



Groupe de Bruges

**Minutes internal meeting
Tirana, Albania
October 17, 2009**

Present: Arie van den Brand, Emilio Chiodo, Mark Cropper (first part), Fatos Fico, Monika Hristova, Charalambos Kasimis, Arvydas Kuodys, Zdenek Linhart, Hans Popp, Hans-Heinrich Rieser, Attila Simon, Bart Soldaat, Martá Stauder

Welcome and presentation of new members and guests

Guests and possible new members:

- Hans-Heinrich Rieser from Tübingen, Germany. Hans-Heinrich has a background in geography and is currently lecturer and organiser of study trips for students to Eastern European countries, mainly Romania.
- Charalambos Kasimis, rural sociologist from Greece and currently teaching as professor at the Agricultural University of Athens. Charalambos is also vice-chair of the European association of rural sociologists and an expert on rural migration.
- Monika Hristova has been member from the beginning. It has been a long time since she has been at a GdB meeting. Monika currently works for a bank in Sofia that is involved in micro-credits.
- Mark Cropper is working for DG Agri and will join the meeting only for the evaluation of the conference.

Minutes meeting June 28 2009, Prague

The minutes are agreed.

Reflection on the work visits and conference

On general both the work visit and the conference were judged as very successful. The work visit has given us a valuable background for the discussions during the conference. It has also given some idea about the challenges and opportunities for Albania's agriculture and rural areas. It has shown that people are competent and searching for improvement. Work visits like these should be a standard element in GdB meetings.

The conference was perfectly organised, both logistically and concerning the programme. The high number and diversity of participants, the presence of high level speakers and the lively discussion in the workshops have made it a huge success.

A number of more specific comments are made on the process:

- There are some doubts that not all participants were fully aware of all the backgrounds of the presentations and discussions. This can be included in the conference report
- The combination of plenary speakers and workshops worked well, but for the workshops there was not enough time for a good discussion
- The workshops and the methodology used resulted in an active participation and open discussions
- The conference offers a good starting point for the AFTD and the Albanian Rural Network. It is clear that a multi stakeholder platform on national level is needed to make connections between farmers and other actors and also with national policy: there is still a gap between what happens on the work floor and in national and European policies. There is already budget for a basic operation to take the next steps
- It seems that the new minister is open to different opinions. The dinner on Friday was very important in that respect. The minister announced that he will start with a course on capacity building for his staff shortly. This would also be needed for members of the agricultural committee in the parliament
- It's also important to connect with European institutions and networks, like PREPARE and GdB members. First contacts are already made.

Comments made on the content of the debates:

- There is sufficient social capital in Albania, which is a basis for realising existing opportunities
- There is a mismatch between level of imported food, mainly from the EU and local food. Although Albania has understood the concept of market orientation, there is still a lack of domestic supply infrastructure
- Albania suffers from the fact that it is hardly known in Europe, both at institutional level and with the general public
- The results of the conference and workshop should therefore be widely disseminated. Mark Cropper offers to diffuse the results within DG Agri
- Albanian agriculture shares similar problems with some of the EU member states. It will go through a similar restructuring process. This is regarded as a problem, but can also offer opportunities
- Direct farmers subsidies were not deemed so important, contrary to government policy. This could be the result of the composition of the participants with an underrepresentation of farmers
- Another issue is the lack of research infrastructure; there seems to be little done in the field of applied sciences.
- Concerning Rural Development: the notion of public goods is understood, but not considered to be important yet
- It is clear that also in the field of capacity building, leadership and empowerment more work has to be done. This will reinforce the idea that Albania has something to offer to the EU.

□ Future of the GdB:

- Establishment of a threshold fee of €50 per annum for members of the Groupe de Bruges is agreed. People that are now on our list, should give notice on their membership for 2010 before the new year.
- Establishment of a membership profile: active members must be ready and committed to spend time for the GdB other than attending meetings, that is contributing also to documents, be in principle willing to involve their national networks in GdB activities and to engage these networks in local and national activities in the framework of GdB work programme. Each year this will be evaluated; members will write a one page document on what they have organised to raise the GdB profile in their country. The old declaration of the GdB will be updated to reflect this profile
- Establishment of a strategy to expand the number of members, especially from countries that are not yet represented. Some budget will be allocated for the Board to be able to actively meet with potential new members. The organisation of events is also a good way to involve new people. The aim should be to diversify the composition of the GdB, not only geographically but also concerning the backgrounds of new members
- The procedure for electing a board is agreed. The Board will be elected at the first meeting in 2010
- The working programme for the next year is agreed. The programme is ambitious, but reflects the higher level of ambition we strive for
The budget needed to execute the work programme and discuss funding possibilities is agreed, including a small budget for the Board to meet with potential new members. At the beginning of 2010 it will become clear if we will have the funds to implement the work programme and to what extent

□ China Europa Forum:

- Establishment of the delegation of five members that will represent the Groupe de Bruges at the workshop that will take place from July 5 - 10 in Beijing and the plenary sessions that will take place on July 12 -14 in Hong Kong:
The secretary will send a message to all members as soon as possible to invite them to make clear if they want to be part of the delegation. Candidates should be in the position to spend time to work on the preparation of the workshop, in particular in elaborating the five main questions. The whole delegation will be responsible for managing the work process that will involve all members. The president and the secretary have the mandate to make the final selection. The delegation should be selected before December 1st.

□ Communication:

- Newsletter: the target is to have four issues per year. The content should be more interactive, with input from the members themselves. Concerning the dissemination, we have to consider the new rules on SPAM. This first issue will be disseminated decentralised by the members to members of their networks. People that have an interest in receiving other issues of the newsletter can report this to the secretariat. In this way a centralised mailing

list can be developed. The newsletter should also contain an events calendar. If there is some important news in between issues, the secretariat will make and diffuse a short version (news flash)

- It is also agreed that in 2010 we should have at least a one day meeting with members of European Parliament and representatives of the European Commission.
- Website: if we have the budget secured, we should also create a new web environment, in a way that will accommodate a more interactive use of the website and in which the content is created by the participants (web 2.0)

Other issues

- We have to realise that the debate on the financial perspectives is already underway. If we want to have some influence on the results we should prepare for this next year and also be active in the consultation rounds.
- Next meeting will be held on Crete, Greece, in the Spring of 2010, provided that the funds for this are secured. This will become clear in a few weeks. The secretary and Charalambos Kasimis will try to set a date for the meeting as soon as possible.