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CI LEADER+ programme for Apulia region (2000/2006) : an example of transnational Cooperation

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Résumé. La création de réseaux transnationaux dans le cadre des actions stratégiques de l'UE en direction des Pays Tiers Méditerranéens incite la région d'Apulia et le GAL Alto Salento à mettre en place une coopération avec la Turquie, le Liban, la Syrie, la Croatie et Malte sur le thème de la valorisation des produits typiques liés à un territoire caractérisé par son environnement naturel, sa culture et son savoir faire artisanal. L'Institut Agronomique Méditerranéen de Bari (IAMB) sera la structure technique d'appui, ce qui permettra une coopération en terme de partenariat pour le développement d'activités et l'organisation de manifestations sur ces questions dans les Pays Tiers.

Abstract. *The setting up of transnational networks within the framework of the strategic actions of the EU for Mediterranean third countries has encouraged the Apulia region and the GAL Alto Salento to establish cooperation with Turkey, the Lebanon, Syria, Croatia and Malta on the theme of the sale of characteristic products related to a region characterised by its natural environment, culture and craft know-how. The Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari (IAMB) will be the technical support structure that will enable partnership cooperation for the development of activities and the organisation of events concerning these questions in the third countries.*

The EU's strategy towards the Mediterranean Third Countries (MTCs) is aimed at favouring political, economic social and cultural cooperation and integration processes through the progressive creation of a Euro-Mediterranean free trade area within 2010. It is an ambitious path stemming from the Barcelona Declaration of 1995, undersigned by 15 EU countries and 12 Mediterranean states.

Ministers agreed on some key aspects of the Euro-Mediterranean relationships in the agri-food sector: protecting the Mediterranean agriculture within multilateral negotiations; governing import flows based on complementarity and product seasonality criteria, ensuring food safety (CIHEAM, Beirut 2002).

The creation of a free trade area in 2010 has not been supported so far by cooperation initiatives aimed at the complementarity of agricultural production in a framework of regulatory harmonization. Similarly global commercial aspects and local development issues related to agriculture multi-functionality and its stabilizing role of the rural world should also be reconciled (Seattle Conference, 1999). *Therefore, "emphasizing rural development, notably in relation to agriculture and the environment" becomes a priority that needs trans-boundary cooperation actions "inspired to the Leader initiative"* (Conclusions of the Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Agriculture Ministers, Venice, 2003).

If this delay is not recovered, the free trade area is likely to increase the existing conflicts between the two shores.

The role of the Mediterranean region in the overall context is reflected by the specific weight of the Mediterranean agri-food products on the global trade flow, namely 19%, showing an imbalance in commercial outlets so that the EU accounts for about 30% of the agri-food trade flow of the MTCs, whereas the MTCs account for only 2% of the EU's trade.

Italy, for its geographical position, history and culture, can play a crucial role in relaunching the Euro-Mediterranean partnership contributing to develop Mediterranean-oriented Community strategies to balance both Europe's enlargement to the East and the strengthened role of continental areas that are detrimental to the Mediterranean areas and products. In this framework, it is important to seek the synergies between the EU and the MTCs, the complementarity, the mutual advantages, the typicalness of Mediterranean products that could find a common enhancement on global markets.

I - CI LEADER+ programme : some characteristics

The general objective can be described as an experiment for a common enhancement of the rural areas and the typical Mediterranean products with Leader approach through the harmonization of regulations and their recognition (label).

Different countries and bodies are involved: Italy with n°9 APULIA LAG (Alto Salento LAG), EU's country: Malta, Mediterranean Third Countries (MTC): Turkey, Lebanon, Syria and Croatia.

The main specific purposes are the following:

□ **OS1. Harmonization of rural development in bottom up integrated approach LEADER and food quality)**

The cooperation project is intended to favour the Know-how exchange between the EU's countries and the MTCs for the purpose of sharing a common regulatory framework on rural development in approach Leader and food quality.

The "*compliance with the same rules*" is considered to be a key factor to start up cooperation between Italy and the MTCs for an economic integration. In a global market it is possible to improve the competitiveness of the Mediterranean products in a climate of cooperation (*cooperate to compete*)

□ **OS2 Quality label of guaranteed typical Mediterranean products**

The subsequent step is to envisage and define a "label" and the relevant complementary regulation, to be employed in the process of common enhancement of the typical Mediterranean rural areas and products. The "label" is intended to guarantee and favour the commercial integration between farms and the common enhancement on the international market.

□ **OS3 Construction of the Mediterranean common**

Cooperation activities will also be performed to favour the exchange and cooperation between the territories and the operators involved so as to initiate a path targeted to the construction of *the Mediterranean common area*.

These activities shall basically consist in the *organization of a fair event* for the presentation of the Mediterranean rural areas and products, with the participation of the operators involved in the project (show-case of farms), to favour the exchange between different operators acting in the Mediterranean region, and promote commercial agreements. To support this event a catalogue (both on the paper and on Cd-Rom) of the operators joining the quality label promoted by the LeaderMed project shall be edited. Moreover a conclusive conference will be organized to launch the proposal for creating an *Development Agency* of the rural areas and typical Mediterranean products that will ensure the continuity of the project in the subsequent years. The event could be jointly promoted with "Fiera Del Levante (expolevante)". Another cross-cutting action shall consist in the creation of a web site mostly acting as a service to favour the knowledge and the exchange between farms and the promotion of their products.

□ **OS4 – Pilot projects.**

Once the harmonization and definition of the common quality label of the Euro-Mediterranean area is achieved, the focus will be on the development of integrated enhancement paths on the main Mediterranean production chains.

Pilot projects shall enable improving the knowledge of the problems related to each single production chain by creating specific paths to enhance *typical products rooted to the territory (meant as environment, culture and handicraft)*. The cooperation process will be completed by the organization of specific events to favour the commercial integration between operators. In support to these events promotional materials (catalogue, brochure, etc...) will be prepared and made available.

Table 1. Summarizing Table of pilot projects:

OS4	Pilot project	LAG	Med. Third Country
4.1	Olive oil Mediterranean paths (olive oil road)	-Terra d'Arneo - Alto Salento	Syria
4.2	Mediterranean paths of mountain and hilly typical products	-Capo S. Maria Leuca - Meridaunia	Malta/Croatia
		- Gargano	Lebanon
4.3	Mediterranean paths of typical fruit and vegetable products	- Luoghi del Mito - Daunofantino	Turkey
4.4	Mediterranean paths of wine	- Terre del Primitivo - Piana del Tavoliere	Croatia/Lebanon

II - The project organisation

The project is structured around horizontal actions common to all partners, vertical actions and pilot projects, which concern only the LAGs and the MTCs partners involved (OS4). Therefore, from a financial point of view, each LAG shall contribute “pro rata” to the horizontal actions (OS1, OS2, OS3) by 25,000 €, whereas for the OS 4 – pilot projects, the cost for each LAG amounts to 15,000 €.

For the management and in order to achieve all the project results, a *lead LAG* of the LeaderMed project is identified, namely the Alto Salento LAG. It shall be supported by a *Management Board*, comprising a representative for each LAG that will meet at least twice a year to check on the project progress, plan the activities and eventually solve problems.

Moreover, *the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari (MAIB) is designated as a technical support structure*. MAIB shall perform institutional activities by favouring contacts with the MTCs and identifying the bodies corresponding to the LAGs to work with within the internal cooperation project.

Moreover, MAIB shall support the LAGs through the following activities: i) assistance in the definition of the partnership; ii) assistance in the development of activities in the third countries, iii) assistance for the organization of events in the third countries.

III - The project management

Based on the Leader programme regulations, it is not possible to bear expenses for actions to be undertaken in the territories of MTCs. Therefore, the planned or desired actions to be implemented in the territories of MTCs shall be charged to the local administrations and actors that might benefit from the technical assistance of the Apulian LAGs.

The vertical actions shall be basically developed through joint meetings between the Italian administrations and those of the five third countries either in Italy or in the third country.

Pilot actions will be defined by the LAGs and implemented through concerted action with the partners of the third country.

Bilateral agreements between the administration of the Apulian region (Agricultural Department – Leader Programme Office) and the administrations of single countries (Ministries of Agriculture, General or Provincial Directorate Rural Development) shall formalize the approval of the project.

For pilot actions, instead, agreements will be arranged between the Apulian LAGs and the local organizations concerned.