Rural Development Plans – an Instrument for Achieving the Sustainability Goal in EU Member States

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Abstract: *Rural Development Plans (RDPs) are an instrument that Member States may use to target various development goals in rural areas, by means of a series of specific measures. Compared to the Direct Payment instrument, RDPs offer significantly increased flexibility because Member States are able to design the financial envelope in accordance with their national specificity while complying with the principles imposed by the latest Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform. By using a comparative analysis based on national data as well as on the statistics provided by DG Agriculture & Rural Development, our paper will examine how RDPs have effectively contributed to the support of sustainable development in the EU rural areas.*

Key-Words: *European Agriculture, Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Rural Development Plans (RDPs)*

JEL Classification: *Q, R, R38, R39*

1. Introduction: an overview on the financing of rural development in the EU

According to certain analyses from the literature in the field, the introduction of Pillar II of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) through the 2009 reform represented a crucial turning point in the financing of sustainable rural development, in particular through the agri-environment measures included in the Rural Development Plans (RDPs) of Member States (DG Agriculture & Rural Development, 2009). In the current 2014-2020 financing framework, RDPs are an instrument for which significant funds are allocated under the umbrella of the second Pillar of CAP for supporting local and regional economic development (Eposti, 2008). According to the latest EU statistics (DG Agriculture & Rural Development, 2017), considerable amounts were allocated for RDPs in 2016 in the EU, although they are lower compared to the financial allocations for direct payments (see Table 1).

According to the same statistics, in EU-27, rural development measures account for 24.3% of the total financing granted in the period 2009-2016 from the CAP funds (compared to 69.4% for direct payments and 6.3% for market measures).

Table 1: Financing the EU's rural areas under CAP

Objectives	2016 (thousand EUR)	Period 2009-2016 (%)
Direct aid decoupled from production	35 204 091	62.2
Other direct aid	5 384 678	6.8
Additional amounts in the form of aid	6.0	0.1
Refunds from direct aid. in accordance with financial	395 357	0.3

Objectives	2016 (thousand EUR)	Period 2009-2016 (%)
discipline		
Direct payments	**40 984 131**	**69.4**
Cereals	0	0
Rice	0	0
Food schemes	1.0	0.5
Sugar	4.0	0
Olive oil	46.0	0.1
Fibre plants	6 134	0
Fruit and vegetables	1 172 724	1.8
Wine	1 072 131	1.9
Promotion measures	81 068	0.1
Other plant/crop measures	242 008	0.5
Milk and dairy products	406 578	0.3
Beef and veal	30 206	0
Lamb, mutton and goat meat	1 837	0.2
Pork, poultry and eggs	140 602	0.8
Market measures	**3 154 276**	**6.3**
Rural development	**18 699 599**	**24.3**
TOTAL	**62 788 007**	**100**

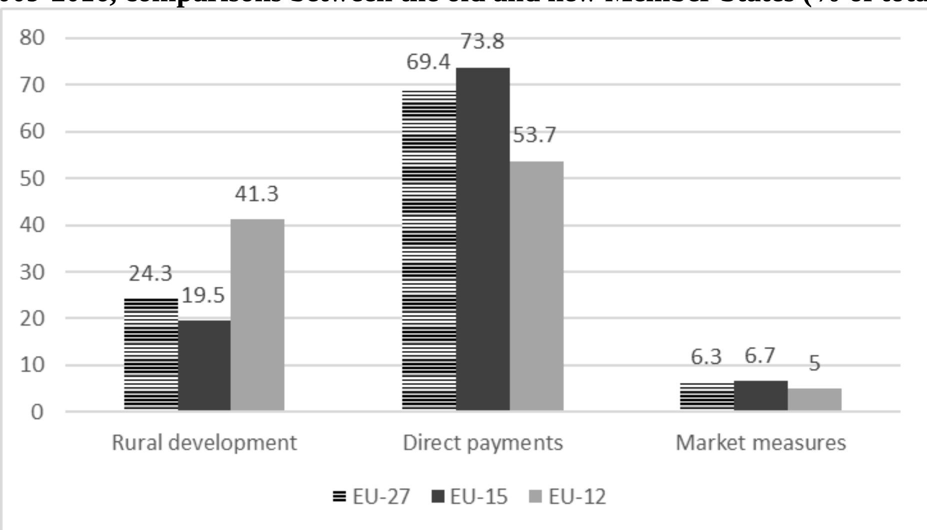
Source: Authors' processing based on DG Agriculture & Rural Development data (2017).

One can see from the analyses of expenses allocated in 2016 at EU level that, three years from the latest CAP reform, the reduction of market measures is visible, and Member States shifted towards direct payments as a more adequate instrument for supporting farmers (Sorrentino and Henke, 2016). Decoupling financing from production also generated another effect: the share of measures supporting sustainability grew through the mandatory introduction of direct "green" payments for ecological agricultural practices (they must account for at least 30% of the total financing by means of direct payments at Member State level).

Although at the level of EU-27 direct payments are predominant as a way of financing the rural areas, in the new Member States, as it can be seen in the Graph 1, RDPs remain important as a support instrument for rural areas, in particular as a means of financing that enable the support for specific objectives (the reduction of poverty and (of) development gaps in rural areas, investments in infrastructure, human resources and programmes for employment).

It must be mentioned that the total funds allocated to rural development is considerably higher in the new Member States (EU-12), namely 41.3% of the total CAP financing, compared to 19.5% in the old Member States (EU-15) (see Graph 1).

Graph 1: Distribution of expenses for the financing of the rural area in the period 2009-2016, comparisons between the old and new Member States (% of total)



Sources: Authors' processing based on the DG Agriculture & Rural Development data (2017).

2. Sustainability objectives in the rural development programmes

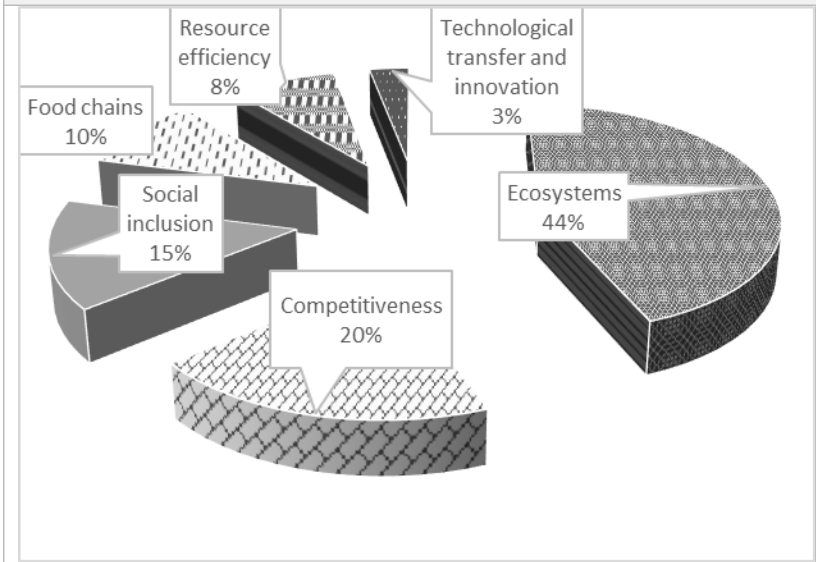
A series of sustainable development objectives have been agreed at the Member State level for the period 2014-2020. According to the latest European Commission report (EU, 2017) on Member States RDPs, 118 rural development programmes are in progress at EU level, and their total financing amounts to 161 billion EUR of which a considerable part is provided by the EAFDR (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development), namely 99.6 billion EUR. Moreover, according to European Commission estimations, around 4 billion EUR will be transferred from CAP Pillar I to CAP Pillar II by 2019 through the CAP Flexibility Mechanism.

If we analyse the objectives for which funds are allocated for all RDPs, we can see that a significant part of the financing is directed towards sustainable development objectives (such as, for example, ecosystem protection) (see Figure 1), followed in the hierarchy of Member States' priorities by competitiveness and social inclusion. Certain studies show that ecosystem protection should be a priority for the funding granted under the Common Agricultural Policy, in the context in which agricultural activity on the whole may impact on the environment and, according to EU authorities, only 17% of the EU natural habitats and 11% of ecosystems are considered to be in a favourable state, while 45% of EU soils have quality problems (ENRD, 2017).

According to the study referred to, these challenges should be remedied, and the positive contribution of agriculture and forestry to the environment should be consolidated (ENRD, 2017).

Figure 1: Share of funds allocated in the total rural development financing at EU level according to the objectives pursued

SHARE OF PRIORITIES IN TOTAL FINANCING



OBJECTIVES
I – protection of agriculture and forestry ecosystems
II – farm viability, sustainable forestry management
III – reduction of poverty, increase of economic development
IV – better food chain organisation, animal welfare, risk management
V – Higher efficiency, reduction of carbon emissions, environmental protection
VI – innovation and patenting of agricultural technologies

Sources: Authors' processing based on DG Agriculture & Rural Development data (2017).

3. Comparative analysis of rural development plans in EU Member States

According to the DG Agriculture & Rural Development data, in 2016, Member States with the highest allocation of funding for RDPs were France, Italy and Germany (see Table 1), but it can be seen that in these countries funds allocated for rural development rank second in the total rural area financing (first being direct payments for farmers). It should be noted that Romania ranks high in the EU hierarchy in terms of total allocation of funds for rural development, the total financing for 2016 exceeding the allocation for direct payments (see Table 2).

Table 2: Financial allocations under CAP in Member States in 2016 (thousand EUR)

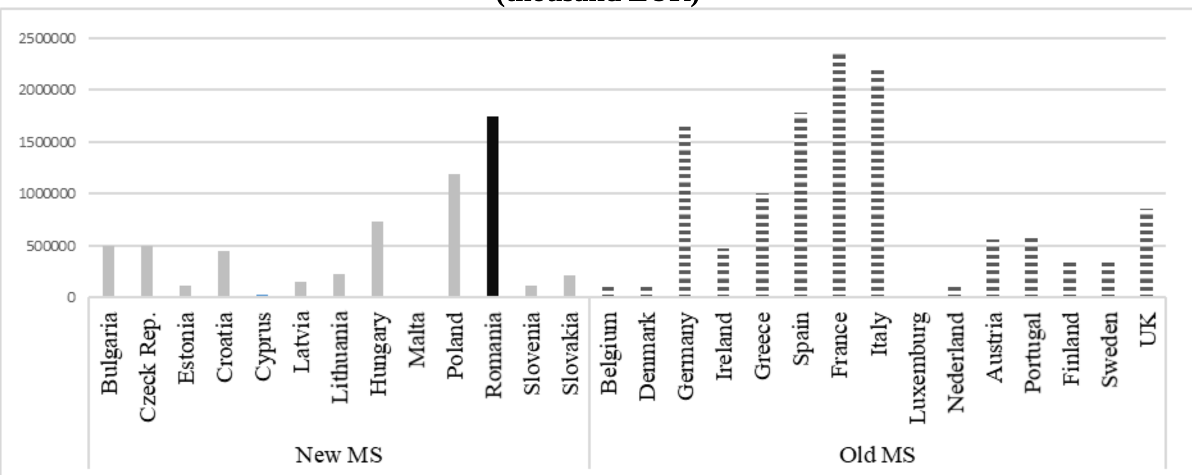
Member States	Direct payments	Market measures	Rural development	TOTAL
Belgium	522 629	77 389	109 822	709 840
Bulgaria	705 306	37 580	505 020	1 247 906

Member States	Direct payments	Market measures	Rural development	TOTAL
Czech Republic	834 009	27 735	503 131	1 364 874
Denmark	852 261	23 077	136 398	1 011 736
Germany	4 875 097	186 485	1 685 574	6 747 156
Estonia	112 836	9 543	111 192	233 571
Ireland	1 208 736	23 053	469 724	1 701 514
Greece	2 072 079	80 040	1 007 737	3 159 856
Spain	5 045 364	604 886	1 780 403	7 430 654
France	7 093 197	598 187	2 363 568	10 054 952
Croatia	179 741	10 307	448 426	638 474
Italy	3 833 812	661 592	2 231 600	6 727 003
Cyprus	49 789	8 254	28 345	86 388
Latvia	177 864	11 811	153 066	342 742
Lithuania	409 895	30 477	230 432	670 803
Luxembourg	33 245	1 104	21 432	55 781
Hungary	1 266 105	55 250	737 100	2 058 455
Malta	5 038	493	20 879	26 409
The Netherlands	725 516	87 894	118 497	931 907
Austria	686 378	35 319	560 883	1 282 580
Poland	3 339 890	263 330	1 193 429	4 796 649
Portugal	645 911	110 961	578 914	1 335 786
Romania	1 521 315	47 074	1 751 613	3 320 002
Slovenia	137 619	8 656	119 342	265 617
Slovakia	425 429	10 417	215 603	651 449
Finland	522 195	16 301	338 456	876 952
Sweden	666 609	22 343	378 153	1 067 105
United Kingdom	3 036 266	86 240	850 859	3 973 366
UE-28	**40 984 131**	**3 154 276**	**18 649 599**	**62 788 007**

Source: Authors' processing based on DG Agriculture & Rural Development data (2017).

When analysing allocations for rural development in the new Member States compared to the old Member States, it can be seen that in 2016, Romania allocated the highest funding for rural development among new Member States (see Graph 2).

Graph 2: Financial allocations for rural developments in the new and old Member States in 2016 (thousand EUR)



Source: Authors' processing based on DG Agriculture & Rural Development data (2017).

3.1. Comparative analysis of rural development financing priorities in France and Romania

As we stated above, in 2016, among all Member States, France allocated the highest amount of funding for rural development, and Romania ranks first in the hierarchy of new Member States, therefore we propose below a comparative analysis of RDP priorities in these two Member States and of the way in which the financed objectives contributed to the stimulation of sustainable development in the rural areas of these two states.

According to EU data (DG Agriculture & Rural Development, 2016), the most recent RDP in France was adopted in February 2015 – RPN (Le programme spécifique du réseau rural national), totalling a budget of 23 billion EUR, with the declared purpose of increasing the quality of life in rural areas, reducing development gaps and poverty and increasing economic development in these areas. This programme finances a series of specific measures, among which: fostering innovation in the agricultural sector, promoting cross-border investments in the rural area, implementing various projects under the LEADER financing axis through LAGs (local action groups), increasing social inclusion and employment in rural areas.

The Romanian National Rural Development Programme (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2017) was adopted on 26 May 2015 and provides a total financing of 9.5 billion EUR, of which 8.1 billion EUR from the EU budget, including the 112.3 billion EUR transferred under CAP from the funds allocated to direct payments, and 1.34 billion EUR national co-financing.

The measures financed by Romania's RDP focus on three strategic objectives: promoting competitiveness and the restructuring of the agricultural sector, agricultural practices that protect the environment and may contribute indirectly to combatting climate change, but also the stimulation of jobs and the improvement of the quality of life in the rural area. Under the first objective – increasing the competitiveness of the agricultural sectors – funds were allocated for the modernisation of 3,400 farms, for the establishment of another 30,000 small farms, but also for supporting 9,000 young farmers.

Within the priority related to the restoration, preservation and growth of agriculture and forestry ecosystems, financing was allocated for over 1.3 million hectares, representing over 10% of the arable land, but also for 800,000 hectares of forest where programs were implemented for the preservation of biodiversity and for promoting environmentally-friendly agricultural practices.

3.2. Evaluation of the way in which sustainable development objectives were financed under Member States' RDPs

According to the latest ex-ante evaluation of RDPs financed for the period 2014-2020 by the Member States (European Commission, 2015), the impact of RDPs on environmental protection may be considered positive, the programmes reviewed showing positive effects on the following objectives related to sustainable development: environment and health, air quality, water resources, soils, habitat diversity, protected natural areas, waste recycling and management.

The European Commission evaluation also shows that Member States' RDPS also finance a series of measures the purpose of which is to lower the adverse effects of agriculture on the environment. Such measures have included: the promotion of the sustainable use of agricultural land (M10 – agri-environment measures financed under CAP), feasibility studies on integrated production, studies on the balanced development of habitats, as well as programmes for the development and use of renewable energy in rural areas.

The purpose of a series of measures financed under RDPs was sustainable economic growth, in particular through agri-environment payments, but also through financing for organic farms (such measures were implemented in Austria, Spain – Cataluña region, France –Pays de la Loire, Ireland, Italy –Bolzano region and in Germany – Hessen region). Another series of RDP measures targeted the forestry sector (in Italy and France), and projects were financed in Ireland for the reduction of greenhouse gases through the introduction of new technologies, but also for investments in environmentally-friendly storage. In the Italian region of Liguria, a project financed under the national RDP aimed at increasing the use of renewable energy, and in Germany (Bayern region), a project was implemented for the increase of biodiversity and the preservation of the soil and of water resources. Also in Germany, the Holstein region received financing for a trans-national cooperation project in the field of climate change, while in France, the Franche-Comté region implemented a project for the preservation of forest soils.

As it can be seen above, the objectives financed under Member States RDPs were diverse, but in order to assess to what extent they focused on sustainable development, we aggregated all the measures proposed for financing for a comparative analysis (see Table 3).

Table 3: RDP financing priorities in Member States within the EAFRD financial allocations (million EUR)

Member State	Increase of farm viability	Promotion of food chain organisation	Ecosystems	Promotion of resource efficiency	Promotion of social inclusion	Technical assistance	TOTAL
Austria	425.4	232.3	2557.3	121.6	486.8	114.2	3937.6
Belgium	238.2	17.1	220.2	98.0	64.2	10.1	647.8
Bulgaria	320.7	232.9	741.5	334.7	699.5	37.5	2366.7
Cyprus	18.2	7.8	63.6	7.7	22.5	12.4	132.2
Czech Republic	414.1	180.1	1489.5	18.2	173.5	37.5	2305.7
Germany	1271.6	486.3	4564.9	437.4	2408.8	214.8	9383.8
Denmark	83.3	0	427.4	49.7	43.9	25.2	629.4
Estonia	245.3	92.1	287.0	20.5	150.4	28.1	823.3
Spain	1925.6	1067.2	2706	1032.9	1158.3	184.4	8072.4
Finland	149.9	235.7	1600.8	43.1	321.1	29.9	2380.4
France	2128.2	1034.5	6349.3	528.3	1174.4	169.3	1138.9
Greece	938.8	402.3	1233.6	807.1	762.5	79.7	4224.0
Croatia	600.6	237.6	561.1	170.5	401.4	55.0	2026.2
Hungary	609.1	660.3	954.0	488.9	633.6	84.8	3430.7
Ireland	161.6	29.7	1590.4	243.9	157.0	8.1	2190.6
Italy	2371.5	2020.7	3432.2	1057.4	1246.3	316.4	10444.4
Lithuania	517.4	139.0	431.2	144.2	247.2	134.1	1613.1
Luxembourg	29.8	0	62.01	1.1	6.7	0.9	100.6
Latvia	335.5	55.8	413.2	51.1	106.7	59.5	1075.6
Malta	13.3	11.9	40.7	17.6	10.0	3.9	97.3
The Netherlands	172.9	14.7	357.9	0	40.1	21.7	607.3
Poland	2847.4	1056	2647.3	191.5	1367.3	488.9	8598.3
Portugal	1483.4	99.3	1148.4	828.0	412.1	86.6	4057.8
Romania	1629.3	846.2	2392.2	874.9	2207.1	178.4	8128.0
Sweden	145.6	76.8	1064.3	31.2	382.3	63.4	1763.6
Slovenia	171.3	76.8	432.1	0	128.7	28.9	837.9
Slovakia	278.2	296.6	677.3	14.3	234.1	59.3	1559.7
United Kingdom	453.4	97.3	3801.2	241.4	539.2	67.2	5199.7
TOTAL	19979.2	9706.8	42239.3	7855.0	15639.5	2598.0	98017.8

Source: Authors' processing based on DG Agriculture & Rural Development data (2017).

Note: EAFRD (European Fund for Agriculture and Rural Development) is not granted for transfer of knowledge, agriculture, forestry and rural areas innovation, this priority being granted separate financing.

As regards to financial allocation for the development of ecosystems (an important component of sustainable growth) it can be seen that France and Germany allocated the highest share of all Member States, and in those countries this component ranks first in RDP financing at EU level. Each of these priorities is financed by a series of measures implemented by the Member States under their RDPs.

It can be seen from the comparative analysis of RDPs in Member States that *investment measures are extremely important elements in all rural development plans of Member States.* Investment measures are the following: M04 (investment into physical assets), M06 (farm and business development in the rural area), M07 (basic services and village renewal in rural areas), M16 (cooperation) and M19 (local development through the LEADER programme). In total, investment measures account for 60% of the financing granted for rural development in states such as Malta, Bulgaria and Belgium and 50% for Hungary, Romania, Poland, Greece, Lithuania, Spain, Estonia, the Netherlands, Latvia and Italy. This significant share in the rural development programmes is due to the intense use of M04 – investments in physical assets by the majority of Member States. For all RDPs analysed, M04 proved to be the investment measure of choice on a large scale, and in certain Member States (the Netherlands and Belgium) it was allocated 40% of the budget. Moreover, there is an obvious favourable trend for this measure in the new Member States (Lithuania – 32.7%, Latvia – 32.1%, Bulgaria 28.2%, Hungary – 28%, Slovakia – 25.9%, Romania – 25.3%, Poland – 24.7%). The "champion" in the financing of this measure under RDP is Malta (66.9%).

In its turn, M04 is divided into a series of sub-measure. Sub-measure 4.1. granted support for investment in agricultural crops (for which financing was granted in Austria, Belgium – Flanders region, the Czech Republic, France – Aquitaine region, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Portugal –Azores region, Sweden, Romania and the United Kingdom). Under sub-measure 4.2, financing was granted for investments in the processing/marketing and development of agricultural products in Austria, Belgium – the Flanders region, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France – the Aquitaine region, Croatia, Lithuania, Latvia, Portugal – the Azores region, Sweden, Romania and United Kingdom). Under sub-measure 4.3, infrastructure investments related to the development of agriculture and forestry were financed in Austria, the Czech Republic, Spain, Croatia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Portugal – the Azores region, Sweden, Romania and the United Kingdom. Under sub-measure 4.4, support for agri-environment measures and climate change objectives was financed in Austria, Belgium – Flanders, Bulgaria, France – Mayotte region, Croatia, Lithuania, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

Many of the financial allocations of Member States concerned the M05 measure – investments for the restoration of the agricultural land and of the production affected by natural disasters, but also for preventive measures. Another measure that is frequently encountered in Member States' RDPs was M06 – support for farms and business development. Under this measure, support was granted to young farmers and start-ups in the rural area (the Czech Republic, Croatia, Ireland, Poland and the United Kingdom) through sub-measure 6.1, support for non-agricultural start-ups in rural areas (the Czech Republic, Croatia, Poland, Romania, United Kingdom) through sub-measure 6.2, support for small farms (Croatia and Poland) through sub-measure 6.3.

In all Member States, the specific objectives of all different measures are quite general, but they are in principle in line with the CAP rural development objectives. For example, as regards M04, the planned interventions and selected operations aim at enabling the improvement of the overall economic performance and environmental sustainability of agricultural holdings. Also, programmes are financed to facilitate the more efficient processing, marketing and development of agricultural products, to create a better infrastructure for the development, modernisation or adaptation of agriculture and forestry, including with regard to the access to agricultural and forestry land. The focus of other financing measures is the consolidation and improvement of the land, as well as the supply and saving of energy and water, but they also support non-productive investments related to the achievement of the agri-environment and climate goals, such as the preservation of biodiversity and the protection of systems with high natural value, such as Natura 2000.

Indicative examples from the cases reviewed are presented below: investments in slurry treatment systems and equipment for improving the management of manure, thus contributing to the reduction of agricultural emissions of greenhouse gases and ammonia (Sweden); long-term competitiveness of farms in Aquitaine and support for investments targeting improved compliance with environmental requirements (France), the balanced management of water resources for maintaining qualitative, diversified and competitive agriculture, the consolidation of the management and use of ageing forests, the improvement of the overall productivity of the forestry industry through optimised logistics (France – Aquitaine). In Romania, support was granted for investments in the modernisation of irrigation systems for ensuring efficient water use; for increasing the accessibility of forests and agricultural land.

The objectives of measure M05 are more specific and similar among RDPs and concern the protection of farms against catastrophic events (natural disasters) and the financing of reconstruction. Under this measure, specific financing was granted for supporting farms against potential catastrophic events caused by climate change and for the restoration of production capacity affected by such events (Poland), but also for investments that restore the agricultural production potential affected by natural disasters, unfavourable weather events and catastrophic events (France – Mayotte).

The main objectives of measure M06 relate to the development and establishment of business activities that are complementary to agriculture in rural areas, as it is generally accepted that this would stimulate the sustainable development or rural areas. In Poland, for example, the focus seems to be on the promotion of innovating farms managed by young farmers. In the United Kingdom, financing was granted for the development and establishment of microenterprises and for the diversification of agricultural holdings, if such investments are beneficial for rural economy or may contribute to the development of non-agricultural activities, in particular to the establishment and expansion of rural enterprises through the development of new technologies and production lines and processes. In Poland, funded projects sought to attract young workforce in agriculture, capable to promote innovative agriculture, but also projects for job creation outside the rural areas, as alternatives for farmers leaving the agricultural sector. In Croatia, projects were financed for the improvement of the economic activity in rural areas, for maintain and creating new jobs and increasing the revenue of business entities. The purpose of such projects is to encourage the diversification of the economic activity, which will attract new workers who will live and work in the rural areas.

Measure M07, in all Member States RDPs, aims mainly at improving living standards in the rural areas. This objective may translate into ensuring access to basic services, infrastructure development (including ITC) and the provision of education. In the United Kingdom for example, this measure provided funding to projects for increasing access to services and the development of infrastructures, such as ITC access and the development of community buildings, public spaces and cultural, tourist and heritage facilities, including the renovation and maintenance of historical farm buildings. Also benefitting from financing were projects for the support of broadband internet infrastructure, including for its extension, and the provision of public access to e-government.

In Austria, projects were financed for creating the prerequisites for promoting socio-economic growth and reducing the negative trend of depopulation in rural areas, for stimulating investments in local infrastructure which would contribute to the reduction of environmental pollution and to the preservation of the rural landscape. Also, financing was granted for increasing the attractiveness of rural regions as spaces for economic activity, life and leisure, in good natural conditions, for the development of the local infrastructure, of social services, for creating innovative all-year tourist facilities and using renewable energy in order to improve energy efficiency.

The main objective of measure M16 in all Member States is the promotion of cooperation among the various actors in the rural areas in order to implement innovative projects. Under M16, in Belgium – Flanders, financing was granted in the field of human resources in order to increase the competitiveness of primary producers and develop short supply chains and local markets. In the United Kingdom, projects were financed for promoting a series of cooperation activities encouraging farmers and forest owners, private enterprises and public bodies or supply chain participants to collaborate for developing their investment priorities and to overcome the disadvantages of fragmentation. Financing in Bulgaria included projects for horizontal and vertical cooperation in agriculture seeking to foster integrated food chains, for increasing quality and safety in the agri-food sector, and also for improving soil management and the development of models of interactive innovation for cooperation.

Under measure M19 (LEADER), Member States financed initiatives resulting from a local approach of rural communities, to the extent that this is in line with the regional and national development imperatives. These local objectives may be specific for each field, but they may also contribute to the objective of each Local Development Strategy (LDS), as well as to the approach of social inclusion, poverty reduction and the economic development of the rural areas.

Because LEADER programmes are supported by an LDS specific for sub-regional fields, the objectives approached by each Member State are different. LEADER financing covered investment programmes for the improvement of farm competitiveness and economic performance, for reducing the negative impact of market fluctuations and ensuring environmental compliance; investments in production technologies and constructions for processing agricultural products; infrastructure support – the reconstruction and retrofitting of drainage systems for agricultural and forestry land, production sites, the construction, reconstruction and redevelopment of access roads (in Latvia). In Lithuania, LEADER programmes financed investments in agricultural holdings, support for investments in the processing, marketing and development of agricultural products, support for land consolidation, support for the management of agricultural waters. In Romania, through LEADER, investments were made in the modernisation of plant and animal farms, new storage, conditioning and packaging facilities, as well as for increasing the added value of products in conditions of compliance with the environmental and veterinary regulations, and for the development of renewable energy resources.

Spain subsidised investments in the modernisation of the existing irrigation infrastructure that did not comply with the conditions that have to be declared to be of general interest and which affect two or more regions, investments in public irrigation infrastructures owned or which are expected to be owned by private legal entities, as well as in existing private irrigation installations on parcels.

4. Conclusions

As shown by the list of specific measures financed, RDPs proved to be a useful instrument in supporting the various sustainable rural development priorities, but it can be seen from a comparative analysis of the measures financed by each Member State that progress is required in terms of their coherence. Certain analyses (Diakosavvas, 2006) show that the internal coherence of RDPs should be improved through a better presentation of the adequacy of financial support forms chose, with specific objectives and actions, as well as of the connections between the planned actions and the expected results. This can be done, for example, through a better delineation of the areas of intervention and of the beneficiaries, taking into account the complementarity and sinergies with CAP Pillar I, which should be improved through the establishment of financing coordination bodies and using common information management systems.

It can be stated in conclusion that the quantitative evaluation of the planned rural development measures promoting sustainable development in the Member States indicates a positive result. As such, the environmental and economic aspects of sustainable development are predominant in the rural development programmes, while social aspects receive less focus. The main deficiencies identified are related to the need for better coherence with the CAP Pillar I and the persistence of high bureaucracy.

RDPs could contribute even more to the sustainable development objective by focusing on the social aspects of sustainability, such as gender equality and the prevention of discrimination, and by involving the relevant stakeholders in the design of the financial envelope of each Member State.

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