

# **CIVIL DIALOGUE ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

**28<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2014, BRUSSELS**

## **DRAFT MINUTES**

### **1. Approval of the Agenda and the minutes of the last meeting of the advisory Group on Rural Development of 14<sup>th</sup> May 2014**

The Commission opened the meeting. The Commission asked the members of the new Civil Dialogue Group on Rural Development if they have any comments regarding the minutes of the last meeting of the AG on Rural Development and on the agenda of the meeting. The members of the group approved both documents.

### **2. Election of Chairperson and Vice-chairpersons**

The Commission presented the procedure for the elections. The Commission proposed to vote by secret ballot as they considered that it is too difficult to vote by raising hands, taking into account the high number of members.

The following members presented their candidature: for the post of chairperson: Mrs Trees Robijns (BirdLife), Mr Steffan Nilsson (ERCA), Mr Peter Pascher (Copa and Cogeca); for the two posts of vice-chair – Mrs Trees Robijns (BirdLife), Mr Peter Pascher (Copa and Cogeca) Mrs Tuija Korhonen (CEJA), Mr Klaus Ehrlich (Eurogites), Mr Laurent Moinet (IFOAM). IFOAM announced before the election started that they have withdrawn their candidate. Each candidate presented himself/herself and the reasons of their candidature.

The results of the election were the following: Mr Peter Pascher (Copa and Cogeca) was elected as chair and Mrs Tuija Korhonen (CEJA) and Mrs Trees Robijns (BirdLife) as vicechair.

The Chair congratulated the two vice-chair and thanked the former chairmanship colleagues from EEB – Ms Defossez and from CELCAA – Mr Capodiecici for a very fruitful and successful cooperation.

### **3. Presentation of the new system of the CDGs by the Commission**

The Commission mentioned the three reasons why they had to change the system. First the EP and MEPs asked the Commission to have a balance approach as regards the economic and non-economic operators in the groups. Second, more transparency was requested from journalists and NGOs and the Ombudsman received also complaints on this issue. Third, the AG system had to be adapted to the reformed CAP and the new structure of the Commission. Based on the call for interest the Commission has received 103 applications which have been analysed by 13 panels based on objective criteria. The Director General of DG Agri decided on the composition of the 13 civil dialogue groups on the 18 July 2014.

The Commission stated that the 2014 is the first year for the new system, therefore we are all in learning process and if needed, the system will be adjusted.

Concerning the strategic agenda, this needs to cover topics for the next 7 years which reflects well the subjects that are relevant for the group and enable in depth discussions on specific topics. An adaptation is possible once a year.

As regards the rules of procedures (Rop), the Commission asked for feedback from the group on the document that has been circulated.

Questions from the members of the CDG

EEB and BirdLife asked why the Eurogroup for animals and Europarc Federation were not accepted as members of the group. For Europarc the justification of non-admission was given on the basis that they had National and regional governments as their members. BirdLife highlighted that also other NGOs present seemed to have national and/or regional governments as their members and hence wanted to understand why one was accepted and not the other. EEB also asked as a common procedure to have the name of the expert who will make the presentation in advance. They have also requested that the Commission is well represented in the group (the right experts) and that Mr Dumitru (The Deputy Director General) comes more often to the meetings of the CDG. This is also linked to all resources that are spent to organize the meeting and the efforts of the members.

Another request referred to the availability of the presentations before the meeting and to the access to CIRCA and also to the work in small groups as the size of the group is quite big. EEB also highlighted the option to work in smaller groups when possible to facilitate discussions.

CEPF mentioned that is quite difficult to work in groups when you have only one seat in the CDG.

COPA asked also how many meetings we will have per year and that is crucial to have the first meeting in the first four months of the 2015 when a lot of MSs will start with the implementation of the new programmes.

Another request referred to the possibility to have observer seats and to have access to CIRCABC for all members of the group.

Answers from the Commission

Eurogroup did not apply to be a member of the CDG.

Only non-governmental organizations can be members of the group. If any member of the group has information that this rule is not respected, please report it to COM to take necessary measures.

As regards the working groups, it is up to each CDG to organize those groups themselves. The Commission supports the idea of working groups because it gives the opportunities for good debates.

Concerning the presence of the experts from the Commission in the group, it was stated that the COM experts in charge of the specific topics are present today and will be present in the future meetings. Unfortunately, the process of approval of the Rural Development Programmes made it difficult this time to share the presentations earlier with the members of the group but COM will do its best to make those available earlier.

The request expressed by the members of the group to see Mr Dumitru present on the meetings will be transmitted to him.

As regards the frequency of the meetings, the Commission answered that the CDG on RD is foreseen to meet twice per year and that they will try to find a solution for the first meeting (even if the provisional calendar for the first trimester was already sent).

The Commission will try to provide in advance the presentation than will be discussed in the meeting. Concerning the access to CIRCA, one access per organization was provided as experts are changing quite often. This helps the Commission to avoid technical problems with the system.

On the observer seats, Commission clearly stated that there will be no observer seats granted particularly for space reasons and not to influence the economic – non-economic balance.

More details will be discussed between the Chairmanship and the Commission.

Concerning the ROP it was agreed that the members of the CDG have the possibility to send their comments to the Commission (Mrs Terrile) up to the end of the year.

#### **4. Tour de table for introduction of members and brainstorming on a strategic agenda for the group – presented by the new elected chairman**

The Commission invited the CDG to reflect on long term perspectives and to have a broader focus. The group is invited to reflect on topics related to the new challenges and opportunities and to reflect already on the next reform. The group should look at the future context, things that we can change.

The Chairman highlighted that the work on the strategic agenda that will be presented in the next meeting is crucial.

The Chairman asked each organization for a short presentation and for the main points for the strategic agenda.

**Copa and Cogeca**, the voice of European farmers and of agri-cooperatives, stated that the efficient implementation of the new reform is crucial. Issues such as ANC, AECM, young farmers, investment needs to be addressed into details. Beside these points, horizontal aspects such as innovation and cooperation that contribute to a more sustainable and competitive agriculture and forest sector need to be addressed.

**WWF** said that an active approach is needed. The effectiveness of the AEC is important. They stated also that over the next years there will be the need to present and have intensive discussion on what is going well with the reform and what not.

**The Pesticide network** mentioned that their main goal will be to have a sustainable use of pesticides in the EU hence how the RDPs are working with Integrated Pest Management will be relevant.

**EEB**, as the largest environmental federation that includes animal welfare, they will continue in the next period to collaborate with other stakeholders. The discussion in the CDG could be prioritized per objective of the RDP. Coherence with other policies such as air and climate is very important.

**BirdLife** stressed that the discussions in the CDG should be focused also on monitoring and evaluation and on indicators that are used. Furthermore, there is the need to look to the opportunities and also to simplification.

**Euraf** (agro-forestry) stated that the implementation of the RD measures related to agro-forestry and their impact on the climate, air and water quality is one of the main points.

**Euromontana** mentioned that their interest is focus on measures specific for the mountain areas.

**Arepo** (producers and consumers of European Regions involved in the valorisation of quality food products) stated that solutions are needed to maintain the existing structures and to efficiently implement the new RD programmes.

**EMB** (European milk board) representing dairy farmers, specified that rural development is possible only if we have farmers. They stated also that more funds are needed to renew villages.

**ECVC** (European Coordination Via Campesina) representing family farming asked to send their contribution to the strategic agenda in writing. One of the points that they would like to be included in the strategic agenda is the Rural network.

**CEJA** (Young farmers) focus on the measures related to young farmers and on horizontal topics such as innovation and sustainability.

**ELO** (European Landowners Organisation) considers that the implementation of the RDP and the difference between various countries could be an interesting topic to be addressed. Issues such as knowledge base, bioeconomy, resource efficiency and sustainable intensification could be also included in the strategic agenda.

**Europabio** (Biotechnology, Biorefineries) mentioned that political and financial stability are crucial for rural development. Their main issues that would like to be addressed are the sustainability aspects (including the whole value chain) and how to create industrial symbiosis.

**PREPARE** (Partnership for Rural Europe) has a wide spectrum of interest and hopes to be able to contribute to the implementation of the new policy for 2014- 2020 period. They have an interest on what policy will develop for the period after 2020.

**European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism** is focused on extensive livestock farming systems. An important issue for its work is the recognition and conservation of the high nature value systems and securing the practical support to ensure their long-term socio-economic sustainability. Another important issue for us is monitoring how minimum 30% of RDP funds are spent on environment and climate. One of the points that they would like to be included on the strategic agenda is how the minimum 30% of the

budget of RDPs will be spent of environment and climate and will be monitored and reported.

**European Leader Associations** mentioned three points regarding the strategic agenda: big flexibility, promote the communication between various DGs on the CLLD and political interventions.

**EFBA** (European Fur Breeders' Association) stated that the main two points that would like to be included in the strategic agenda are the animal welfare and the young farmers.

**UEAPME** (European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises) stated that the rural development policy needs to be implemented in a balanced way and this has to take into account the growing role of non-agriculture activities. They have highlighted that exchange between the members of the CDG has to be promoted on the issues such as implementation of the partnership agreements, LEADER, multifund approach, role of stakeholders, Juncker investment plan.

**ECPA** (European Crop Protection Association) is committed to a sustainable use of existing resources. Issues such as science based policy, innovation protection and integrated policy making are important points to be addressed by the CDG.

**RED** (Rural Economic Development) mentioned that the rural areas do not include only an economic part but also actors that are linked to environment protection, renewable energy, territorial and political coherence.

**APURE** (Association for the European Rural Universities) consider that the focus should be put also on new knowledge, on know-how in the field of innovation for rural territories.

**CEPF** (European Forest owners) highlighted that forest are crucial for rural development. They support the topics mentioned by ELO and they've mentioned that is important to know how measures are implemented in the MSs.

**FoodDrinkEurope** stressed that is important to know what are the measures that will be implemented in the MSs and what will be there impact. One of the measures of particular interest is the EIP and operational groups.

**CELCAA** (European sectoral trade associations involved in retail and wholesale of agricultural and agri-food products) stated that diversification of revenues in rural areas is an important issue that needs to be addressed by the group.

**EuroGites** (European Federation of Farm and Village Tourism) stressed that the focus should be also on unexploited opportunities and on a coherent partnership which for the moment is not working in the field.

**CETTAR** (agricultural contractors) mentioned that farmers need reliable partners that can ensure for example safer working conditions and safety when driving on the roads. These are important points for the agriculture sector that needs to be addressed.

**ERCA** (European Rural Community Alliance) stressed that other activities than the general rural development measures need to be addressed.

As regards the strategic agenda the member of the CDG have the possibility to send their points and comments to the Commission for the chairmanship by the end of the year. The chairmanship will prepare a draft for the next meeting of the CDG.

## **5. Partnership Agreements and Rural Development Programming – state of play (Commission) and exchange of views (members of the CDG)**

The Commission provided a presentation on the state of play of the PA and RDP that is available on CIRCABC.

Questions from the members of the CDG

PanEurope asked who are the MSs that have the programmes ready for approval.

COGECA asked what is the link between the national and regional programmes, if the regional programmes could be adopted before the national one (e.g. Italy). They have asked also what will happen with the big number of programmes that are not part of the carry over and how we can make sure that we do not have in 2015 a blank year.

The chairperson asked if it is possible to start the implementation of the programmes that are ready for adoption before the modification of the MFF.

Answers provided by the Commission:

The carry over programmes need to be ready by the end of December 2014 and this depends on a number of points to be clarified between the MS and Commission.

The Commission stated that it is not possible to mention what are the countries due to the fact that changes could still appear.

Regarding the national and regional programs approval, the Commission answered that there is no particular order.

MS can start to take new commitments but there is an issue if the eligibility criteria are not clear yet. Some risks for the regional/national administration are remaining. To reduce this risk a so called comfort letter for approval ripe programmes is under discussion.

Questions from the members of the group:

EEB mentioned that there is a difference between the theory and practice when we discuss about the partnership agreements.

BirdLife mentioned that as regards the adoption of the RD programmes, the time pressure should not jeopardise the quality of the programmes.

The Leader associations asked the Commission to be more open with stakeholders and try to clarify the situation.

ERCA reminded the group that the whole MFF was delayed by the MSs in the Council.

COPA asked who will take over the costs during this period if farmers have to wait after summer to start with the new measures.

Answers provided by the Commission:

The Commission will adopt at the beginning of 2015 the mature programmes. The Commission did an enormous work as in some situation the quality was not so high specifically in relation to the environmental measures. The programmes that were simple and of the best quality were the first ones ready for adoption.

The Commission mentioned that the programmes that are not ready for adoption in December 2014 cannot be approved before May next year. MS can apply measures at their own risk if they are on the right track and if they have their own money.

Regarding the partnership, in the programmes there is a chapter on how partners were involved and the Commission is checking this.

## **6. AECMs (Article 28)**

- Legal Framework (Commission)
- Verifiability and controllability of the measures (Commission)
- Double funding – First results of implementation of the rules in the MSs (reporting from the members of the CDGs)
- Presentation of the study – Results-based agri-environment schemes: payments for biodiversity achievements in agriculture (IEEP)

Please see the presentations on CIRCA on these points.

- Legal Framework (Commission)
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Questions from the CDG's members

ELO – in CZ will have three equivalent measures and it is not clear how these measures will be paid to avoid double funding; very difficult to explain to farmers.

COPA asked about the collective approach? Who is certifying the costs? Who are the possible beneficiaries?

As regards Natura 2000 in Ireland there is a question whether Member States are obliged to pay for the restrictions defined under Natura Directives?

Answer from the Commission –

If an EFA-related agri-environment-climate (AEC) operation is not used for the purpose of equivalence to the EFA greening obligation in pillar I and a beneficiary of this AEC operation complies with the EFA greening obligation independently from the AEC, then the beneficiary can receive full payment for that AEC operation. However, if such AEC operation is used for equivalence, then the payment for the area corresponding to the obligatory 5% area under EFA required in pillar I will have to be reduced to avoid double funding.

For organic farming if the national rules on organic farming did not include crop rotation, there double funding risk would not exist and the double funding reduction would not apply.

The beneficiaries of the collective approach under agri-environment-climate measure (AECM) are groups of farmers or groups of farmers and other land managers or groups of other land managers in justified cases. The premium calculation for collective AEC is to be certified by a body independent from the authorities managing the implementation of AECM. It can be for instance relevant research institute.

Member States have flexibility in ensuring the proper management of Natura 2000 sites. They can do it through statutory, administrative or contractual measures. It is up to Member States authorities to decide if they want to offer support under rural development for Natura 2000 sites in form of Natura 2000 payments.

- Presentation of the study – Results-based agri-environment schemes: payments for biodiversity achievements in agriculture (IEEP)

Questions:

Euraf highlighted that the example presented on agropastoral system is a very good one and has a very good impact in reducing forest fires. They have asked what is the relationship between the AEC and LULUCF.

EEB asked about the publication of the study and the timescale and on how this will fit into the current programming period.

COPA asked what are the methods to verify.

Answers:

The report will be available from next year. The summary will be translated in all EU languages.

The project will have 4 pilot projects for 4 years that will be supported by Dg Envi. Concerning the implementation in the new programming period, a good solution will be to use the cooperation measure for pilot projects.

The result-based schemes will maybe use from 2020. More tests still need to be done.

Questions:

EEB commented that farmers come with measures such as irrigation that have a negative impact on environment. As regards projects related to biomass, no impact assessment is prepared before. Furthermore, there are important measures which due to the controllability are not used by the farmers.

COPA asked about the density of the pasture as there have been some issues in some MS.

Answers:

It is important to achieve the policy objectives and to be able to verify. Ex-ante assessment is important for verifiability and controllability.

The chairman thanked to the speakers and concluded that these points will be for sure the subject for debate in the future meetings.

## **7. Public procurement for advisory services and knowledge transfer measures (Commission)**

Please find the presentation made by the Commission that is available on CIRCABC.

Questions:

PanEurope – for advisory services, knowledge transfer on environment and animal welfare the rules were twisted in the old programming period in Slovenia.

COGECA mentioned that for each fund (under CSF) the state rules apply also not only the EU rules. They have asked how this can really work in practice.

Answers:

Under the EAFRD 2014-2020, public procurement rules have to be applied when the beneficiary of a measure shall be selected by the contracting authority for public contracts as defined in Article 1(2) of the Directive 2004/18/EC, including, for example, training, providing advice, environment and animal welfare, etc. The applicable rules are either the unharmonised national rules on public procurement or harmonised Member State rules following Directive 2004/18/EC, depending on the value of the contract to be awarded. If the Contracting Authority decides to provide the works, services or supplies by its own “*in-house*” services, public procurement rules do not have to be followed. In case of “*in-house*” procedures, there is a specific set of rules and conditions to be followed. This procedure was followed for instance by Cyprus during the 2007-13 rural development programming.

DG GROW is responsible for the transposition of Directive 2004/18/EC into the national legal order of the Member States and/or of the regions.

Technical Assistance could be used to optimise the use of public procurement in the context of the EU co-funding ensuring like that open and transparent procedures avoiding at the same time error rates and financial corrections. .

## **8. Structure and organisation of ENRD and of the EIP-network 2014-2020:overview, state of play and next steps (Commission)**

- EIP on agricultural productivity and sustainability: Concrete examples of operational groups – “How does it work?”

Please find the presentations provided by the Commission on CIRCABC.

Questions from the members of the CDG:

COPA asked if the rural network will be built on the CSF structure or will be linked only to rural development policy? They have asked also how the new LAGs will be included?

Another question referred to representations in the assembly and steering group if this is at organisation level or expert level and if replacements could be foreseen.

EEB asked that the results of the network should be included in the strategic agenda and should be discussed in the CDG meeting.

Answers:

Multifunding is an important topic and permanent coordination with other groups and avoiding overlaps is important.

The Commission clarified that institutions and/or organisations are members of the Assembly and of the Steering Group, not individuals in their personal capacity. Each member institution or organisation send its representative to the meetings. The same institution/organisation may have different representatives in the Assembly and in the Steering Group. A replacement system for representatives could be analysed after.

#### Questions:

EMB asked how this will really work in practice and how much money will be allocated? What we will do with the proposals of the network?

The Commission clarified that the networks are supported under the rural development technical assistance budget. The Assembly ensures appropriate monitoring and assessment of the activities of both the ENRD and the EIP-AGRI network.

The chairman concluded that the whole CDG need to be committed that the rural networks work in practice. The chairman highlighted that we are under time pressure as the first Assembly will take place already in January 2015.

The chairman thanked the members for their active contribution and to the representatives of the Commission for their engagement and trustful collaboration.

#### Disclaimer

"The opinions expressed in this report represent the point of view of the meeting participants from agriculturally related NGOs at community level. These opinions cannot, under any circumstances, be attributed to the European Commission. Neither the European Commission nor any person acting on behalf of the Commission is responsible for the use which might be made of the here above information."