

6-8 November 2003, Krakow, Poland

Conference "EU ACCESSION AND AGRICULTURE - Making CAP work for People and the Environment"



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Housing, Spatial Planning  
and the Environment

## Speech

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Parallel breakout sessions, round 2, Session 1: Lessons from SAPARD

### **SAPARD – chance or obstacle for sustainable development in Bulgaria?**

#### **Introduction**

SAPARD is one of the most important pre-accession programs. Bulgaria was the first country to have the opportunity to implement the program starting 17.05.2001. The program in Bulgaria is criticized more than praised. The criticisms are mostly directed towards what the program cannot do for Bulgarian farmers and there is almost no analysis of the benefits of the program and the progress towards its objectives. One of the aims of SAPARD is to solve "priority and specific problems for the sustainable adaptation of the agriculture sector and rural areas in the applicant countries (Art.1, paragraph 2 of regulation (EC) 1268/1999).

Is SAPARD targeted towards the Second Pillar of CAP and does it find solutions for "specific and priority problems" for the sustainable adaptation of future EU accession?

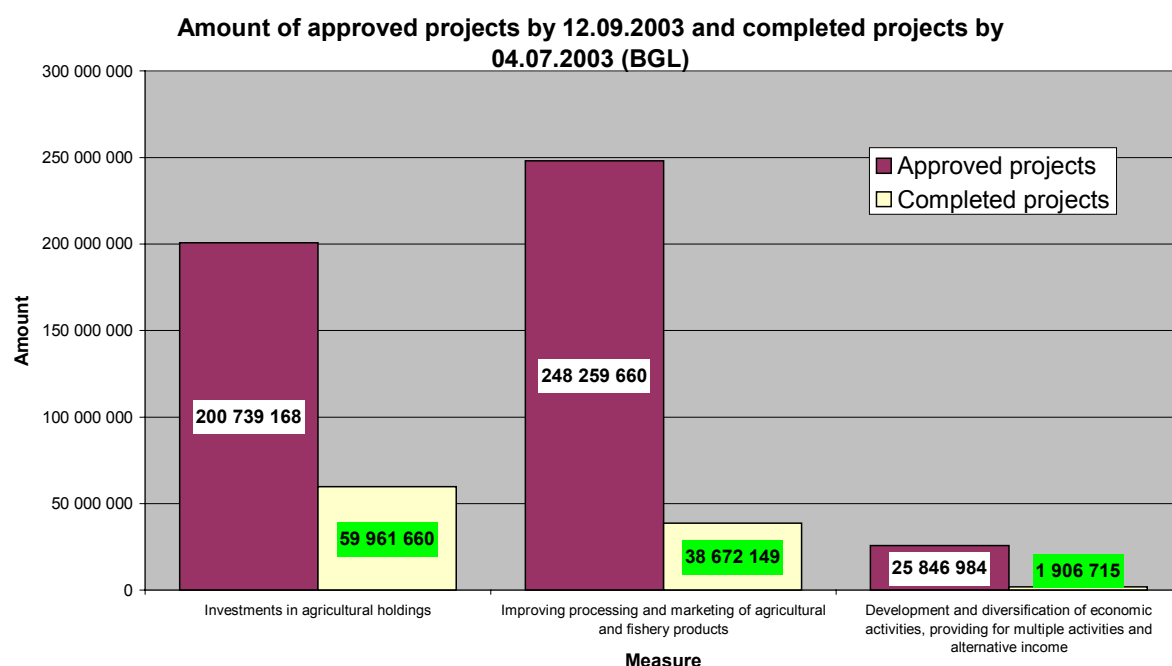
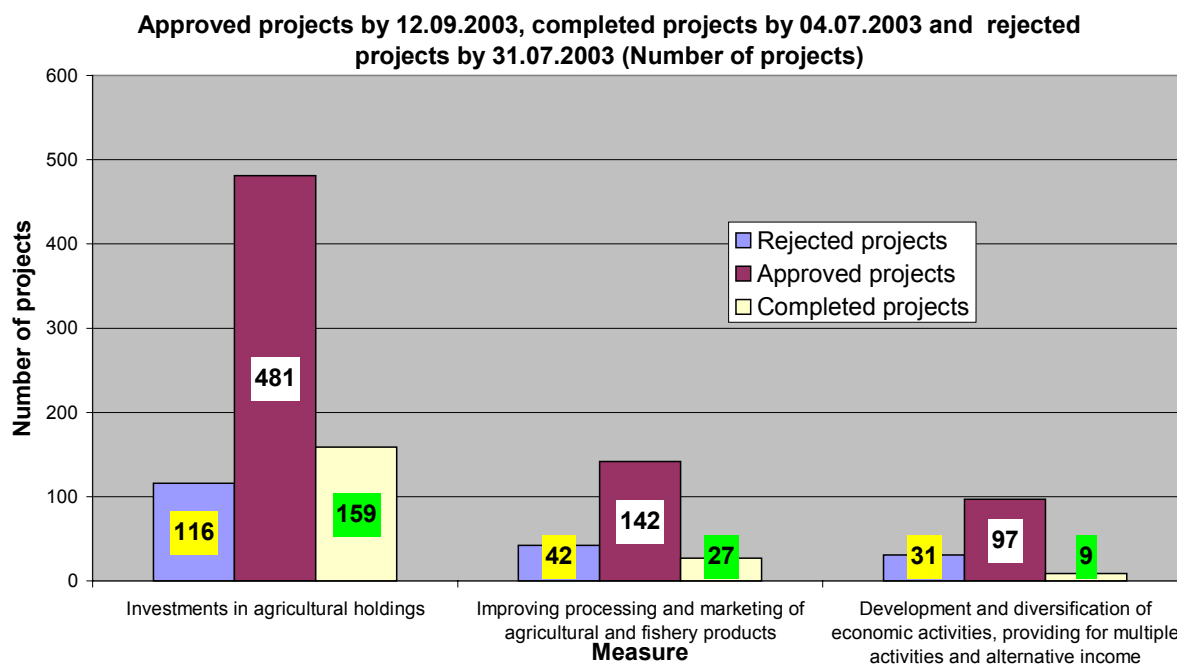
The issue of the impact of agriculture on the environment and specifically of SAPARD program is very little discussed in Bulgaria. The focus of discussion among institutions and the society are the problems of competitiveness and markets. It is accepted that the lower use level of mineral fertilizers and chemicals in agriculture after the fall of communism does not have such a negative impact on the environment. It should not be forgotten, however, that the low impact on the environment is only in certain areas and is a "spontaneous extensification"<sup>1</sup> rather than long-term line in the institutions' policy for sustainable agriculture development. The change of property – from state, cooperative into private – also has risks for the sustainable development. The problem is that currently the major aim of rural areas is the production of food. One of the major themes of discussion in Bulgaria each autumn is the price of bread. The remaining elements of rural areas development are left behind – landscape, protection of the cultural and historical heritage, traditional local practices.

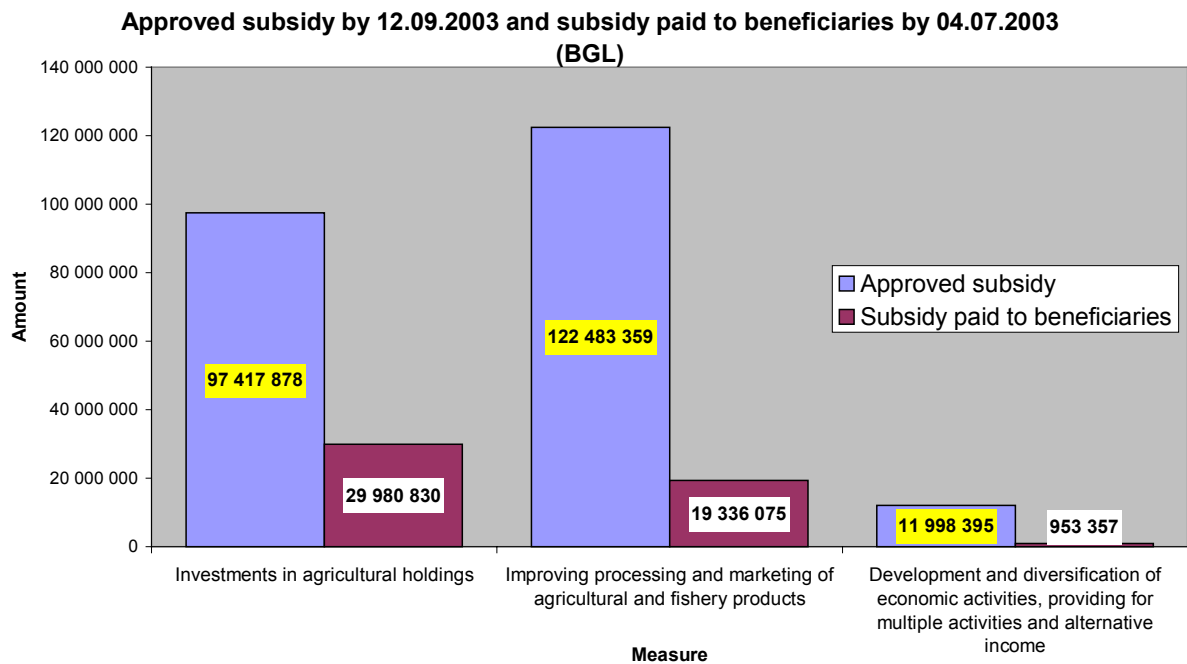
#### **Performance of SAPARD so far**

From funding allocations in the SAPARD in Bulgaria (and all other Accession countries) it seems that the main actual priority of the programme is to increase the

<sup>1</sup> Leiber T., Can SAPARD Form the Foundations for Agri-Environmental Sustainability?, ACE Seminar on Sustainable Agriculture in Central and Eastern European Countries, September 10-16, 2001 Nitra, Slovakia

competitiveness of the large farms and processing industry. Sustainable rural development, environment and nature conservation objectives are secondary. At the same time the data from resource utilization progress shows that the small-scale farmers are not ready to use resources from the program due to the hard application criteria. The most money is used on “Investments” - 102 943 150 EUR and “Marketing and processing” – 127 312 643 EUR, the least money is used up for Diversification of economic activities’ measure – 13 254 863 EUR. The money for rural tourism is used to build hotels on the Black Sea coast and the winter resorts, and not in rural areas. No projects have been submitted for silk production, horse-breeding. There is only one project for local crafts. (Table 1 Financial execution of SAPARD programmes so far)





SAPARD is a program which does not take into consideration the local situation in Bulgaria. The problems, created by political changes, agriculture reform and change of property are not accounted in the preparation of the program. The low activity of farmers for presenting projects, the lack of capacity of small and medium farmers to apply are problems, for which SAPARD does not offer solutions. The program does not account for the mentality, skills and conditions of life in the rural areas in Bulgaria. For example, the “Agro-ecology” measure includes activities for supporting farmers in sustainable production, the solving of some environmental problems such as – erosion, protection of semi-natural habitats. This measure, however, cannot solve any of the institutional problems. The “Professional education” measure includes training of farmers in environmental protection. But it doesn’t include awareness raising campaigns for the wide public. If the harm from intensive agriculture is not known, if the farmer does not take personal responsibility for the protection of the environment, if decision-makers’ priorities are not connected to environmental protection – then it is hard to have good results. The development of environmentally friendly agriculture activities is impossible if they are only for the export to European markets, without the pressure and support of the community for the local market. What is needed in Bulgaria is support to networks and associations of producers. The measure “Creation of producer groups” is targeted only towards big producer groups on the national level with big production quantities for better competitiveness. SAPARD does not envisage support to smaller groups on regional level and of small-scale producers, which are most of the organic producers.

SAPARD envisages trainings, but not education, research, information, monitoring. The Bulgarian rural traditions, the consequences of the communist regime on agriculture production and the need for changed mentality require different SAPARD measures.

### **Development of environmentally friendly agricultural practices and activities**

On 09.04.2003 the Committee STAR approved the agri-environmental measure but the implementation will be implement may be next year.

Two of the actions (Management of semi-natural habitats and Support to anti-erosion practices) are to be implemented in pilot areas (limited geographical scope) and two of the actions (Organic farming and Local breeds endangered of being lost to farming) are to be implemented for pilot crops (products) and pilot breeds at national level. EU requires that the agro-ecology measure has a pilot character. Bulgarian NGOs together with the MAF defended the possibility for organic agriculture and rare breeds activities to be implemented not only in pilot areas, but countrywide.

Table 3. **Activities ( crops, breeds, areas)**

|   |  |   |                  |                   |
|---|--|---|------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Organic farming</i>                                      | Essential oil and medicine crops                                   | Fruits and vegetable  | Fodder crops     |                   |
| <i>Local breeds endangered of being lost to farming</i>     | Local Grey Cattle  | Rhodope Short Horned cattle,                                | Karakachan Sheep | Copper-Red Sheep. |
| <i>Maintenance and improvement of semi-natural habitats</i> | Semi-natural grasslands (valuable for richness of flora and fauna) | Farmed wetlands (valuable for breeding or migratory birds); |                  |                   |
| <i>Support to anti-erosion practices.</i>                   | The catchment basins of Struma River and Arda River                |   |                  |                   |

#### **Partnership principle within the planning/implementation process**

- ◆ There did not exist any legally binding rules
- ◆ Disseminated Information on the programme is partially sufficient
- ◆ Environmental NGOs were fully involved in the planning team
- ◆ There is no country-wide NGO platform on SAPARD and agri-environment issue
- ◆ Environmental NGOs representatives are members of Monitoring Committee – 1 and in all working groups of measures – 8 people
- ◆ Access to documents issued in Monitoring Committees to NGOs is strong

Bulgarian environmental NGOs have approved procedure for appointing their representatives in different committees and councils on national level. Bulgarian environmental NGOs have representatives in the Monitoring Committee - 1 person and 8 people in the working groups on the measures, implemented currently. NGOs also have representatives in the working groups on the measures, who are not yet operational.

#### **Main problems of SAPARD program**

##### **a) Problems caused by the Conditions for program implementation:**

- ◆ **Ongoing process** of agriculture restructuring, accompanied by a great polarization and dynamics of agriculture producers
- ◆ **Non-functioning** agricultural credit system and unavailable access of majority of agriculture producers to bank credits
- ◆ **Practical isolation** of agricultural science; poorly functioning system of extension services; low level of education of farmers.

## **b) Problems of the program as a whole**

- **Complicated procedure** for approval, including four levels. Long timing of answering project proposals – up to 3 months for rejected projects. The process should be divided by each of the levels of approval.
- **Poor methodical connection** on document reception at the first two levels. In agricultural projects there are no requirements for presenting technological maps and techniques for animal breeding.
- **Low expertise** of officials in the functional structure of SAPARD concerning business planning of the activities under the measures.
- **Lack** of arbitrary independent commission when disputes arise regarding the application process.

## **Proposals for program improvements:**

- **Creation** of possibilities for inclusion of independent experts (NGOs, etc.) in the whole cycle of selection, evaluation, monitoring and control of the projects and training of personnel.
- Necessity for **creating** a platform – coalition of environmental NGOs for independent control, evaluation and monitoring
- **Integration** of the problems of environmental protection through inclusion of indicators
- Special **attention** to projects, connected to potential negative impact on the environment – forestry, infrastructure development (roads, sewage systems, irrigation systems). Involvement of NGO representatives in the evaluation of such projects
- **Activation** of the regional structures of MAF and the institutions for information campaigns about the national plan
- **Improving** financing of rural areas development
- **Creation** of arbitrary commission for solving disputes on application and implementation of SAPARD projects.