

Intergroup
SUSTAINABLE HUNTING, BIODIVERSITY & COUNTRYSIDE ACTIVITIES
Intergroupe
CHASSE DURABLE, BIODIVERSITÉ & ACTIVITÉS RURALES
Intergruppe
NACHHALTIGE JAGD, BIODIVERSITÄT & LÄNDLICHE AKTIVITÄTEN
Intergruppo
CACCIA SOSTENIBILE, BIODIVERSITÀ & ATTIVITÀ RURALI
Intergrupo
CAZA SOSTENIBLE, BIODIVERSIDAD & ACTIVIDADES RURALES

Meeting of 05.07.2006
Towards an Alliance of Rural Organisations

MEPs

ATTARD-MONTALTO, John (PES, Mt)
BERLATO, Sergio (UEN, It)
DEß, Albert (EPP-ED, De)
EBNER, Michl (EPP-ED, It)
FERBER, Markus (EPP-ED, De)
FLORENZ, Karl-Heinz (EPP-ED, De)
HELMER, Roger (NA, UK)
KLAß, Christa (EPP-ED, De)

KONRAD, Christoph (EPP-ED, De)
MAYER, Hans-Peter (EPP-ED, De)
PIEPER, Markus (EPP-ED, De)
REUL, Herbert ((EPP-ED, De)
SCHIERHUBER, Agnes (EPP-ED, At)
SEEBER, Richard (EPP-ED, At)
SOMMER, Renate (EPP-ED, De)

Represented

BACO, Peter (NA, Sk)

PODESTA, Guido (EPP-ED, It)

Apologised

DIAZ de MERA, Agustín (EPP-ED, Es)
EK, Lena (ALDE, Sw)
FRIEDRICH, Ingo (EPP-ED, De)
GALA, Milan (EPP-ED, Sk)
HOPPENSTEDT, Karsten F. (EPP-ED, De)
JEGGLE, Elisabeth (EPP-ED, De)

LETHINEN, Lasse (PSE, Fin)
LULLING, Astrid (EPP-ED, Lux)
McCARTHY, Arlene (PSE, UK)
MATHIEU, Véronique (EPP-ED, Fr)
WATSON, Graham (ALDE, UK)

Experts/Observers

BERTAMINO, Teresa (EP Service Juridique)
BORCHERT, Jochen (MP, President DJV)
BORTLOVA, A. (ELO)
BOSTEELS, Jean-Louis (FACE Be)
CARETTA, Maria Christina (CONFAVI)

HOGGARTH, Tim (FACE UK)
KRYSTYNA, Marcinkiewicz (EBCD)
SYMONS, Despina (EBCD)
de TURCKHEIM, Gilbert (President FACE)
von WÜLFING, Goddert (DJV)

Assistants

KAPRACIKOVA, Ivana (P. BACO)
MARTIN, David (R. HELMER)

SCHLERITZKO, Ludwig (A. SCHIERHUBER)
UNTERKOFLE, Myriam (M. EBNER)

Secretariat

ESPÁRRAGO, Manuel (FACE)
LECOCQ, Yves (FACE)
von STEYNITZ, Max (FACE)

1. Introduction and Opening Remarks

M. EBNER, President and Co-ordinator of the Intergroup, opens the Session and welcomes all present and represented MEPs, as well as invited speakers, experts and guests.

2. Development of Possibilities in Germany

J. BORCHERT begins his speech by referring to the increasing lack of understanding for the future of rural areas that has resulted from the urbanisation of society. This includes the increasing rejection of the harvesting of animals, as well as the natural use of the environment in the traditional manner. Taking Germany as an example, he explains how different rural associations have combined to form the „*Aktionsbündnis Forum Natur*“ (“Action Alliance Forum Nature”). This group is comprised of farmers, gardeners, winemakers, forest owners, fishermen, hunters and riders – in total six million members and people of rural areas. The aim of this alliance is that society and politics should perceive more strongly the interests of the countryside and its users and that these should be taken into account at decision-making level. A perception of the environment exists, in which it has been forgotten, or rather suppressed, that rural areas provide the means of existence for many people. It is an important and integral element, which represents a highly attractive economic area, in which 40% of the German population lives. J. BORCHERT emphasises that 11% of the workforce still derive their income from the agriculture, forestry and food sectors.

Apprehension exists due to the wishful thinking and loss of a grip on reality in public debates regarding animal welfare, nature conservation and environmental protection. He explains that more and more regulations and laws on ownership and use restrictions come into effect, which hampers economic activity. Nature and species conservation is not accomplished through regulated protected areas, rather through voluntary agreements and co-operation with all sides. Therefore, the “*Aktionsbündnis Forum Natur*” campaigns for a policy that benefits private property ownership rights. The contractual agreement should be put ahead of legal regulations and nature conservation, environmental protection and animal welfare should be created only *with* and not against users and owners. J. BORCHERT emphasises the objectivity with which the Alliance carries out its political work. In this sense, he also sees good chances for Europe that an alliance of rural organisations can sustainably assert the interests of rural areas.

3. Countryside Alliance – an organisation with many roles

Tim HOGGARTH, of the British *Countryside Alliance* (CA), subsequently reports about the work and organisation of this large association, which has an annual budget of approximately £6.5 million and some 50-60 full-time employees. Apart from the CA, there are 30 individual interest groups and associations of rural areas in the UK (of which 20 are in FACE-UK). The CA has representations in the regions of England and Wales, as well as Ireland and Scotland. The largest organisations next to the CA are the *British Association for Shooting and Conservation* (BASC) and the *Country Land and Business Association* (CLA), as well as the *National Farmers Association*. He explains the most important aims and interests of the CA, especially the promotion and defence of rural life and the safeguarding of the basis of existence, as well as the contribution that the views of the rural population make to the political process. The securing of sustainable use and productivity of the land in all respects is a further aim.

He further informs participants about the intensive interest campaign of the CA, which is based on work at the parliament and education campaigns in regional and national media. This includes direct contact to politicians, officials and other decision-makers.

On the basis of examples provided, he illustrates how the CA tries to broach the issue of hunting in the media, for instance, the new *Hunting Act*, which bans hunting with hounds leading to such formidable protests in the population that the impact is now to be reconsidered at the political level. A *hunting campaign*, which with a threefold strategy incorporates public opinion, national projects and regional events, a Game-meat project, which reached 46 million people and led to a large increase in its consumption, as well as an Angling development project, which made material and education available are further examples of the extent of the CA engagement in different rural thematic areas.

The *Countryside Alliance* represents an important counterbalance to the increasing number of (extreme) nature protection and animal welfare activists and organisations, so that one-sided information and reporting in the media can be countered.

4. Discussion

Following the two presentations, A. SCHIERHUBER emphasises the effect of hunting and fishing and stressed the economic factors. He laments the extreme views of the opposition, who do not recognise its contribution to the fostering and care-taking of nature. It is important to engage repeatedly at the EP to get this point across and he sees this as a main point of application for the Intergroup.

S. BERLATO explains that in rural society, 6-7% of the workforce is engaged in the maintenance of approximately three quarters of the total EU land under arable and forest cover – this must be recognised in respect of future generations. He further explained that 47% of products from hunting work and products are available to the greater population, but hunters receive no financial reward for these, in fact they must finance them to a large extent, by themselves, even though they are irreplaceable services.

T. HOGGARTH mentions the importance of direct influence through stakeholders in the (national) parliaments. The MPs must understand how and why interests are represented and pushed.

J. BORCHERT agrees with this view and insists that MPs must be briefed about the interests at stake and also must understand the implications for their constituencies.

G. de TURCKHEIM supports the commentary and uses Germany as an example for how influence can be used and built. There are just 300,000 hunters in Germany; however the “*Aktionsbündnis Forum Natur*” has approximately 6 million members, which would represent 12 million potential voters, if families are incorporated. That corresponds to an important political argument and could help hunting to get out of its political isolation. People, who meanwhile are increasingly moving to the countryside, must be informed about their surroundings, in order to develop a total understanding for that, which attracted them to Nature in the first place.

C. KLAß asks how one can prevent EU projects in connection with the “Birds” or “Habitats” Directive from encroaching on other issues, so that the results are not counter-productive.

Concerning this matter, J. BORCHERT pleads for cross-border regulations for rural organisations instead of national agreements. This would guarantee that both partners would benefit from such regional agreements.

J. ATTARD-MONTALTO insinuates that Maltese politicians connected with hunting do not freely reveal this in public because of huge external pressure. He asks how then the pressure from the hunting opposition can be countered.

S. BERLATO promotes a lobby for the whole rural area of the EU. Communications experts have to conduct explanatory work, otherwise one can not get beyond the theoretical statements of the Intergroup and no message is sent. He invites FACE to communicate positive experiences and to provide him and the Intergroup with all information materials from the Member States, in order to approach schools in an explanatory fashion. Positive results must be copied and exported. He himself knows politicians, who speak against hunting out of ignorance and such people must be furnished with the correct information.

J. BORCHERT refers to the fact that the majority of politicians have a favourable view of hunting. However, politicians should admit to being hunters and consequently enlighten others.

M. EBNER asserts that as it is also an economic factor, hunters must stand by the topic of "Harvesting". He considers what chances exist to convince the agricultural community of the danger for countryside issues, but at the same time of the standing up for the countryside issue. He asks himself, whether the psychological strain is high enough.

J. BORCHERT replies that membership figures of rural organisations are falling. In his opinion, in light of this, the individual, as well as common interests must and can only be promoted through close *co-operation* of the rural organisations.

According to R. SOMMER, the interests of the users must be combined. People have no concept of nature anymore. To maintain the natural and cultural landscape, appropriate regulations must be implemented at national and regional level.

5. Any Other Business

No other themes were put forward under this point of the agenda.

6. Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place after the summer recess on Wednesday, 27th September and concern itself with the topic "Hunting and Sporting Firearms in the EU".

M. EBNER thanks all speakers and participants for their active participation and closes the meeting.

Max von STEYNITZ
Public Affairs Officer