

13. Institutions for sustainable agriculture in Central and Eastern Europe

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the process of building institutions that are established to promote sustainable agriculture in countries preparing to enter the European Union (EU). It is based on the main findings of the CEESA research project.¹ The project's objective was to analyse how the requirements for sustainable agriculture were taken into account in the process of transforming the political and social systems from Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs). The agri-environmental problem situation describes the difficulty of finding adequate institutions and implementing policies for the joint production of agricultural and environmental goods and services. This process presents a particular challenge for all new Member States, one that goes beyond the difficulties of transforming the political and economic systems. The aim of this chapter is to describe the challenges to emerging policies, institutions and governance structures in creating sustainable agri-environments. Accession and evolution are additional forces of institutional change, which facilitate but also complicate the move towards sustainability.

The new EU Member States have made great efforts to transform their systems and prepare their citizens for EU accession. The Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia were successful in fulfilling the Copenhagen criteria. The European Council therefore ended the accession negotiations on 13 December 2002 and scheduled these CEECs to enter the EU as full members on 1 May 2004. Despite this success story, it is evident that the environment was not the sole gauge for measuring achievement towards sustainable agriculture. The CEECs continue to be confronted by the diverse challenges of institutionalising the joint production and provision of agricultural and environmental goods and services. This challenge goes beyond the 'daily' difficulties of transforming the political and economic systems. Therefore, in their efforts to adopt the *acquis communautaire* and comply with the accession criteria, which were prescribed by the current members (EU15), the new members' task of designing adequate institutions for environmental goals in agriculture is not always the top priority on the political agenda. Adequate social and economic preconditions need to be fulfilled and broader institutional frameworks established before sophisticated institutions and governance structures for multifunctionality can be crafted. For example, if agri-environmental schemes require the voluntary participation of farmers, then a minimal requirement would be that farmers are informed about such schemes, have access to information as well as the knowledge and skills required for participation. Such preconditions do not always exist in the CEECs' rural regions, which are frequently affected by ageing rural population, emigration and land abandonment.

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Road to accession or to perdition? The case of Bulgaria's irrigation sector

Conclusions