



The project “ALTER - Active Local Territories for Economic development of Rural Areas” is supported by European Commission



Partnership for Rural Europe



Albanian Network for Rural Development

PREPARE Gathering 2016

The first multi-national thematic meeting within the ALTER programme



Institute for Democracy and Mediation
Instituti për Demokraci dhe Ndërmjetësim



Network for Rural Development of Serbia



RRJETI I ORGANIZATAVE
PER ZHVILLIM RURAL TE KOSOVES



MRRBIA
Mreža za ruralni razvoj u Bosni i Hercegovini



HMRR
CROATIAN RURAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK



TKV
TÜRKİYE KALKINMA VAKFI
Development Foundation of Turkey



MREŽA ZA
RURALNI RAZVOJ
CRNE GORE



RURAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK
OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

PREPARE - Partnership for Rural Europe -

aims to strengthen civil society and promote transnational cooperation in rural development, especially in the new member states, accession countries and the "new neighbour countries" of the enlarged European Union. Essential components of the PREPARE programme are multinational events - the "PREPARE Gatherings".

Albanian Network for Rural Development

(ARDN) is the newest member organisation of PREPARE Network, established in December 2015. Mission of the ARDN is to promote community-led rural development through advocacy and initiatives on policy development and implementation towards sustainable rural development with the aim to improve the quality of life of rural communities.

PREPARE Gathering is the main annual event of the PREPARE network, organised each time in a different country. This year around 85 participants from about 20 European countries will gather in Voskopoje from 13 to 16 September 2016 to meet, to exchange and to learn from each other with a common objective: to **contribute to networking for sustainable rural development**.

ALTER project, which is focused on the strengthening of civil society organisations in the Western Balkans and Turkey, was started in December 2015 after receiving funding from the European Commission's Civil Society Facility programme and will last for 40 months. The partners in the ALTER project are the civil-society-based Rural Development Networks in Serbia (the leading partner), Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia (FYROM) and Montenegro and the Development Foundation for Turkey. Co-partners are the Croatian Rural Development Network HMMR; and the Latvian Rural Forum, representing PREPARE Partnership for Rural Europe. The Standing Working Group for Regional Rural Development in South East Europe is a formal Associate of the project.

This multi-national thematic meeting between CSO Networks in the applicant countries and countries within the EU is a part of the project to ensure intensive dialogue with EU institutions and CSO networks with relevant experience within the EU.

Albanian rural areas offer a picture of rural development based on a mostly agriculture model with strong structural problems and lacking a wide range of public services. Community prosperity is impeded by lack of employment opportunities. There is poor understanding of modern rural development, especially towards an endogenous model of rural development based on bottom-up participatory approaches such as LEADER.¹

The rural development governance system in Albania is overseen by the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Administration of Water Resources. Albanian Rural Development Strategy 2014-2020 draws significantly from EU's Common Agriculture Policy.

The third priority of the Integrated Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development addresses the **balanced territorial development of rural areas**. The focus will be on facilitating diversification of economic activities and creation of jobs and new small businesses, improvement of local services, village renewal, rural infrastructure; enhancing accessibility to use modern information and communication systems; and capacity building for development of bottom-up approaches and local participation in planning the development at local level by developing Local Action Groups.

There is ample room for more vibrant contribution to participatory rural development by other actors such as local government units, farmers or group of producers, farmers' cooperatives, rural women's networks, agribusinesses, academic and research institutions, think tanks and Rural NGOs.

Other recent developments have their impact on rural development. Briefly they are summarized as follows.

- A territorial and administrative reform has been carried out during 2015, as part of a broader strategy of the Government of Albania to improve the quality and standards of local governance and to further the process of decentralization. The reform substantially reduced the number of local government units, from 384 to 61 municipalities.
- In this light, Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) have been established at the regional level. The mission of RDAs is to promote a common and integrated investment policy toward developing the potential of regions, encouraging a model of multi-stakeholder cooperation, establishing public-private partnerships, promoting regional and inter-regional networking, reducing the gap between developed and undeveloped areas and assisting the implementation of public and private projects.
- Different researches and studies on the civil society sector in rural areas in Albania show a lack of active civil society stakeholders, depriving citizens of the advantages and benefits that participatory governance can generate. The Civil Society Index as well as other reports evaluating the 3rd sector provide empirical evidence related to inconsistencies in the level of development and civil society role in urban areas versus rural and remote areas.² Other findings show that 89% of CSOs are based and operate in Tirana and other main cities of the country : only 11% are based in rural and remote areas.

¹ Participatory rural development in Albania: The status-quo and future challenges. (IDM 2012)

² Empowering Civil Society in Rural Areas. Book of achievements. Institute for Democracy and Mediation (January 2013)

Rural economy in Albania. Agriculture is one of the main sectors of the Albanian economy, generating approximately 17.7% of the country's GDP, and providing employment to around 55% of the total employed. The most predominant problems are: migration from rural areas, very limited size of holdings (average of 1.2 ha, compared to 14 ha in EU-28), poor marketing of products, underdeveloped irrigation and drainage systems, low technological level, weak organisation of farmers and low level of development of the processing industry. In general there is low interest in investment in agricultural activities.³

Indicators on rural economy and quality of life:

- The high migration from rural areas results in gradual depopulation of rural areas.
- A significant deterioration of the age structure of rural population between 2001 and 2011. The population below 15 years old decreased by 44%, the population in the age group 15-64 decreased by 14%, and population at 65 and above increased by 28%.
- The educational attainment of the labor force in predominantly and significantly rural regions is much lower than in urban areas.
- There is a significant gender educational gap - the share of women with upper secondary and higher educational attainment in rural areas is 41%, compared to 48% of men.
- The predominantly rural regions contribute 17.5% of GDP in Albania and the significantly rural regions 35.2% (2009 data). The GDP per capita in predominantly and significantly rural regions is 20 percentage points lower than the country average.
- Agriculture creates the majority of jobs in rural areas and is the main source of income for rural households.⁴

Key themes for the Gathering. By bringing together CSO Networks from PREPARE and ALTER partner countries, the Key themes that will be discussed can be summarised as :

- **Strengthening the capacity of CSOs and CSO Networks** to participate actively in policy planning and implementation, to build a strong civil society in rural areas, and to enhance regional development through networking and cooperation
- **Building the partnership of CSOs and CSO Networks with public institutions** and their involvement in decision-making and governance processes, for the well-being of rural communities in those countries.

PREPARE partners within the EU are well-placed to offer experience on these themes.

³ http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/bilateral-relations/pdf/albania_en.pdf

⁴ Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, Under Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), October 2015.

PROGRAMME

Tuesday, 13 September

A. Early arrivals. For those participants who arrive early at Tirana airport (Albania) till 15.00 and all participants arriving from Ohrid airport (Macedonia), or travelling through Macedonian border.

15.00 – 19.00 Getting to know Korçe region – walking tour in Voskopoje village.

Korçe region has wide areas of highly cultivable and fertile land, varied eco-systems and habitats, protected areas, high biodiversity levels, healthy climate, many historic-cultural resources and handicraft and ethno-gastronomic characteristics. Moreover, it is one of the most important in Albania regarding rural development, with good opportunities for agro-tourism. It is a cross border area, with borders to Macedonia and Greece.

20.00 Dinner and getting to know each other

B. Late evening arrivals. For participants arriving in Tirana airport from 16.00 to 20.00, shuttle minibus will pick up and take participants to hotel accomodation in Permet.

C. Late night or early morning arrivals. For participants arriving very late in Tirana airport on 13th, or early on 14th, there will be hotel accomodation in Tirana, followed by pick-up from airport on 14 September.

Wednesday, 14 September

09.00- 19.00 **Travelling workshops**

Starting points are Permet for Group 1; Tirana for Group 2 for those who arrive very late on 13 September or early on 14 September; and Voskopoje for Group 3 and 4,

Group 1

Consortium "Pro Permet" and Slow food Convivium in Permet District supports the development of the territory by promoting typical agro-food products and crafts, reception and accommodation facilities, and preservation of the environment.

Time: 09.00 – 19.30 **Route:** Permet - Petran- Kelcyre –Leskovik Erseke- Voskopoje



Points of Interest:

a) Cheese factory "Bunker". Meet with Altin Meshini, National Coordinator of the Consortium; Tasting of factory's products. The rich and numerous pastures of the area and early tradition of milk processing have a positive influence on the quality of the products.

b) Winery "Bejko". The winery surrounded by vineyards is constructed in a traditional style and offers typical and quality products.

c) Gliko Manufactory – member of the Consortium and Slow Food.

d) Artisanal processing of organic products.

e) Dinner - Restorant Antigonea, member of the Consortium and Slow Food. The restaurant features typical local dishes.

f) Return to Voskopoje, Korçe. The road goes through breath-taking scenery.

PHOTO: www.visitpermet.org

Group 2

A community-based agro-tourism cluster in the Belsh Municipality – as a way to ensure economic advancement and better self-employment opportunities for women

Time: 09.00 – 19.30 **Route:** Tirana - Belsh - Elbasan - Pogradec - Korçe – Voskopoje



PHOTO: www.ejanebelsh.al

Points of Interest:

- a) Dumra area, the karst pearl of Albania (there are 84 karst lakes in an area of 194 km²)
- b) Local apiary, winery and small livestock farm at Marinez Forest. Family farming located at the forest and lake shore.
- c) Meet the members of Amateur Fishermen's Association.
- d) Cheese factory "Gjoleka Family" - member of the agro-based cluster. Tasting Stopani cheese – a typical local cheese.
- e) Traditional handicraft. A woman artisan who hand-makes the local traditional costumes.
- f) Dinner – Local restaurant, member of the agro-based cluster.
The restaurant features typical local dishes. A showcase with agro-processing local products – naturally from Belsh
- g) Return to Voskopoje, Korçe.

Group 3

Assist the process.

"Discover the bottom" of what you love: Opportunity to get in contact with local producers and assist the production process : meeting with the farmers, visits to the fabric and production processing – The Product.

Time: 09.00 – 19.30 **Route:** Voskopoje — Plase – Mollaj – Korçe – Voskopoje



Points of Interest:

- a) Tasting the "Best Albanian Wine 2015"- Visit to the Vineyard / Rilindja Winery – wine production process / Wine tasting
- b) Visit to the "Ferdinand Ali" company – growing apples and processing. Heading to the Apple organic juice production Fabric
- c) Production, Harvesting, Tasting – Morava Honey Farm
- d) Korca Beer Fabric
- e) Dinner to local restaurant

Group 4

"Made by hands"

Handmade / handcraft work, rugs, stonemason, iron and wood craft – everything behind the old tradition! Discover the interest in crafts, inherited from generation to generation.

Time: 9.00 – 19.30 **Route:** Voskopoje - Shtylle - Vithkuq - Voskopoje



Points of Interest:

- a) *Handcraft work, rugs – Lindita Berdilla*
- b) *Iron and wood craft – Tika Nikolla and Gjergji Joga*
- c) *Stonemason – Qazim Bezhani*
- d) *Livestock farm*
- e) *Rungaja stream*
- f) *Ceramic handcraft, wool processing*
- g) *Dinner to local restaurant*

Evening – all groups arrive back in Voskopoje

20.00 International Buffet Dinner and Trade Fair of local products brought by participants in the Gathering, in order to reveal and celebrate the diversity of Europe

Thursday, 15 September

from 8.00 *Breakfast*

9.00 to 11.00 **Opening and First Plenary Session**

Greeting from organising team, and from Mayor of Korca

Self-introduction by all participants

Introduction to the theme and the programme

Members of PREPARE partner organisations present case studies of successful networking in rural areas

11.00 to 11.30 *Coffee break*

11.30 to 13.00 **First session of 5 simultaneous multi-national Workshops.**

Main theme of this first session

Strengthening the capacity of CSOs and CSO Networks to participate actively in policy planning and implementation, to build a strong civil society in rural areas, and to enhance regional development through networking and cooperation.

Provisional list of specific sub-themes to be addressed by individual workshops

- Encouraging the **formation** and activity of civil society organisations (CSOs) at local and regional level; identification of key people; ways to involve members
- Creating and **strengthening** national networks of Civil Society Organisations, including the trust building and setting its' role in the national processes of rural development
- Building the **organisational capacity** of CSO's and CSO Networks, including governance, business planning, fund-raising etc.
- Effective networking within and between CSOs, including **effective methods** of the exchange of information and good practices, activities and best methods used for networking with members and other CSOs
- **The role** of CSOs and CSO networks in rural and regional development – programmes, projects and day-by-day working.

Each working group will have a facilitator to guide the discussion; an introductory speaker, who will open the debate by offering a practical example from her/his experience; and a rapporteur (chosen among the participants in the workshop), whose role will be to synthesise the ideas emerging in the workshop and to report to the subsequent plenary session.

13.00 to 14.30 *Lunch*

14.30 to 16.00 **Second Plenary Session.**

This session will be focused on the main theme of the first session workshops, namely

“Strengthening the capacity of CSOs and CSO Networks to participate actively in policy planning and implementation, to build a strong civil society in rural areas, and to enhance regional development through networking and cooperation.

The session will be structured according to the sub-themes addressed by individual workshops. Each sub-theme in turn will be opened for discussion through a short report from the sub-theme rapporteur, followed by general discussion on that sub-theme. The later part of the Plenary Session will be devoted to a broader debate upon the main theme stated above.

16.00 to 16.30 *Tea Break*

16.30 to 18.00 **Second session of 5 simultaneous multi-national Workshops**

Main theme of this second session

“Building the partnership of CSOs and CSO Networks with public institutions, and their involvement in decision-making and governance processes, for the well-being of rural communities.”

Provisional list of specific sub-themes to be addressed by individual workshops

- Effective **national level consultative structures and systems** operated by governments, and how these may be used and if necessary improved in order to enable participation by CSOs and CSO networks
- The **role of local authorities** in rural and regional development, and how local authority structures and administrative reform affect that role and the ability of CSOs and CSO Networks to contribute to development processes
- The **formal and informal ways/technics** for the involvement of rural CSOs and CSO networks in policy making and implementation; establishment and improvement of the dialogue and cooperation between public bodies and CSOs and CSO networks

- Building **partnership** between public, private and civil sectors at local, regional and national level, including CLLD, LEADER-type activity
- Raising the **voice of rural people**, and the profile of CSOs and CSO Networks as the important voice that should be heard and taken into account through publicity, publications, Rural Parliaments and other techniques.

19.00 **Conference Dinner** at the restaurant with live traditional music of Serenades and traditional food.

- Folklore night with the group of clarinet players
- Dancing the typical Korca Valle's
- Singing with the Korca serenades group and guitar player

Friday, 16 September

from 8.00 *Breakfast*

9.00 to 11.00 **Third Plenary Session.**

This session will be focused on the main theme of the second session of Workshops, namely

“Building the partnership of CSOs and CSO Networks with public institutions, and their involvement in decision-making and governance processes, for the well-being of rural communities.”

The session will be structured according to the sub-themes addressed by individual Workshops. Each sub-theme in turn will be opened for discussion through a short report from the sub-theme rapporteur, followed by general discussion on that sub-theme. The later part of the Plenary Session will be devoted to a broader debate upon the main theme stated above.

11.30 to 12.00 *Coffee break*

12.00 to 13.30 **Final Plenary Session**

- Conclusions, and comments on future work by the PREPARE Partnership and by the ALTER partners to follow through the discussions during the Gathering
 - PREPARE representative
 - ALTER representative
- Reactions and comments from :
 - Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration
 - Representative from European Commission
 - Representatives from European institutions and Networks
 - Other respected guests

Conclusion and end of formal proceedings

13.30 to 14.30 *Lunch*

Departures

14.30 to 19.00 **First session of PREPARE AISBL General Assembly**
for PREPARE partners and members, plus invited guests

19.30 *Dinner*

Saturday 17 September

From 8.00 **Breakfast**

A

Departures to the Study tour for those not attending the General Assembly.

B

09.00 to 13.00 Second session of **PREPARE AISBL General Assembly** for PREPARE partners and members, plus invited guests

13.00 Lunch for those taking part in PREPARE AISBL General Assembly

Those who attend the General Assembly meeting on Saturday afternoon can join the optional tour described in point C.

C

Optional Study tour of Prespa National Park at participants' own cost

From 09.00 on Saturday 17 September from Voskopoje to 15.00, Sunday 18 September in Tirana (AL) and Ohrid (MK)

Study-tour theme : Protected areas and local economic development

There are fifteen national parks in Albania. One of them is Prespa National Park which is located in Korca region. Prespa National Park and the Great Prespa Lake are areas of outstanding natural beauty. The centre of the lake marks the border between Albania, Macedonia and Greece. In the Albanian water is the tiny island of Maligrad, with a 14th century church built into the rock. Travel by boat to visit the island and the church. You can wander through the villages near the lake and see centuries-old farming methods.



Within the territory of the Park lies the municipality of Pustec, whose population is ethnic Macedonian. The local economy is strongly connected with Park resources.

In Albania still there is a lack of studies to show the role that tourism in protected areas plays in local and national economy. National and Natural Parks can return to an efficient way to bring good incomes through sustainable economic development for the local population.

There are good practices in the Balkan region, e.g. Slovenia and Croatia, where national parks are the promoters of local economy and sustainable economic development. Some relevant topics for consideration for the study tour might be as follows:

- Participatory management of protected areas, involving multiple stakeholders;
- Community-based natural resource management in supporting sustainable livelihoods.

