



ALBANIAN FOUNDATION FOR
TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT



Groupe de Bruges

International conference

*“The future of agriculture and rural areas in an
enlarging Europe:
dealing with diversity”*

Tirana International Hotel

Tirana, Albania

Friday October 16 2009

Report of plenary sessions

Opening of the conference

by Mr. Arie van den Brand, president of the Groupe de Bruges.

‘A very warm welcome, especially to Mr. vice prime minister Mr. Meta, Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Ruli, and our two guests from two important European institutions, Mr. Cropper from the European Commission and Mr. Lorenzen from the European Parliament.

As chairman of the Groupe de Bruges, I also want to take the opportunity here to thank Fatos Fico and his people from the AFTD for organising this conference and in bringing together so many different stakeholders together today. In establishing the agenda on agriculture and rural development in the context of the continuous process of enlargement it is imported to choose an integrated approach in which all stakeholders can participate. In this respect, I would like to point out that today we will also be witness to the birth of a new Albanian organisation, the Albanian Rural Network that will operate on a national level to encourage and support multi stakeholder approaches.

This is also an educational meeting, to meet and talk with other people, people you have not met before’.

'The Groupe de Bruges was founded 15 years ago as an independent European think tank on agricultural and rural development policies. We analyse and we write proposals to improve the Common Agricultural Policy. It is our philosophy that the existing diversity in Europe should not be treated as a problem, but as an opportunity. There are more roads for sustainable social, economic and ecological development. In doing so, we travel through Europe to organise meetings like this and we are very happy to have had the opportunity to be co-organiser of this event'.

Welcome by Mr. Ilir Meta, vice prime minister of Albania:

'This conference is a golden opportunity for the Albanian government. I consider the workshops of great importance for policy makers and other stakeholders. I hope it will result in a clear agenda for the future.

The Albanian government is very much aware of the importance of the Common Agricultural Policy. It is one of the cornerstones. Our government is fully committed to this policy and I can say that we are on the right track to meet all requirements. For the next four years we have developed ambitious objectives for structural reforms concerning agricultural production, rural infrastructure and market development and have allocated more budget to reach these objectives together with fiscal incentives and better access to credits. We view the integration into the European Union as a two way process, that is not only complying with EU requirements, but also by showing what we can offer. I wish you a good conference'.

Speakers¹:

Key note speech by Mr. Mark Cropper, DG Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Commission

Key note speech by Mr. Genc Ruli, Albanian Minister of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection

Key note speech by Mr. Hannes Lorenzen, advisor of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Parliament

Speech by Mrs. Flutura Veipi of the ProCredit Bank on the role of banks in supporting agricultural and rural development

Speech by Mr. Zef Pashuku of the Shkodra Rural Forum on the role of a multi-stakeholder approach in agricultural and rural development

¹ All speeches are attached separately and can also be found on the websites of the Groupe de Bruges (www.groupebruges.eu) and on the website of the Albanian Rural Network (www.rur.al)

Discussion

Mr. van den Brand introduces the discussion by stating that the various speeches highlight the multifunctional role of agriculture. Also concerning the new challenges, combatting climate change, developing new forms of renewable energy, agriculture can be part of the solution. New policies set new conditions for new types of products and services.

Secondly, cooperation is a key word for agriculture. Being aware of the psychological restraints concerning cooperation in Albania, it is nonetheless an important mechanism for development and can act as a countervailing power in the market place.

Ms. Zhanet Prifti : I'm an expert on forestry. In Albania 50% of the surface is forest, but in the rural development strategy and the speeches there is little or no attention for this. Forests and forestry can be a big added value and resource in rural development, also on a European level. In Albania there are at least two problems, a lack of technical support and the fact that the forests are not managed by the Ministry of Agriculture.

Mr. Lorenzen: in the European Parliament we have proposed to develop a European forestry policy , but this was met with resistance by those members that have large forests and said that it was not a matter of European policy but of national policy. There is however a good opportunity to integrate forestry with agriculture on EU level. There is a strong link with agriculture in containing water supplies, preventing erosion, combatting climate change and safeguarding bio diversity.

Mr. Cropper: personally and from my professional background as researcher in forestry I support the idea. Forestry is or should be part of the Rural Development Strategy. We have a forestry department at DG AGRI, but the relation with agriculture is still a big question. Foresters also understand sustainability differently than farmers, their approach is by definition more on very long term. I would say, that the rural policy leaves room for forestry policy, it is just a matter of making them work.

Mr Karlsson: my nine years of experience in Albania has taught me that Albania has great opportunities in terms of nature resources, people capacities and leadership. Encouraging cooperation and stakeholders working together would be my biggest advice.

Mr Andon Rrapokushi: the Shokdra Rural Forum is already putting this into practice. The Forum is a partnership, not only of farmers, but also with other actors, local governments, businesses and civil society. The Forum is aimed at capacity and leadership building, networking and exchange of good practices, for example by organising excursions.

Mr. Lorenzen: building of rural networks is one of the success factors. It is not necessarily a bad thing, if conflicts arise. It indicates that something has to change and can be viewed as an opportunity rather than a threat. It can form the starting point for a process

of negotiating and development of a common perspective. This does not depend on the government acting. Stakeholders have to become active themselves.

I would also like to point out in this respect the experiences with the so called Rural Parliaments that are active in other countries. The PREPARE network can offer help by organising 'travelling' workshops.

Ms. Jetona Myteveli : there are many initiatives in the field of rural development. The large audience today also shows the need for cooperation, but what is our perspective on rural development. There we seem to disagree. We also have to view this from the strategy of the EU.

Mr. Cropper: we also have to consider the relationship between rural development policy and regional development policy. Rural development originates from agricultural policy, but especially axis 3 has a close relationship with regional development. At the moment a big debate is going on in the EU about the allocation of money between rural and regional development policies. Can regional development policies, which focus mainly on infrastructure, be made beneficial for rural areas?

Mr Hysni Thaci (Ministry of Agriculture of Kosovo): we have to deal with the exodus from rural to urban areas and with people that emigrate. Which policies are needed to prevent this? There is a common interest for both the rural and urban areas and between countries to solve this matter.

Mr. Lorenzen: this is one of the key debates in Brussels, the rural-urban relationship, which gives way to a long time competition between different DG's. It is also one of the reasons of increasing pressure on Pillar I spendings. The way out is to shift money from the First Pillar (direct income support for farmers) to the Second Pillar of Rural Development. You will see that the interest goes where the money goes. This shift has caused DG Regio to become more active in finding new policy spaces and they have developed the new notion of territorial cohesion. In my opinion this is in principle a good concept, but a change of policy or of concepts does not automatically also change people's minds. Territorial cohesion is seen by DG Regio more as a spatial planning policy rather than a development policy. In this context I would also like to mention the CURE network (Convention for a sustainable Urban and Rural Europe, www.cureforsustainability.eu), supported by both DG Regio and DG Agri.

Mr. Cropper: agriculture and rural development together with regional cohesion policy form the largest part of the EU budget at the moment. The current debate is on the fact that the policy goals will have to shift to delivery, that is to output rather than on direct payments. Both policies have difficulties in delivering, which could undermine their basis for budgets for the next programming period. It's also interesting to see what a network like PURPLE is doing, by developing a peri-urban concept (<http://www.purple-eu.org>) in which regional market development is key.

Concluding remarks of the morning session by Mr Thomaj, deputy minister of Agriculture: I'm very pleased with this turn out and the debate. Once again I would like to stress the priorities of this government: the building of infrastructure to connect production with consumption, to develop incentives to encourage people to engage in agricultural business, to build an information technology infrastructure, to improve the use of technology and marketing and to establish standards for quality products.

Launch of the Albanian Rural Network by Mr. Fico, director of the AFTD:

The network is an initiative of the AFTD and the Groupe de Bruges and is based on the success of the Shkodra Rural Forum. Most networks are local and regional based. There is now a need for a network that is working at national level to connect and support these local and regional networks, to act as a contact and information point and to establish contacts and cooperation with European networks or national networks in other European countries such as the PREPARE network. It is also our ambition to work with the government to improve policies and to analyse the effects of policies. As of now we have also launched a website www.ruralb.org where information on agriculture and rural development can be found in Albanian and English and which also included an on-line forum facility.

Concluding plenary afternoon session:

Mr. Van den Brand: I would like first of all give a very big thank you to all volunteers, interpreters and the organisers of this conference. You have done an exceptional job in making this conference a success. From what I have heard during the morning session and the results of the workshops, I conclude that Albania has to focus on leadership development and capacity building. In other words: to invest in people that are capable of making progress in market and policy development with a long term perspective. To the bankers I say: look at developing policies to support sustainable developments, what is called green banking. Look into criteria for green banking and give incentives to farmers to invest in sustainable production. This can be backed up by public policies. There has been a lot of debate on the question of modernisation and competitiveness of agriculture. The question is, what type of modernisation? If you choose the road that was chosen by the EU 50 years ago, you eventually will have to pay the bill for the negative effects of this type of modernisation. So, your challenge would be to come up with a modernisation model that will avoid our problems we now face with pollution of water and soils. The fact that you are now in the backseat, can, with good leadership, be turned into a possibility, in what I would like to call ecological modernisation and green competitiveness based on the three p's of sustainability: people, planet and profit. The public goods are there and we need farmers to take care of them, not by giving them subsidies, but by paying them for services to society, what I call green services. In my mind Albania has a huge potential in this respect that can eventually be eligible for EU cofinancing.

Mr Thomaj, deputy minister of Agriculture: I have from today drawn three conclusions: we as decision makers in Albania, but also in the other Balkan countries have to address rural development with more investments involving other interests groups. Secondly, we need new institutions and an update of legislation to decrease the disparity in existing poverty levels between urban and rural areas. Lastly, exchange of experiences is a good opportunity to build up good practices.

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