On the 4th and 5th of July, rural development experts from CEEweb’s network of members and partners gathered in Budapest for the first in a series of meetings planned for influencing the inclusion of relevant biodiversity-friendly measures in the new national RDPs of the CEE Members States (MSs). These meetings come in the context of the recent political agreement on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform reached on the 26th of June and the subsequent obligations from MSs to draft new RDPs for the next multi-annual financial framework (MFF) for 2014-2020. The kick-off meeting was attended by Nat Page (chair) and Razvan Popa from ADEPT Foundation in Romania, Faustine Defossez from the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), Andrejs Briedis from the Latvian Fund for Nature, Martin Strelec from DAPHNE in Czech Republic, Nerijus Zableckis from the Lithuanian Fund for Nature and Ágnes Zolyomi (moderator), Veronika Kiss and Eduard Nedelcu from CEEweb. Although they could not attend, Iris Beneš from Brodsko Ekološko Društvo (BED) in Croatia and Silvia Lotman from the Estonian Fund for Nature had a valuable contribution by providing information on the planning process for RDPs in their countries.

The meeting was opened by its chair, Nat Page, who provided an explanation on the goals and proceeding of the event. He highlighted the instrumental role NGOs can have in cooperating with their national governments for the elaboration of more biodiversity-friendly RDPs, now that a political consensus has been reached on the CAP reform. Also, he pointed out that gathering information and opinions from agriculture policy specialists such as those present and analyzing good case studies from MSs is the first step in this process. Participants were asked to make an introductory round, after which the chair presented CEEweb’s workplan for the Rural Development Working Group (RDWG).
The Future CAP – dilution of greening and remaining opportunities

Faustine Defossez was the first speaker and she described in a nutshell how the CAP reform happened in Brussels, allowing the audience to have an insight into the actual process. Her input was of great value, in that participants were offered a comprehensive account of what was initially proposed by the Commission, how the European Parliament analysed this proposal and how the Council, Commission and Parliament had to reach a compromise.

EEB’s awareness raising campaign on CAP reform for MEPs (source: EEB, 2013)

She emphasized the fact that this was the first time that Parliament has had equal status and co-decided with the Council of Ministers for the CAP and that this played an important role in the subsequent negotiations. The initial reform plan from the Commission comprised some timid but relevant steps towards greening of the
agricultural policy, such as cross-compliance including the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive (SUPD), as well as a specific protection on carbon rich soils and wetlands and 30% of direct payments for green measures.

However, negotiations failed to secure a minimum of spending for environment (no longer legally binding) and the inclusion of risk management measures such as insurance schemes for natural disasters and mutual funds for animal disease in Pillar 2. Also, Member States have to apply the cross-compliance measures only once the two directives have been implemented, and although all MSs should have implemented the directives by 2014, not all of them are likely to do so. This proposal was forwarded to the European Parliament, which delegated the Committee for Agriculture to examine and make changes and recommendations. However, the Environment Committee was not involved in the process and its recommendations were mostly overlooked in the final version of the modified proposal advanced in the plenary voting session. The modified proposal from the Agri Committee was very similar to the one adopted by the European Council, which was regarded as favouring intensive farming: some of the measures proposed included crops in Ecological Focus Areas, which had a reduced size from 7% to 5% (even 3% in the Agri Committee), exemption of permanent crops and crops which are 75% under water from greening measures, no cross-compliance with WFD and SUPD, etc.

While the plenary of the Parliament managed to counter the very negative outcomes of the AGRI vote, in the negotiations for a political agreement many of the greener amendments were lost. The final political agreement which is to be voted in the Parliament and the Council in autumn sets down EFAs for 5% of farm areas, with nitrogen fixing crops accepted and no pesticides allowed (as an equivalent measure), but mandatory only for farms larger than 15ha. This excludes 89% of the total farm holdings in the EU and 35.5% of the utilized agricultural area. Also, countries with more than 50% forest cover and farms with over 75% of their surface covered by grasslands are exempt from EFAs. Crop diversification with two crops does not apply to farms under 10ha but between 10 and 30ha, while for farms over 30ha diversification is with three crops. Moreover, investment measures for climate and the environment and Less Favoured Areas (LFAs) are also eligible for green funding in Pillar 2. At the same time, MSs can transfer 15%, or 25% for 12 MSs with lower than average direct payment rates, of the Pillar 2 funds to Pillar 1 (reverse modulation) and the amount of funding to be spent on environmental measures in Pillar 2 will stay at 30% of the remaining money. Equivalence mechanisms are also present in the new
CAP version, with a list of equivalent measures annexed to the deal but which can be further developed. A positive aspect of the agreed version is the improved definition of grasslands, although only Natura 2000 grasslands are protected under the greening measure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of UAA 2010 that would be exempted from crop diversification</th>
<th>Below 10 ha arable land</th>
<th>Below 20 ha arable land</th>
<th>Below 30 ha arable land</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(87% of all holdings)</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(92% of all holdings)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(94% of all holdings)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UAA and farm holdings exempt from greening according to the new CAP proposal (source: EEB, 2013)

**EU Commission’s Working Group on Agriculture and Biodiversity**

An update on the latest meeting of the EU Commission’s Working Group on Agriculture and Biodiversity held on the 26th of June was provided by **Nat Page**. The meeting was centred on 5 main points:

1. Establish the list of data sources to be gathered for biodiversity in order to have a sufficient knowledge base to develop the necessary measures. It was suggested that there should be less and more simplified data but the focus should be on data that is essential to shape RDPs and the agri-environmental measures. Factsheets with relevant data for biodiversity and agriculture for each country to give easy access to RDPs for national programmers were seen as a good scheme.

2. Develop recommendations to establish the level of environmental ambition and set quantified biodiversity targets in the Rural Development Programs. There was interest in the NGO proposal to set the level of ambition to 25%/33% favourable conservation status (FCS) for species/habitats and it was agreed that quality as well as quantity should be measured. It was argued that more attention should be paid to implementing ‘dark green’ measures rather than allocating money for ‘light green’ measures.

3. Develop criteria to define good examples of agriculture measures for biodiversity. In this direction, the International Federation of Organic
Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) presented their paper on criteria and the results of a questionnaire from the EU Commission directed at determining what factors are important for increasing uptake, efficiency, facilitating control and ensuring continuity. It was concluded that continuity, finance, simplicity and farm advisory services are essential.

4. Develop a catalogue of the most effective biodiversity agri-environment measures. Here, Sweden presented a good compilation of best practice examples from MSs contributions. There is support for a comprehensive, structured inventory of good measures at MS level with systematic examination of land use categories such as meadows and orchards and the Commission agreed to create and circulate a template in which each of the MSs should contribute with two examples until September.

5. Develop recommendations for mechanisms to facilitate the collaboration among farmers to achieve cooperative mechanisms to protect biodiversity. Netherlands’s case of contracting 150 farmer groups/cooperatives rather than 1000 individual farmers was seen as efficient in terms of reducing administrative costs, as at present they pay 0.40 € for every euro spent. Also, farmers in the group/association are legally obliged towards the farmer who draws up the contract to live up to their obligations.

This was the last workshop for 2013 and the rest of the comments and debates will be carried out by email. At the end of the year, all the recommendations will be uploaded on the public area of CIRCABC of the DG Environment website and hopefully within DG Agri. Nevertheless, the overall level of expectation and sense of urgency seemed to have dropped once the participants realized the recommendations that are being developed are not likely to be included for the next programming period.

Updates on RDPs from other CEE Countries

Martin Strelec from DAPHNE in Czech Republic was our next speaker and he presented the progress in the drafting process of the new Czech RDP as well as the shortcomings of the previous RDP. He pointed out the fact that in the Czech Republic there are only three NGOs willing to influence the NRDP – DAPHNE, Birdlife and the Coalition of Organic Farmers and no significant results have been accomplished so far.

The Institute for Agriculture, Economics and Information supported by the MoA is leading the working group responsible with the technical preparations for new environmental measures. Here, DAPHNE was involved in reviewing the limitations of
the previous environmental schemes prescribed in the 2007-2013 RDP and providing suggestion on how to make the advisory system more efficient and beneficial for farmers. Some of the NGO’s recommendations were related to mowing dates, options for grazing and nutrients. Also, the low uptake of agri-environment measures designed to protect butterfly species was brought forward and new, more attractive insect-friendly measures were proposed. Another issue discussed was the ineligibility of biodiversity-rich grasslands outside Natura 2000 sites for agri-environment payments. Bio-strips located on the arable lands with particular importance for bird protection were mentioned as a good example. Also, it is worth mentioning that for 2007-2013, the entire budget allocated for agri-environmental measures was spent. As for the advisory system, work is still underway for agri-environmental plans for individual farms, which should include basic information about the farm, maps, analysis of economic feasibility and any other data available. A proposal for training advisors on both environmental and farming issues has been advanced. Nevertheless, while the working group filled many of the gaps of the previous RDP, due to its informal status in relation to the Ministry, it is not yet known how much of its recommendations will be taken into consideration when finalizing the first RDP draft later in July.

Andrejs Briedis, Latvian Fund for Nature (LDF), introduced the participants to the RDP drafting progress in his country. He mentioned that the Latvian Ministry of Agriculture has initiated a round of 6 thematic discussions with the NGOs in February and March this year with an additional discussion on environmental measures in May but the latter were predominantly directed at distribution of funds and not at discussing environmental objectives or targets. The main focus of the Latvian RDP, he said, was to encourage agricultural intensification and industrialization of production, keeping in mind that every hectare of agricultural land should be used for production.

The informative report on the new RDP measures was adopted by the government in the first week of July and it points out that the conflicting suggestions from NGOs were taken into account, although LDF was not consulted in the process. The first draft of the environmental measures was sent out to stakeholders on the 28th of June and the Ministry will await input by 15 July – workshops were promised for this consultative process but nothing has been mentioned to this moment. Another criticism is that while LDF is represented in the RDP Steering Committee that was established at the initiative of the Ministry, the decisions formally made by this committee were ignored when drafting the RDP. Also, a number of official letters were
sent from the NGO to the Ministry from as early as October last year but a formal reply was only received in late June.

As seen in the table below, the Latvian MoA proposed an increased budget for environmental payments, with 15 million LVL more for 2014-2020 compared to 2007-2013. While many of the budget lines have little or no modification, there will be substantially less money available for biologically valuable grasslands and agriculture in Natura 2000 sites. Finally, Andrejs mentioned that in the previous RDP, support for biologically valuable grasslands was also provided in case of defective management, such as mowing the grass and not removing the biomass, which is destructive for the botanical diversity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RDP 2007 - 2013</th>
<th>LVL</th>
<th>RDP 2014 - 2020</th>
<th>LVL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental payments</td>
<td>19.13%</td>
<td>185,957,348</td>
<td>Environmental payments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agri-environment</td>
<td>142,283,267</td>
<td></td>
<td>Agri-environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Organic farming</td>
<td>105,000,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Integrated production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Integrated production</td>
<td>5,000,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Biologically valuable grasslands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Biologically valuable grasslands</td>
<td>21,000,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Stubble fields in winter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stubble fields in winter</td>
<td>11,000,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Environmentally friendly production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natura 2000 - agriculture</td>
<td>10,451,484</td>
<td></td>
<td>Organic farming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natura 2000 - forests</td>
<td>7,462,858</td>
<td></td>
<td>Natura 2000 - agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afforestation</td>
<td>12,103,455</td>
<td></td>
<td>Natura 2000 - forests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic value of the forests</td>
<td>13,656,284</td>
<td></td>
<td>Afforestation and creation of woodland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investments improving the resilience and environmental value as well as the mitigation potential of forest ecosystems combined with afforestation and creation of woodland</td>
<td>22,000,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Nerijus Zableckis, Lithuanian Fund for Nature**, offered a clear picture of the new agri-environmental schemes in Lithuania. He indicated that together with the Ministry of Environment, NGOs proposed

- Investment programmes: include establishment of pastures in abandoned or former pastures; purchase of cattle for grazing; reconstruction of small water bodies; planting of vegetation (orchards) strips in the fields; clearing bushes and scrub; clearing of unwanted reed bed; construction of accession
roads; purchase of special equipment and techniques for cutting and biomass removal from the fields; eradication of invasive species

- Landscape stewardship schemes: include extensive management of meadows; extensive management of wetlands; management of woodland pastures and forest meadows; management of slopes of mounds, hills, other steep slopes and shorelines of water bodies; management of ‘small’ natural elements such as landscape trees, stone piles or springs; planting nectariferous plants on the arable lands

- Habitat management schemes: include management of extensively grazed meadows and shorelines; management of extensively grazed wet meadows; management of semi-intensively grazed meadows; management of lately and rarely mown wet meadows and wetlands; management of dry and sandy meadows; management of other less favoured areas; setting of individual farmland plan for strictly protected species.

Nerijus also explained that the Lithuanian Fund for Nature is involved in demonstrating good agricultural practices, including managing some grazing farms. LFN is also responsible for the preparation of a pilot plan that aims to set up a variety of agri-environmental schemes within one farm where European pond turtles are conserved. However, he agreed that when trying to upscale the plans, problems will arise from the necessity of experts in every particular case, from monitoring the effectiveness of such plans and from selecting simple conservation criteria for farmers. He also mentioned some of the problems with the previous NRDP and potential threats to biodiversity conservation resulting from the new one, namely, that the water protection measures were poor, destruction of open semi-natural grasslands might occur due to prioritization of afforestation, payments are related to the number of cattle and/or proving selling of hay and renovation of melioration systems supported by subsidies have the potential to destroy habitats. Nerijus also provided the audience with an example of mistakenly allocation of funds. He explained that for grassland management silage is not biodiversity-friendly because many invertebrates are collected together with the silage. On the other hand, if the mowed grass is allowed to dry, invertebrates are allowed time to move away and this reduces their mortality rate. While farmers should be paid to make dry hay and not silage, these payments are usually not sufficient. It is worth mentioning that 10% of Lithuania’s hay meadows are either abandoned or not mown.
Razvan Popa and Nat Page from ADEPT, Romania briefed the audience on the results and limitations of the Romanian RDP for 2007-2013. They specified that Romania had an impressive uptake of the agri-environmental schemes, insofar that spending for the greening measures exceeded 125%, with overspent money coming from unused investment measures. The agri-environmental payments for High Nature Value (HNV) grasslands alone accounted for 90% of the agri-environmental schemes (AES) budget, covering 1,2 million hectares and reaching 230,000 farmers.

Nevertheless, the greening measures are relatively weak and providing the same amount of money for grazing and haymaking lead to environmental problems associated with overgrazing, as haymaking is more costly. Another problem with the previous RDP was that the cutting date was not flexible and thus not reflecting the particularities of each region, which in Romania can vary significantly. The control system was another weak point of the 2007-2013 RDP and many of the farmers ended up cutting down trees in order to make sure they are eligible for payments. Moreover, the MoA changed the RDP 11 times and this meant a lot of time was wasted and the implementation process was not easy to follow and assess. The fact that MoA does not cooperate with the other ministries only worsened the situation. On the other hand, NGOs such as ADEPT and BirdLife Romania have had noticeable results in their work with the ministries and they succeeded to include new agri-environmental measures for birds and butterflies. ADEPT is also very active in the designation of the new RDP, for which there is no proposal at the moment. Drafting of the RDP was outsourced to a consultancy company, though no tender has been chosen yet. Nevertheless, there are indications that for AES there will be two Thematic Sub-Programmes, for Mountain Areas and Fruit Trees.

Veronika Kiss and Agnes Zolyomi from CEEweb Hungary presented a review of the current Hungarian RDP. Here, the Ministry for Rural Development and the National Agri-Consulting Training and Rural Development Institute are responsible with drafting the RDPs. The first version for public consultation was received in June. The new CAP comprises links to the Europe 2020 Strategy, such as creating competitive and vital agriculture; adapting to climate change through environmental friendly practices and ensure more opportunities for the countryside. There are 6 priorities for the new Hungarian RDP:

- Knowledge sharing and innovation, which accounts for 3% of the total budget
• Enhanced competitiveness and the vitality of agricultural plants, 42% of the budget
• Support for food and non-food chains as well as tackling chain-associated risks, 3% of the budget
• Conserve, restore and improve affected ecosystems, 26% of the budget
• Enhanced resource efficiency and a low carbon economy adapted to climate change, 5% of the budget
• Decrease poverty, increase social acceptance and rural economy, 17% of the budget.

The new RDP also includes special modules aimed to support community-lead local investments (CLLD). Activities here are mostly directed towards children education, youth development, improved business environment, support for small and medium enterprises, creation of local production-consumption schemes and improved resource efficiency. Last but not least, thematic programmes within the RDP are designed to support business activities and information and expertise exchange for young farmers and enhance short, local provision food chains. In practice, however, the currently accepted national legislation on agriculture and forestry land (Act of 2013/CXXII) does not support small farmer and the policy making process often disregards public concerns. Also, Natura 2000 and AES budgets have been underspent in Hungary for the previous RDP funding period.

Iris Benes from BED, Croatia, could not attend the meeting, but contributed with insights into the RDP state of affairs in the newest EU Member State. She highlighted the fact that prior to EU accession, Croatia had little if any experience in implementing agri-environment measures. Although there were two projects designed to support the implementation of AES in Croatia between 2002-2004 and 2007-2009, both of them had a local pilot character and did not result in the drafting of a national agri-environment administration system. Moreover, although the two pilot projects were designed, work in this direction did not continue and they were never implemented. There is also little institutional experience: the Paying Agency for Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Development was established in 2009, at the same time with the Agricultural Land Agency, though the latter only became functional in 2012/2013. From 2011, all farms registered in the Farm Registry have been introduced into the Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS). Some progress has been registered with the adoption in 2010 of the Ordinance on cross-compliance and in 2011 of the Ordinance on Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAECs), which define 18 Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs) and 9 GAECs.
The 2014-2020 RDP will be issued sometime in the late summer/autumn. There are concerns that the MoA and the MoE are working in parallel on the AES designation, and that lack of cooperation between the two ministries will hinder the inclusion of relevant agri-environment measures in the RDP.

**Silvia Lotman from the Estonian Fund for Nature** could also not attend, but she did send us materials about the Estonian RDP and as she was directly involved in the designation process she could provide an insider’s picture about the actual progress state. It seems that in Estonia the MoA and environmental NGOs did not have an entirely successful cooperation relationship, as the MoA largely overlooked the recommendations forwarded by the environmental NGOs consulted. The environmental measures included in the RDP caused strong criticisms from the NGOs, who pointed out that the proposed measures are only for green-washing and will not have any significant positive effect on the environment as they are shallow by nature. In a form of protest, the NGOs refused to attend the RDP Steering Committee and the media throughout the country popularized the topic intensively, putting a lot of pressure on the MoA. Eventually, the latter was determined to reconsider its position and invite the NGOs for further talks, stating it reopened the final version of the RDP for modifications and so the new final version is believed to come out in September. Meanwhile, the Estonian Fund for Nature and the other environmental NGOs are collaborating with small farmers, SMEs and organic farmers in order to meet the Prime Minister in the summer.

**European Innovation Partnership**

Faustine Defossez presented the newly-launched European Innovation Partnership as a chance for NGOs to facilitate a better implementation of the greening measures in the new CAP. The purpose of the EIP is to create a bridge between agriculture and science by acting as a platform to share best practices and money for EIP should come from the RDPs, if MSs deem it necessary. Therefore, lobbying with the MSs to fund the EIP from the RDPs and/or Horizon 2020 is the first step towards an effective use of this initiative. More information about the EIP is available through the service point, which became operational on 11 July. Faustine also provided the contact details for the service point: **koen.desimpelaere@vlm.be, +32 2 543 73 48.**
Concluding remarks

The new RDPs will probably not begin until 2015 and meanwhile transitional rules will be decided by the end of 2013 to cope with 2014 policy gap. NGOs can also keep a close eye on the agri-environmental schemes designed under the transitional rules.

Lobbying the Commission and MEPs on delegated acts is another opportunity for NGOs. At present, the Commission is elaborating delegated acts on the green aspects of the CAP, such as EFAs and the list of equivalent greening measures, some of which might be of particular interest and importance in the implementation of the new policy.
Influencing the new NRDPs is generally seen as the biggest opportunity for NGOs to ensure that the new CAP provides much more support for the greening of agriculture. In this direction, NGOs should focus their efforts on avoiding reverse modulation from Pillar 1 to Pillar 2, and the use of risk management measures (in particular the income stabilization tool) to justify spending of the 30% ‘green’ money from Pillar 2. Also, NGOs should support modulation from Pillar 1 to Pillar 2 and ensure that the money will go for genuine green measures. Under Pillar 2, NGOs should examine their MS choices of Thematic Sub-programmes, which (if used by member states) will indicate and provide integrated support for national priorities.

**Next steps**

The participants agreed on a 4-step action plan:

1. Information collection and dissemination: an important element here is a template which is being circulated among CEEweb and EEB members. The template’s objective is to gather information on measures from previous NRDPs (2007-2013) and assess the extent to which quality and quantity targets for measures with a both direct and indirect effect on biodiversity were achieved. Moreover, a case study template for good examples was prepared and circulated. Deadline for this submission of both was fixed for 1st of September;

2. From 1 September until the next RDWG workshop, which will take place during CEEweb’s Annual Meeting, a draft version of the study will be compiled using the information provided by our members. During the workshop, the draft will be presented and an action plan for the conference at step 3 will be established;

3. Around 28 October, CEEweb and EEB will co-organize a high-level conference in Brussels in which they will present the results of the study and will try to raise awareness among EU policy-makers on the challenges and opportunities of the new RDGs;

4. Lobbying activities and dissemination of results will be the last activity of the RDWG for this year.

For more information about the work and activities of CEEweb’s RDWG, please contact Nat Page (npage@copac.org.uk), Agnes Zolyomi (zolyomi@ceeweb.org) or Eduard Nedelciu (nedelciu@ceeweb.org)
The event was generously supported by the European Commission.