in the past years. I could imagine that we might look back to what happens in Poland or Hungary, or even organise a Gathering in Latvia.

'PROGRESS MIGHT BE SLOW, BUT IT IS HERE'



Marina Koprivnjak works for HMRR, the Croatian Rural Development Network, which is a PREPARE partner. She graduated in sociology at the University of Zagreb and gained her first working experience in this Network, including cooperation with member organisations and other CSOs in Croatia and abroad, project management, conducting training and workshops, policy analysis etc.

This year, Croatia will join the European Union as the 28th member state. Despite the economic crisis in Europe, are people in Croatia still enthusiastic and excited about the prospect of joining the EU?

Croatia is still undergoing an economic crisis – allegedly this will not change for the better in the near future, and announcements of new layoffs are extremely worrisome. Still, most people remain in favour of the EU. We consider the accession of Croatia to the EU a process of positive transformation, new investments and job opportunities, granting access to various EU funds, signalling new possibilities for international cooperation and easier financing

new opportunities for development of key areas such as tourism and agriculture.

Is the same true of young people in Croatia? Are you worried that an ever increasing number of young people might try to emigrate to the more developed parts of Europe?

Plenty of our young people are unemployed. It is truly difficult to find a job in Croatia and the unemployment rates keep rising. I hope that the accession of Croatia to the EU will create new jobs here and keep our young professionals and experts in Croatia. But of course many young people want to pursue their careers abroad, and there will be lots of attractive job openings in Brussels as well. Ambitious young people are already looking for better working conditions in the most developed western countries. Fortunately, Europe is not too big!

Upon completing their formal education, many young people stay in big cities. Is it possible that now more of them will return to the rural areas from which they originally came?

It is true that many of our young people go to study in big cities, make their lives there, forge new friendships and never return to their home towns or villages. However, lately there has been an increasing trend towards a healthier and more leisurely lifestyle, which is precisely what small towns and rural areas are able to provide. In our cooperation with LAGs,

“We are an innovative generation of young enthusiasts looking for opportunity to prove ourselves. This is era of internet and social networks: we are using it all, and we are good at it. We do have an interest in politics, but it seems that we have lost faith in the ability of politicians to change things for the better.”

we have noticed that young people do take an active interest in improving living conditions for their families and communities. At present we are waiting for IPARD Measure 202, which underlies and supports the work of selected LAGs, to step into effect. LAGs are actively seeking managers. I know of a couple of instances where the LAG manager is a young person, in one case a 23-year-old enthusiast. There is an ever growing need for rural development, and an effort is being made to invest in it. Progress might be slow, but it is here.

Which topical issues are today's young generation most interested in? Would you say that the young people of today are apolitical?

We are an innovative generation of young enthusiasts looking for opportunity to prove ourselves. This is era of internet and social networks: we are using it all, and we are good at it. We do have an interest in politics, but it seems that we have lost faith in the ability of politicians to change things for the better.

What opportunities do you see for people who want to stay and live in their rural communities?

We are aware that we cannot live off big cities alone and that we need to turn to rural areas, productive areas which offer plenty of opportunity for development and a more peaceful life, surrounded by nature. Rural communities have formed associations, which are becoming the facilitators of rural development. Any minute now we are expecting to receive

funds from LEADER and to expand the activities undertaken by our LAGs. Despite little support from Government, we have 51 LAGs in Croatia. Rural communities have recognised the importance of LAGs, which open broad opportunities of rural development including cooperation and networking.

Plans for the future?

HMRR will continue its work in promotion of rural development and activating rural communities. Hopefully each of our LAGs will have at least one professional at work, and Croatia will have improved opportunities for funding and cooperation. HMRR is planning to organise a first Croatian Rural Parliament in 2014 and we are counting on the experience of PREPARE members.

‘ “BURNING SPIRITS” MADE PREPARE ATTRACTIVE 12 YEARS AGO, AND WE NEED YOUNG EUROPEAN CITIZENS NOW WHO ARE READY TO TAKE CARE OF THEIR OWN FUTURE IN THEIR OWN RURAL AREAS.’



Marta Marczis founded the Hungarian Rural Parliament and was a co-founder of the PREPARE network. She works for UNDP Regional Center for Europe and the CIS as freelance adviser, and has been strongly engaged in sustainable local development for inclusion, especially for Roma people.

In 1999 you were a moderator in the traveling workshop through Estonia and Sweden which became the cradle of the PREPARE network. The network quickly spread to other Baltic and Central European countries. What was so attractive about PREPARE at that time?

I believe it was because those other countries could see that smaller states like Sweden and Estonia had similar conditions to their own. They looked for European partners to gain stronger influence on their governments in the new European Union context. PREPARE was attractive because it

offered a space for cooperation to make rural needs and policies visible beyond local dimensions, especially for the various village movements which were not then taken seriously by mainly urban decision-makers.

Hungary had already decided to support self-government in the villages after the Iron Curtain came down in 1989. What did the European Union context offer you on top of that?

Indeed, Hungary already had a level of self-government at the very local level. Thirty inhabitants were enough to elect a mayor and create a local governance structure. The EU's LEADER approach added to that, because we could use that instrument to support small projects at local level, such as schools and kindergartens, and to offer capacity building and exchange of good practice. This bottom-up self-organising was very inspiring, and we gained good ideas from Swedish communes, British parishes and German Gemeinden.

Is the populist government, elected in 2010 in Hungary, carrying this bottom-up approach forward?

No, definitely not. The trend is to recentralise the governance of rural development. The powers of local self-governments have been curtailed in the last 2 years. The government argues that local and decentralised structures were inefficient and expensive, and that centralised structures would make things more transparent. The prime minister offers a tough internal order against dispersed and conflicting individual

“ If we can offer intelligent ways to empower local communities, which enhance diversity of options instead of ‘one structure fits all’ solutions, and if we include the younger generation, it could work.”



Roma women at workshop

interests. Many people seem to welcome, or at least passively accept, the new political trend. There is a dramatic lack of democratic experience and knowledge, and the current economic crisis prompts people to accept more autocratic forms of governance.

Could the Hungarian example be followed by other countries?

I don't know, frankly. The financial and economic crisis seems to lead to less engagement of people in politics and self-governance. The crisis is manifold. It hits on social and environmental levels, and it is global. People can hardly understand why their job has suddenly gone, or their harvest is lost due to unpredictable drought or rain. They feel abandoned and frustrated: so, they prefer simple solutions and accept a strong top-down structure.

Can the PREPARE network do something about it?

Well, the answers offered by democrats seem to be boring to people these days. But the multiple crises may lead to some unexpected innovation. If we can offer intelligent ways to empower local communities, which enhance diversity of options instead of 'one structure fits all' solutions, and if we include the younger generation, it could work. 'Burning spirits' made PREPARE attractive 12 years ago, and we need young European citizens now who are ready to take care of their own future in their own rural areas.

How has your work at UNDP helped civil society in Central and Eastern Europe, and PREPARE in particular, in mobilising people for improved work in rural development?

Since 2002 I have worked on local development projects at regional level. In 2002-2004 I was the regional manager of an 11-country UNDP project, 'Localizing Sustainable Development'. The aim was to transfer to South-east and Eastern Europe the experience that Central European countries had in rural development during their transition towards membership of the EU. Later I worked on 'LEADER type' rural development projects in Serbia, Albania and Macedonia. I always invited skilled colleagues from PREPARE to work with me on these projects, and I linked the target country stakeholders to the European network. This has brought many new partners into PREPARE initiatives.

You have engaged a lot for the Roma people and struggled against exclusion and rural poverty, also within your work in UNDP.

The popular European image of Roma is that they are all beggars and outside society, but it is an awful stigma. Many Roma people are integrated into society in Hungary, Romania and other countries. But when it comes to education and jobs, they are often actively excluded. Most Roma people are victims of social and economic transition. They are the poorest of the poor, and they need help. I work with Roma settlements which show all the symptoms of a refugee camp. Even within their own countries, many Roma are indeed refugees from bad development decisions. If we do not make serious efforts to include and help them, they will become a serious European problem.

Inclusion is a declared goal of the new EU policy framework until 2020.

Yes, and it is often perfectly misunderstood because of an attitude of 'helping the poor guys to live'. But they were excluded first and then became poor. This becomes very clear when we deal with post-conflict countries and regions, with a long history of oppression and discrimination, such as parts of ex-Yugoslavia, or among the Kurds or Armenians in Turkey. As Europeans, we should support these regions and their people and help them to overcome their sometimes painful history. But we should not do this in a spirit of charity to the

poor. We should recognize that people can, with help, solve their own problems. Development is for everyone. There is no difference between those who make decision and those who are the 'target' of decisions. We all are on the same boat.

REFLECTIONS ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE AND OF PREPARE (Hannes Lorenzen)

What should rural Europe look like in 20 years? How will the next generations live in their countryside, villages or small towns of Estonia, Poland, Romania or Macedonia? We may have ideas and wishes. But how do we PREPARE for it?

Since 2010, the European Union has been preparing for a new seven-year working period for all Common policies, in-



Scholarships

PREPARE offers scholarships for members of the network to visit and learn from other organisations and projects of the network. With the support of Fondation de France and Forum Synergies, we offer travel and accommodation expenses for scholars and host organisations. Scholars can improve their professional knowledge in rural development planning and management or do research about certain themes of interest of their own organisation. Their reports on the results of the scholarship are a condition for being funded and are published on the PREPARE website.

Latvian Rural Forum moving on

cluding rural, agricultural, regional, social and cohesion policies. Thanks to the success of past LEADER programmes and the new Community Led Local Development concept, there seem to be new opportunities for making more integrated use of the various European funds on a local, territorial or cross-border level. But in order to make more participative, democratic, bottom-up rural development policies work, much remains to be done to convince national governments to trust and collaborate with local initiatives and European civil society networks.

Contributing to the European project. The European Union and its institutions are going through multiple crises. The turmoil of financial fallout, public debt and the Euro crisis have drastically limited the room for manoeuvre of most member states, including their ability to co-finance support from EU funds. New nationalism and populism are feeding on the insecurities caused by economic recession and unemployment. Countries contributing to the European budget, the so-called net-payers, want “their money back”, while those who need help point to the promises of solidarity and cohesion.

The role of civil society becomes even more important in such difficult moments in history. Civil society can provide mutual help and new forms of cooperation and innovation on the local level, which are much needed to fill the gaps of public disengagement and shrinking funds. It can also do much to achieve the inter-cultural and cross-border European networking and capacity building which is needed to reanimate

the European project and spirit. Civil society can be the mediator between European citizens and national government and European institutions. It can interpret European programmes and rules to the citizens, and express the needs of citizens forcefully to the public bodies. In this way, it can help to rebuild the connection between the people of Europe and the European project, which has been gravely weakened by recent events.

New neighbours. PREPARE has played a significant role in making rural civil society stronger during the accession of the new member states. We have offered to support initiatives in new accession candidate countries and ‘new neighbour’ countries such as Turkey, Georgia, Moldova and the Ukraine: we may even exchange experiences with rural civil society networks like REMADEL in the Southern Mediterranean countries. The speed with which we have brought new geographical regions and national networks into the PREPARE community may sometimes have stretched our capacity to meet the needs of our existing members. Just as the EU accession process has demanded a constant balance between going deeper or wider, so PREPARE has to “do the splits” between serving its network and spreading its capacity and its impact.

Rural well-being. PREPARE’s activity is driven not only by a passionate belief that development processes will be most effective and sustainable if citizens and civil society organisations are fully involved, but also by a high concern for the social and economic well-being of rural populations through-

out the European Union and the accession and neighbouring countries. Demographic change – including depopulation of rural areas – is still dramatic. More than 70 % of farmers in Europe are older than 55: less than 7% are younger than 35. Many rural economies are narrowly based. Social services and infrastructure are often grossly inadequate. We believe that there is widespread need for a strengthening and diversification of rural economies, for radical improvement in rural infrastructure, and for other measures to stabilise rural populations and where appropriate to encourage a re-migration into rural areas.

Cohesion. A special challenge, for civil society and for public bodies, is the future well-being of communities based on subsistence farming, or those which contain minorities suffering from social exclusion and poverty. These include, for example, the over 3 million small and semi-subsistence farmers in Romania whose needs are emphasized by Viviana Vasile in her interview (see page 25); and many communities of Roma people in Hungary, Slovakia and elsewhere which are described by Marta Marczis in this chapter. Such communities can all too easily remain ‘below the radar’ in terms of eligibility for help from national or European programmes, and they may lack civil society champions. PREPARE will continue to support the strengthening of civil society in such areas, and to express the needs of such communities to public bodies, in the full spirit of European solidarity and cohesion.

Youth. Looking ahead, PREPARE is also committed to strengthening the role of young people in the civil society movement. As shown in the interviews with Kaija Koiv and Aris Adlers in this chapter, our partner organisations are ensuring the relevance and vitality of their work by bringing young people forward in leadership. Many other interviewees – Marta Marczis (this chapter), Kjell Roger Karlsson (page 13), Kaj Mortensen (page 32), Hans-Olof Stålgren (page 38) – emphasise the importance of a focus on youth both in civil society work and in rural development. As its contribution to this principle, PREPARE has established a Scholarship scheme whereby young people working in our partner organizations can gain a month’s experience in another such organization - see the Box on page 101.

Community spirit. In these and other ways, PREPARE is determined to contribute to the European project at a time of multiple crisis. We can offer both **a sense of place**, through which people feel they belong to and serve their local or sub-regional community, and a **sense of the common space** which we share as citizens of Europe and of a supportive and respectful neighbourhood.

In a period when national egoisms of governments and the undermining of the principles of solidarity and cohesion gain momentum, Community Spirit can win.

“We can offer both a sense of place, through which people feel they belong to and serve their local or sub-regional community, and a sense of the common space which we share as citizens of Europe and of a supportive and respectful neighbourhood.”

Conclusion

Our common history of Europe has as many facets as there are nations and regions where people live. The same is true for the many different memories, expectations, or visions of PREPARE. It is impossible to draw one picture of the great diversity of experiences and the potential of our members and partners. The full picture emerges when we meet physically in our Gatherings, when we travel together, cooperate in bilateral projects or support each other in capacity building. It is not easy to put the many pieces of the PREPARE puzzle together without missing the spirit.

We have therefore chosen to individually interview people from almost all the national networks which are part of PREPARE. Interviewed also are people who have supported us from partner networks, government agencies or European institutions. The interviews reveal a certain pride in what we have achieved together, a critical view of weaknesses that we might have to address, but above all much curiosity about what we could still achieve in the future.

When we have asked people what PREPARE should further do, the answer sometimes sounded like “let’s do more of the same”. But Europe and our neighbours around us are far from static: our history evolves, new member states are not as new as 20 years ago, and relations between countries and people in the North, South, East and West are facing new challenges.

PREPARE’s work has been driven and drawn towards the Baltic States first, then towards Central, East and South East Europe by the passion of people in rural movements for more participative democracy, bottom-up governance and cross-border connections and cooperation between civil rural societies. The yearning to participate in the movement which now includes many new member states is working, like yeast in the dough, in countries which are now outside the European Union. Some of these countries, for example those in former Yugoslavia, aspire to become members of the Union. Others have – at least, now – no such aspiration, but are showing great interest in the ideas and experiences that PREPARE and its partners offer.

Our engagement to build bridges between the worlds of civil society and of governments and decision-makers was often seen as a mission impossible or an over-ambitious plan. But in many cases it has proved to be worth the effort, because relations have improved and energies have been used to improve living conditions, instead of quarrelling about roles and competences. There is much space for PREPARE to go forwards and outwards, geographically and institutionally, offering help to civil initiatives and to governments to join forces and create synergies.

However, in pursuing that path, we need to take note of the warnings contained in many of the interviews. These warnings revolve around ideas of diversity, parity, time and continuity.

Diversity. The interviews are rich in examples of the social, cultural, economic and political diversity found across the face of Europe and its neighbours. The most graphic phrase is perhaps that from Aylin Ornek, “Turkey does not ‘belong’ to Europe: it has its own identity and lies somewhere in between the many different cultures and histories of our region”. The countries of former Yugoslavia may share a language and a recent history, but have strong and distinct identities which inevitably colour the re-emerging democracy of each country. Among the new member states, there is great variation between countries in economic conditions, social structure and political tradition, which affect the way communities evolve. As PREPARE seeks to support the strengthening of civil society, we must observe – with openness and humility – the particular character of each national context, and adapt what we say and do accordingly.

Parity. Diversity implies something else – the need for parity between those who are involved. It has been a principle for PREPARE, from the beginning, that we are not seeking to export ideas from West to East Europe, from old to new member states. Rather, we are sharing ideas on equal terms between west and east, north and south. The traveling workshop of 1999, from which sprang the PREPARE idea, spent equal time in Estonia and Sweden. Our gatherings and traveling workshops have been held in a variety of new member states and accession countries, with people drawn from yet further afield; and the local hosts have offered their ideas and experience. All participants have gained from exchange of ideas

on equal terms. As we look further outwards, we will gain yet more from the experience of others, for example the remarkable processes of communal self-help in the Maghreb described by Sanaa Moussalim in chapter 5.

Time. The “timeline” of PREPARE’s activity which appears in the Appendix may give the impression of rapid progress, for example in the emergence of national rural movements or forums in 12 countries within as many years. But those who have been involved in that process know that the building of civil structures, from the early isolated steps to the point where they have some cohesion and strength, can take many years; and that continued effort may be needed over a further period to achieve the maturity of a civil movement as a recognised force in its country. The interviews – for example those with Dragan Roganović and Marko Koščak in Chapter 5 – provide a vivid confirmation of this need for time. In our further work, we must accept the need for patience; for the quiet building of strength; and for persistent activity over time.

Continuity. Closely related to the idea of time is the need for continuity. Europe is currently going through a grave economic crisis, with severe knock-on social effects. Governments are being forced to retrench financially. But governments, whatever difficulties they face, have by their nature some guaranteed continuity. This is not true of civil society, which cannot use taxation to assure its income and which is heavily dependent upon the continuity of voluntary effort. The national rural movements and networks which

“As PREPARE seeks to support the strengthening of civil society, we must observe – with openness and humility – the particular character of each national context, and adapt what we say and do accordingly.”



Warm thanks to all who made this happen: Michael Dower and Hannes Lorenzen in Istanbul.

form the PREPARE partnership, and which we are helping to emerge in other countries, are often financially fragile, over-dependent on a few key leaders, and under-resourced (because under-regarded) by government – yet often expected by the same government to fill gaps in public services caused by shrinking public budgets. For PREPARE, this implies three things. First, we must put efforts not only into strengthening civil society in new countries, but also into helping our own partners and other existing civil organizations to survive and thrive. Second, we must support the process of finding and involving the young people, who will be the future leaders, so that – as Kaija Koiv from Estonia puts it – they ‘learn on the job’. Third, we must do more to persuade governments that it is strongly in their own interest to treat, and to support, civil society organisations as valuable partners in sustaining the quality of life in many countries.

These principles will guide us as we move forward into PREPARE’s continuing work .

/ Appendices /

Appendice / 1. Timeline of PREPARE activities

1998

European Parliament publishes report on sustainable rural development in pre-accession countries, recommending bottom-up approach and a traveling workshop of people involved in rural development (see References , Appendix 3)

1999

- Traveling Workshop in Estonia and Sweden, organized by Kodukant, Swedish Popular Movements Council, the Federation of Swedish Rural Economy and Agriculture Societies, Hungarian Rural Parliament, Forum Synergies and ECOVAST with support from European Parliament (EP), European Commission, Open Society Institute, Swedish and Estonian Governments
- Report on that Traveling Workshop published by EP, documentary film by Kodukant and EP

2000

- PREPARE Programme formally launched
- Slovakian Rural Parliament established, with support from PREPARE
- First PREPARE Gathering in Etyek, Hungary with Hungarian Rural Parliament

2001

- Regional conferences and workshops in Slovenia, Romania and Lithuania

2002

- Traveling workshop in Finland with SYTY
- PREPARE secures base funding from CS Mott Foundation
- Polish Rural Forum created

2003

- Support for steps to create networks in Slovenia, Czech Republic and Latvia
- Slovenian Rural Development Network established
- First PREPARE Gathering in Pocuvadlo, Slovakia, with Traveling Workshops through Romania, Hungary, Czech Republic and Poland
- PREPARE Website set up
- PREPARE offers proposals on Rural Development at the Salzburg Conference of the EU Commission

2004

- PREPARE delegation of 50 people attends 'Forum for Cooperation in Rural Development' at Caceres, Spain, as guests of Spanish Network for Rural Development & Extremadura Regional Council
- PREPARE Gathering in Chiflik, Bulgaria with traveling workshops in Bulgaria and Romania
- PREPARE joins European Commission's Advisory Group on Rural Development
- Latvian Rural Forum established
- Lithuanian Rural Communities Union (set up in 2002) recognized by PREPARE

2005

- Meeting in Stockholm, Brussels and Helsinki between PREPARE partners and existing national rural movements in western Europe, leading to creation of the European Rural Alliance
- Support for steps to create a rural network in Croatia
- PREPARE Gathering in Lithuania, with Traveling Workshops also in Latvia
- Czech National Rural Observatory created

2006

- PREPARE publishes report on 'National Rural Movements in Europe' by Vanessa Halhead (see **References , Appendix 3**)
- PREPARE Gathering at Velehrad, Czech Republic
- Croatian Rural Development Network established
- PREPARE assists European Commission to organise in Hungary a major conference of Local Action Groups from throughout Europe
- PREPARE partners in Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Slovenia and Sweden together secure funds from EU Grundtvig programme and Vysegrad Fund for a two-year TEPA project to train animators in rural partnerships.

2007

- Launch of PREPARE Scholarships programme, funded by Fondation de France
- PREPARE Gathering in Poland, with Traveling Workshops also in Ukraine
- PREPARE gains seat on Coordination Committee, and LEADER Sub-Committee, of the European Network for Rural Development set up by European Commission
- PREPARE signs Memorandum of Agreement with the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group of South-Eastern Europe, representing government agencies in the former Yugoslav countries plus Bulgaria and Romania

2008

- Workshop and capacity building in Croatia
- National Conferences of rural interests held in Serbia and in Albania, supported by PREPARE
- PREPARE actively involved with seminar on Cooperation and organisation in local development in Kars, Turkey
- PREPARE present at the EU Commission's Rural Development Conference, Cyprus, Greece; and at the OECD Conference on Rural Service Delivery, Köln, Germany

2009

- PREPARE Gathering in Croatia and Slovenia

2010

- PREPARE Gathering in Ohrid, Macedonia
- PREPARE website renewed and PREPARE electronic news launched
- PREPARE bilateral projects in Belarus, Ukraine, Macedonia and Albania

2011

- PREPARE Workshop on 'Rural Parliaments', followed by publication of a report on that subject (see References, Appendix 3)
- PREPARE Gathering in Zlatibor, Serbia
- PREPARE supporting emerging rural parliament in Slovenia, and holding a workshop within the Estonian Rural Parliament

2012

- PREPARE Workshops in Turkey and in Bosnia and Herzegovina
- PREPARE's active role at Swedish Rural Parliament in Ronneby
- PREPARE bilateral projects in Monte Negro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine and Turkey
- PREPARE present at the OECD Conference Innovation and Modernizing the Rural Economy, Krasnoyarsk/Siberia, Russia

2010 – 2013

- PREPARE members actively involved in the CAP reform process at European and on the national levels

Appendice / 2. PREPARE partner organisations



Forum Synergies is a pan-European organisation, with individual and organisational members, based on the achievements of the former European Network of Experiences in Sustainable Development (ENESD). We build our activities on the concrete experience of communities and projects which promote democratic and environmentally sound development. Our thematic workshops include themes like renewable energy, farmer's ecology, access to land, rural health and many others. We offer support for partnership through dialogue and cooperation between local actors, public services, political decision-makers and private enterprise. Our concept of sustainable development is based on four pillars - the land, the local economy, social cohesion and democratic decision-making. The land theme includes attachment to local culture and protection of nature. The local economy means giving priority to local resources and high local added value. Social cohesion means including people and minorities and sharing knowledge with partners. Finally, we seek to develop methods which enable people to partic

www.ecovast.org ipate in sustainable development and democratic decision-making.

www.forum-synergies.eu

Hannes Lorenzen



ECOVAST, the European Council for the Village and Small Town, is a pan-European NGO. It was set up in 1984 to further the well-being of rural communities, and the safe-guarding of rural heritage, throughout Europe. It has members – both individuals and organisations – throughout and beyond the EU. It has national sections in Austria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia and the United Kingdom, which run their own national activities. We published our Strategy for Rural Europe in 1991; and policy documents on Traditional Rural Buildings, Heritage Trails and Integrated Rural Development. Our international work now focuses on landscape identification, rural architecture and a major project ASSET (Action to Strengthen Small European Towns). We work with the European Commission's RURBAN initiative to promote small towns as a crucial link between urban and rural areas. We have consultative status with the Council of Europe and the European Commission, including a seat on the EC Rural Development Advisory Committee, and work closely with many other European organisations.

www.ecovast.org

Valerie Carter

Croatian Rural Development Network - HMRR (*Hrvatska Mreža za Ruralni Razvoj*) was set up in 2006. Its members are 11 civil society organizations active in rural development, and 8 LAGs. It has focused on good European practice and the LEADER approach. Because the government has not yet implemented the LEADER part of the IPARD programme, HMRR has a leading role in helping LAGs to set themselves up and to prepare local development strategies. It is represented on the National Council for Rural Development, the IPARD Monitoring Committee and the Managing Board of the National Network for Rural Development. HMRR values its membership in PREPARE and ELARD. PREPARE supported our creation in 2006. We became a PREPARE partner in 2009. With the Slovenian Rural Development Network, we organised an inspiring PREPARE Gathering in 2009. PREPARE has helped us to achieve better relations between state administration and civil society; however, huge steps are still needed to reach the level of modern and efficient democracy. PREPARE and ELARD help us to enable young practitioners to learn from experienced LAGs in the EU and to apply the knowledge in rural communities.

www.hmrr.hr

Marina Koprivnjak



National Local Action Groups Network of the Czech Republic is the Czech partner of PREPARE. It took over this role in 2007 from the Czech National Rural Observatory, which was itself created in 2005 after three years of initiatives by a group of individuals to bring together people involved in rural action. These initiatives included national and regional conferences, training programmes and promotion of LEADER-type local action groups. The Observatory acted as host of the PREPARE Gathering 2006, including five Traveling Workshops. Members of the National Local Action Groups Network include 140 Local Action Groups, covering all rural areas in the Republic. In this way, the Network associates all the major players involved in rural development at local level, and is a partner in regular talks with state institutions. The Network objectives are to improve the quality of life in rural areas through continuous and integrated local development; to ensure exchange of knowledge and experience between the individual members and with others throughout the EU; and to encourage cooperation with other countries that are ready to apply the LEADER approach in their rural areas.

www.nsmas.cz

Olda Čepelka





Kodukant, the Estonian Village Movement is an association of non-governmental organisations, structured at three levels – village, county and national. It started in 1991, when Estonia's rural areas began to suffer severely following the country's independence. Rural enthusiasts made contact with "All Sweden Shall Live", and learnt how to mobilise the rural population. Kodukant was set up officially in October 1997. It now has about 5,000 members. It embodies the spirit and values of the villages and is driven by a passion to retain rural life and traditions. Its aims are to give technical advice; to promote networking and communication; to arrange training and capacity building; to act as advocate for rural communities; to support local initiatives; and to foster co-operation at all levels. It has offices in each county, which organise events and act as intermediaries between local people and the national board of Kodukant, which deals directly with the Ministry of Agriculture. Every other year, Kodukant organises a Maapaev or Rural Parliament, at which delegates from throughout the country gather to debate issues, prepare declarations to go to government, and agree the association's programme for the following period.

www.kodukant.ee

Liina Saar



The Village Action Association of Finland (*Suomen Kylatoiminta Ry – SYTY*) was the first 'village action movement' in modern Europe. It began in the 1970s as a response to rural decline and depopulation. The current organisation, SYTY, was formed in 1997. Its main activities focus on strategic village planning and policy development, advocacy and lobbying, support to village and regional associations, projects and services for inhabitants, international co-operation. SYTY mobilises and supports almost 4,000 village associations and has formed regional associations in each of the 19 administrative regions. It develops strategic plans, including the National Village Programme, which feeds directly into the national Rural Policy Programme. It also implements a wide range of rural development projects and supports the developing movements in Central and Eastern Europe. It has also provided the service of the Finnish LEADER network. One of its key achievements has been to influence the development of rural policy in Finland.

www.village-action.fi

Kim Smedslund

Hungarian Rural Parliament (*Videk Parlamentje Egyesület*), set up in 1998, is a network of local and national NGOs which aims to represent the “rural voice” in Hungary. It seeks to build a network of rural community development initiatives, promote cooperation between different rural actors, improve the situation of disadvantaged social groups such as Roma, protect rural livelihoods, foster citizen participation, and disseminate best practice in rural development. Its annual Assembly decides on strategy and elects the Board, which organises activities : these have a current focus on sustainable food processing and local added value; environment and landscape protection; and local knowledge and lifelong education. The Parliament created strong working connections with about 1000 villages and small towns during the years before EU accession; organised national and regional meetings, plus local workshops, fairs and training sessions; built partnerships with other rural movements in Europe through PREPARE; empowered rural network initiatives in Western Balkan countries and Turkey; and contributed to national debate on the SAPARD and Rural Development Strategies. It promotes inclusive rural development based on the LEADER approach.

www.ruralnet.hu

Peter Varga



Latvian Rural Forum (*Latvijas Lauku forums*) is a national civil association dedicated to the sustainable and balanced development of rural areas. Set up in 2003, it unites 44 rural NGOs which work to build sustainable communities in all regions of Latvia. It has become the voice of civil society in Latvia representing rural NGOs where decisions about rural development are made. Its main tasks are to :

- promote the sustainable development of Latvian rural territories;
- strengthen civil society in rural territories, promoting local initiatives and cooperation;
- represent the interests of rural people at national and international level;
- cooperate with the government, municipalities, NGOs, business persons and other institutions.

The first Latvian Rural Parliament will be held in June 2013. This event will help greatly in developing the NGO cooperation network, encouraging local initiatives through advice and education, and strengthening the Forum’s position in the dialogue between politicians and organisations. The Forum represents the interests of rural NGOs in the national Council of Civil Society and is a member of memorandum between Latvian NGOs and Cabinet of Ministers.

www.llf.partneribas.lv

Valdis Kudins





Lithuanian Rural Communities Union was founded in 2001, with the aim to unite rural communities throughout Lithuania and to represent their interests. It is an independent union of rural communities which are registered as public organisations. Its members include more than 1190 rural communities and 20 LAGs. Its mission is to ensure that Lithuanian rural areas are attractive and safe, with good infrastructure, viable agricultural, forestry, fishery and other sectors, healthy environment, and well-managed landscape. It coordinates the activities of rural communities, provides timely information and help, finds and trains new rural leaders, and represents the needs and interests of its members in national government and European institutions. The members take an active part in the network, and their exchange of ideas and experiences helps to ensure the viability and development of rural communities throughout the country. The Union is a member of various institutions, including the Steering Committee for implementation of the Rural Development Programme, the workgroup of the LEADER programme, representing rural communities in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, working with the Lithuanian Parliament etc.

www.lkbs.lt

Guoda Burokiene



Rural Development Network of the Republic of Macedonia was established in March 2010 in Skopje, as a movement at national level to provide a voice for rural communities in the Republic of Macedonia. Currently, the Network has 53 NGOs as members represented at its Assembly, and is working closely with about 1,500 rural leaders. The membership is very diverse, including associations which represent farmers, rural women, craftsmen, rural tourism workers, environmentalists etc. As an umbrella organisation, the Network has the potential to support the interests of civil society, to promote networking, and to keep rural development on the agenda of all relevant actors at national and local level. Using the bottom-up approach, the Network currently has six priority areas of action - pioneering the LEADER approach and creating links between stakeholders at local level; the economic empowerment of women in rural areas; agriculture and forestry; cultural heritage as a tool for development of rural areas through promotion of rural tourism; sustainable management of the environment; and diversification of economic activity in rural areas.

www.ruralnet.mk

Petar Gjorgievski

Polish Rural Forum (*Forum Aktywizacji Obszarów Wiejskich, FAOW*) is the national platform for cooperation among rural NGOs in Poland. Set up informally in 2002, it was legally registered in 2005 as a “union of associations”, the members being organisations dealing with rural development. It has over 80 members, including nearly all national-level organisations in that field, “umbrella” organisations representing rural communities, many local and regional NGOs and over 30 LAGs. Its charter ensures that the small local organisations are not dominated by the big national-level players. Its activities include:

- education and training for local communities and rural NGOs
- stimulating cooperation between rural development actors, including support to networking between LAGs at national and regional level
- animating debate on rural policy
- facilitating exchange between rural actors in Poland and rural NGOs in other countries
- sharing its experience with rural stakeholders in EU candidate countries.

The Forum is currently running a project “Making a good start”, to support the setting up and capacity building of rural NGOs, funded by the European Social Fund.

www.faow.org.pl

Ryszard Kamiński



Network for Rural Development of Serbia is a young and under-valued organisation in the sector of rural development in Serbia. However, it has the great advantage of 16 member organisations, which between them cover the whole of rural Serbia and have significant experience and remarkable results in promoting local development. The mission of the Network is to promote an evenly developed Serbia, in which rural areas are a desirable place to live, where people contribute with their work and activities to the conservation, development and improvement of all potentials, values and advantages that rural communities have. In pursuing this mission, we work with all registered agricultural households, local governments, entrepreneurs and companies, and Ministries. Our work programme is focused on

- Improving information-service provisions for rural stakeholders
- Active involvement in planning and implementation of rural development measures
- Strengthening the capacity and sustainability of the organisation
- Improving visibility and recognisability of the organisation

www.ruralinfoserbia.rs

Dragan Roganović





VIDIECKY PARLAMENT
NA SLOVENSKU

The Rural Parliament of Slovakia (*Vidiecky Parlament na Slovensku - VIPA*) was established in 2000, to promote the development of rural areas and address the lack of co-ordination between the many organisations and groups working with rural development. The national organisation has also established regional associations in the eight administrative regions of Slovakia. There are no village associations, due to the structure of municipalities at village level. Instead, the movement has focused on supporting the formation of partnerships at micro-regional level, and has initiated a network of 48 Communication and Information Centres. These form the grassroots of the movement.

www.vipa.sk

Luka Juvancic



DRUŠTVO ZA RAZVOJ
SLOVENSKEGA PODEŽELJA

Slovenian Rural Development Network was set up in 2003, following a nationwide consultation supported by PREPARE. Its mission is to bring together all those individuals and organisations who are involved in rural development in Slovenia. It seeks to facilitate co-operation and mutual help among individuals and rural organisations, in order to ensure effective representation of rural interests and the flow of information between government and NGOs and from local to regional, national and international level. It has drawn inspiration from the government's earlier CRPOV programme for Integrated Rural Development and Village Renewal, and from its partners in PREPARE. It wishes to be an equal partner in shaping legislation and rural development policy, on behalf of the broad rural interests in Slovenia. It has an advocacy role at national and international level. Its current activity is focused on informing members and the public about measures for rural development; providing support for the LEADER programme in Slovenia; organising Rural Parliaments in Slovenia and international exchange with rural parliaments abroad; and active participation in international LEADER institutions and the PREPARE network.

www.drustvo-podezelje.si

Goran Šoster

Hela Sverige ska leva! All Sweden Shall Live! (formerly the Swedish Popular Movements Council for Rural Development) is one of the two largest and most highly developed among the national rural movements of Europe, the other being SYTY in Finland. Like SYTY, it receives significant Government funding, which is rare among movements elsewhere. It arose in the 1980s in response to a campaign, supported by Government, to address the de-population of rural areas in the north of Sweden. The movement has assisted the formation of about 5,000 village associations, with 100,000 people directly involved. In addition to the village representatives, the organisation has about 40 national NGOs as members. It provides practical support to local actors and develops programmes for rural development. Its biennial Rural Parliament involves over 1,000 village representatives and provides a direct voice to the Government. It also has a lobbying role and seeks to influence the Government and politicians at every level.

www.helasverige.se



Staffan Bond

Appendice / 3. References and Glossary of Acronyms

References

- **European Parliament, 1999, 'Creating partnerships for pre-accession' (report of the traveling workshop to Estonia and Sweden), European Parliament** (available at www.europarl.europa.eu/workingpapers/agri/132text_en.htm)
- **Vanessa Halhead, 2005 'The National Rural Movements of Europe', PREPARE**
- **PREPARE, 2011, 'Rural Parliaments : emerging Participative democracy'**

Glossary of acronyms

CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CIS	Confederation of Independent States (some member countries of the former Soviet Union)
CLLD	Community Led Local Development
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSA	Special Committee on Agriculture of the European Council
CSA	also stands for Community Supported Agriculture (farmer-consumer movement)
DG	Directorate General (a section of the European Commission)
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
ECOVAST	European Council for the Village and Small Town (a PREPARE partner)
ELARD	European LEADER Association for Rural Development
ENRD	European Network for Rural Development
ERCA	European Rural Communities Association
ERA	European Rural Alliance
EU	European Union

ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
ENPARD	European Neighbourhood Policy for Agriculture and Rural Development,
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation (of the United Nations)
FARNET	European Fisheries Areas Network
FLAG	Fisheries Local Action Group
IAM	Mediterranean Agronomic Institute (based in Montpellier, France)
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession of the EU
IPARD	Instrument for Pre-Accession for Agriculture and Rural Development
LAG	Local Action Group
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-government Organisation
PHARE	Poland and Hungary: Aid for Restructuring of the Economies
PREPARE	Pre-accession Partnership for Rural Europe (<i>original title</i>) <i>now simply</i> Partnership for Rural Europe
RDP	Rural Development Programme
REMADEL	Mediterranean Network of Local Rural Associations
SAPARD	Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development
SEE	South Eastern Europe
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SWG	Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group of South-Eastern Europe
TAIEX	Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument of DG Enlargement
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

