



Groupe de Bruges

**Minutes of the meeting  
Prague, Czech Republic  
June 28 2009**

*Participants:*

Name	First name	Country
Chiodo	Emilio	Italy
Fico	Fatos	Albania
Hecker	Edwin	Holland
Josse	Sofie	Sweden
Linhart	Zdenek	Check Rep.
Purseigle	Francois	France
Simon	Attila	Hungary
Soldaat	Bart	Holland
Sotte	Franco	Italy
Stauder	Márta	Hungary

*Farm visits:*

Before the meeting two farms in the area were visited on June 27: the ZD Krasna Hora farm (<http://www.mas.sedlcansko.eu/fotozdkh.htm>) in Krasna Hora and the St. Pierre v Petrovicich goat farm in Zahrádkách u Sedlcán.

The MAS Sedclansko farm originated as producers' cooperative in the communist era. After that it was transformed into a stock holding. The farm has 5500 ha with 2000 heads of dairy cattle. At present the farm employs 160 people. The farm, aided by European subsidies, has over the last years invested in a biogas plant with a 530 kW performance. The director mentioned that producers and processors are under pressure of retail chains. Milk prices at the moment are at such a low level, that even a big farm such as MAS Sedclansko, is not able to produce for a cost below the milk price.

The second farm was started 10 years ago by a businessman that had earned his money outside agriculture. Because he was a fan of French cheese and sustainable production, he decided to invest his money in agriculture through buying an old 50 ha estate. The organic milk of the 100 goats is processed on the farm into cheese and other dairy products, which are marketed under the licensed brand name St. Pierre. The products are marketed directly to various retail chains and is very successful, because it has developed a unique marketing position. As a result the farms also now buys 70% of the processed milk from other farmers to be processed and sold under the farm brand.

*Minutes of the meeting of June 28:*

- ❑ Action points meeting Bucarest, November 2008 and minutes meeting core groupe, Tirana, April 2009  
A summary will be made of the action points of the meeting of Bucarest and Tirana.
- ❑ Globalisation:  
the extended summary has yet to be updated by the secretary and sent to all members for comments. This will be done this summer. Based on that a summary of the summary will be made, which can be translated by the members into their own language and disseminated through their own networks
- ❑ Evaluation of the Health Check:  
Franco Sotte and Emilio Chiodo have written a paper on the outcome of the Health Check. Franco has also developed an Internet survey. Both the paper and the survey have been disseminated to the members. They have been asked to approach people from their networks to react to the paper and to fill in the questionnaire. So far there has only been one reaction on the paper from Sweden. The survey had 166 respondents, 130 from Italy and 36 from other EU countries. Franco and the secretary will do a second attempt to attract more reactions on the paper and the survey this summer. Deadline for reactions is August 15. Preliminary result is that only 15% of respondents is in favour of the current system. The meeting feels that based on this we should discuss more the methodologies that could be used as GdB. Simple methods are preferred and the goals and target groups should be clearly defined.
- ❑ Food supply chains:  
The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development of the EP has been making an investigation into the role of the supply chains in relationship to food prices. The existing GdB working group consists of Márta Stauder, Mario Campi and Bart Soldaat. Martá explains that the theme is now described in too general terms. She would like to connect it with the theme of small farms. Martá is at the moment concluding a study on procurement policies of retailers in Hungary. This could offer a basis for defining the agenda of the working group. Martá will prepare a draft paper to be discussed at the next meeting. Edwin Hecker also mentions the Future of Food seminars that are being organised by his consultancy. A second seminar is planned for 2010, which will center around the themes responsibility and sustainability of the retail and finance sectors, also concerning prices. The results of these seminars could be presented in a meeting of the GdB in 2010 and integrated in the work of the working group.
- ❑ Enlargement:  
Dacian has agreed to write a short paper on this theme. Due to his new position as chairman of the presidential committee on agriculture in Rumania and his future position at DG Agri he has not been able yet to fulfil his commitment. The secretary will ask him what he expects us to do with the paper and whether GdB members can help him with the paper. It is also mentioned that we should regard EU-integration not only from the point of view of formal membership by countries, but also alternative ways of becoming part of the EU and interactions on other

levels, e.g. immigrant labour and their role in rural development or personal membership through virtual means. There should in any case be a connection with the CAP, agriculture and rural development to narrow the theme down.

❑ E-learning courses CAP:

in February an application was submitted by the Centre for Rural Assistance (director is Alina Bernecker, member of the Gdb) under the Leonardo programme. The GdB is partner representing Holland. Other partners are the Associazione Alessandro Bartola (chairman Franco Sotte) and the University of Szeged, Hungary. The result of the tender procedure will be announced in July. If the application is successful the partners should also discuss which strategy they will use to attract and involve users.

❑ Conference Albania, autumn 2009:

Fatos Fico explains that a survey is being held in the North of Albania among 500 farmers and RD organisations on the current status. The survey will be representative for the whole of Albania. It will give important input for the Rural Network that will be established in October. Albania has recently applied to become a candidate EU member and is preparing for accession. The conference in October is aimed at involving farmers and RD NGO's in this process. The conference will aim at the themes of small farms, enlargement and involvement of different stakeholders. It will give also exposure to the GdB. At the conference the Albanian Rural Network will be presented to the general public, which will give continuity in the follow up of the conference. The network will have a national scope and can be linked to international networks. It can act as an example to other SEE countries that are in the same position. In september a webpage will be launched in Albanian and English.

The meeting agrees that a pro-active bottom-up approach towards policy is necessary and needed.

The programme will be a plenary session in the morning and workshops in the afternoon. The workshops should consist of different stakeholders and not only represent the farmers' perspective. Maybe the survey results can be presented at the plenary session. The meeting would like to add the theme of labour migration in relationship to RD and to have a workshop on the network itself. The meeting suggests to add successful case studies from the SAPARD programme and the Living Lab initiatives. Also representatives for the LEADER-programme should be invited to give successful examples of the bottom-up approach. It will be one of the tasks of the network to gather and disseminate best practices. It is also suggested to invite more people from lower EU levels and MEP's. Through the GdB network other suggestions can be sent to the secretariat.

❑ China Europa Forum:

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Biennial has been postponed until 2010 because of the Mexican flu. This will give more time for preparing the workshop. At this stage it is important to collect references on China like the OECD report on Chinese agricultural policies and the speech that Fischer-Boel gave on May 21 in Beijing. Also the website [www.gapminder.org](http://www.gapminder.org) is useful for references and data. We have to keep in mind that we should consider what is valuable input for our Chinese partners. A part from content also the methodology is crucial. We have to take the Chinese

structure and culture as starting point to define the working methods, rather than our own attitude if we wish that the workshop will lead to output that is useful for them to implement. In July there will be a meeting of the leaders of all the workshops. The secretary will attend the meeting and meet with our Chinese partners.

□ Future of the GdB:

In 2006 a paper on the future of the GdB was discussed and agreed. Is this still valid or should we discuss a renewal and re-orientation of the GdB? The discussion was held based on a short paper by the secretary in which two models were put forward: a status quo model and an ambitious model.

All members present are in favour of the second, more ambitious model.

However, this model has several implications that should be carefully considered:

- This model presupposes a steady and sufficient influx of funding. This will only happen if the GdB will be able to define her Unique Selling Proposition clearly and communicate this to (possible) funders. The fact that we have a good track record, are independent, are spread through the whole of Europe and are able to make connections between different stakeholders and between policy, science and practice should be part of this USP
- We can also use the fact that the Commission has a communication problem to organise the debate and to involve all relevant stakeholders and civic society.
- We should also be able to extract money from 'selling' methodology products, for example surveys, e-courses and knowledge provision
- We should also distinguish between money for daily running cost and cost for specific events and projects. It will not be easy to get continuous funding for running cost as think tanks are not very popular. Nonetheless, funding will always be difficult. This is the case for all independent institutions, for example universities and research centers.
- We also have to solve the problem of membership. Now there are too many changes and people that are leaving taking their knowledge and networks with them. It should become clear who is a member and who is not and what it means to be a member. A small financial threshold of €50 per year should be imposed to force people to make a conscious decision
- People that make the decision not to become a member can be active in the outer circle as supporters, so as to keep them in our network.
- In this model it is also necessary to renew the structure of the GdB, that is to form an official board and to try to attract new members from other EU countries and other professional backgrounds. In this new structure also working procedures and products should be defined
- It is also necessary to professionalise the secretariat and the communication. There should be a continuous flow of electronic information, first of all to all members and supports and secondly to the people and institutions we want to give information about our activities. We could start by issuing an electronic news bulletin each month and renewing the website. For the future the ambition should be to bring the Agriregionieuropa website to the EU-level.
- The GdB can also act as a quality label for smaller activities that are carried out by a selection of members

- The secretary would at a later stage like to discuss the name of the GdB as there are more organisations that have more or less the same name, which can be confusing for funders and potential members.
  - Finally it is also stressed that we have to discuss the presidency of the GdB in the new setting. The absence of Arie is now becoming a problem. The secretary will discuss this with Arie first. After that a procedure for decision making will be developed for the meeting in October.
- Working programme 2009 – 2010:  
The meeting feels that the working programme has already been sufficiently discussed at the points above. Based on this, the secretary will write a revised version of the working programme.
- Communication strategy:  
at the Bucarest meeting the general feeling was that the GdB should be more involved in communication to get a higher and better profile at all levels but in particular at the European level.

Note: a first action was a meeting Edwin Hecker and the secretary had with the director-general of DG Agri, Jean Luc DeMarty on June 30. The added value of the GdB as an independent network and think tank was stressed, as well as the long term approach and the connection with civic society. Mr. DeMarty seemed interested in the GdB book, The dilemmas of globalisation. Also present was Mr. Tassos Haniotis, head of the Unit Agricultural Policy Analysis and Perspectives, who will act as our contact for future reference. Mr. Haniotis will be invited for the conference in Albania.