ISSN 1743-9965

"Integrated" Rural Development Policy in the EU: Rhetoric and Reality

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Aberdeen Discussion Paper Series: People, Environment and Development.

Editor: Ayele Gelan

Series Coordinator: Clive Spash

2004

ISSN 1743-9965

The Macaulay Institute, Craigiebuckler, Aberdeen AB15 8QH, Scotland

ABSTRACT

Since its introduction in the early 1980s for Mediterranean and some other regions, an "integrated" approach to EU rural development policy has come to be increasingly advocated. However, the precise meaning(s) of the term is (are) seldom made clear in official and other documents, which appear to apply it in a variety of contexts in a number of different ways. This paper discusses and analyses, from both theoretical and applied points of view, some alternative interpretations of "integrated rural development policy" (IRDP), including considerations of finance (funding), administration (policy design, approval, monitoring and evaluation), institutions (responsibility and coordination) and economics (efficiency and complementarity). The analysis concludes that the following considerations are necessary before the interpretation, promotion and assessment of IRDP can be properly undertaken:

I. The economics of within-sector scale, between-sector complementarity and multifunctional operations.
II. The transaction costs of designing and implementing IRDP in rural areas of different types, particularly those which have been more or less successful to date.
III. The "territoriality" of developmental factors, including physical and human resources, and institutional and socio-cultural systems.

INTRODUCTION

In the language used to discuss the agricultural and rural affairs of the EU, it has become common to employ the term "integration" or "integrated" in respect of policy measures, especially those directed at the development of rural areas, as well as more generally, e.g. in the approach to be adopted towards the evaluation of agricultural and rural policies. However, the term "integrated" is in danger of being used loosely in all sorts of contexts. This is particularly unfortunate when analysts, policy makers and others are searching for a new future for European rural areas, and clear thinking about appropriate structures and practices in designing efficient policy institutions should be paramount. This paper seeks to examine the meaning and use of the term "integrated" more closely and generally than is normally done, in the hope that more precise understandings may ensue.

It must of course be recognised that there is frequently a conflict between political rhetoric and policy realities, not helped by the fact that in some languages there is no clear distinction between "politics" as the "art of government" and "policies" as the courses of action undertaken by government. The need for politicians to persuade others and to negotiate compromise solutions in a wide variety of contexts, from Cabinet through conferences to the television studios, puts a premium on the use of language, often in an artful and imprecise way. This is quite different from the design of "optimal" (or at least different) policy instruments for which efficiency, effectiveness, targeting and value for money are (or should be) of primary importance. The appropriate relationship between these two areas of policy-making must be left to the study of political science (Lindbolm, 1968) and to the realities of public life. This paper leans heavily to the academic approach.

EU HISTORY

As outlined by Delgado and Ramos (2002), 'integration' was introduced into the relevant (i.e. rural, or at least regional) field of EU (then EC) policy in 1981, with the approval of experimental Integrated Development Programmes (IDPs) for specific areas of Scotland, France and Belgium (Commission, 1979). These programmes were limited in scale and scope, rather fragmented in terms of funding and 'top-down' in approach (Houston, 1987). They aimed at improving structures not only of not only agriculture but also of other sectors such as fish farming, tourism and small-scale manufacturing. However, the IMPs funds originated exclusively from the EAGGF Guarantee Section and thus, all associated programme-objectives were linked to farming. Indicative projects funded in the context of the IDPs included farm modernization and amalgamation, drainage, and land and pastures improvement. Despite the above shortcomings, IDPs recognised that agricultural policy alone – even with the addition of Less Favoured Areas (LFAs) in the 1970s, as the first regionally specified component of the Common Agricultural Policy – was incapable of addressing many of the fundamental problems of rural development.

In 1985, Integrated Mediterranean Programmes (IMPs) were introduced for the whole of Greece, the south of France and parts of central and south Italy (Fennell, 1997). The aim of the IMPs was to combine agricultural development measures with projects for the development of other important activities in rural areas, such as food processing, craft industries and tourism-leisure activities over a specific time-period (multi-year programming). They jointly involved national funds and the three EU structural funds (the Regional Development Fund, the Social Fund, and the Guidance Section of the Agriculture Fund). Fennell comments that “the management structure set up to agree the IMPs and monitor their implementation was a complex one”, with Commission, national and regional authorities, and also Advisory and Monitoring Committees. “It was inevitable that this cumbersome structure would lead to delays and would expose most cruelly the administrative inadequacies in some of the poorest parts of the Community”. As a result, several difficulties were observed in implementation (Commission, 1991; 1992), and absorption rates[1] were very low in the case of the Italian south and unsatisfactory in the case of France. However, at least in Greece, absorption rates reached 89 per cent, even though IMPs were not a part of a coordinated, area-specific development framework (Plaskovitis, 1993).

By the end of the 1980s, in The Future of the Rural Society, the Commission (1988) was stressing the need for an approach that would stimulate rural development by taking account of local requirements and initiatives and exploiting area-specific

[1] The ratio of actual payments to programmed funds.

comparative advantages. In a generally favourable report from a respected body, these ideas "form[ed] a suitable basis for future policy development" (House of Lords, 1990, p. 45). However, "there should be a closer integration between agricultural and non-agricultural policies to promote economic and social development in the countryside". Along with wider developments (e.g. the 1986 Single European Act and especially Article 130a which introduced 'economic and social cohesion' and Article 130b which specified the instruments to be used for this purpose), the increasingly clear need to diversify agriculturally dependent areas away from uncompetitive farming, and to coordinate and rationalize EU structural policy more effectively, resulted in the 1989 and 1993 reforms of the Structural Funds. Structural policy funding initially doubled and was planned to reach 35 per cent of total EU expenditure by 1999, while there were also efforts to concentrate their use, and to improve coordination of different financial instruments and monitoring (Allen, 1996; Tsoukalis, 1997). The three Funds (ERDF, EAGGF-Guidance which was vastly expanded, and ESF) were regionally targeted on development programmes in Objective 1, 5b and (later) 6 rural areas, while the LEADER scheme, as a "Community Initiative", succeeded the IMPs and IDPs on a wider geographical basis, emphasising a bottom-up approach to innovation, community mobilisation and partnership building.[2] Community Support Frameworks (CSFs) became the basis of structural policy financing. Objective 1 areas development plans received almost 65 per cent of total structural spending in the period 1989-93 and 70 per cent in the period 1994-99 (94 billion ECU). Also, during the 1994-99 period, 0.7 billion ECU were budgeted for Objective 6 areas. Nearly 15 per cent (14 billion ECU) of this spending during 1994-99 originated from EAGGF-Guidance and was mainly allocated to diversification measures, farm investments, compensatory allowances and agri-food investment (Commission, 1997). Rural development support for Objective 5b (including spending on 5a measures) amounted to 7 billion ECU and was mostly spent on the development of agriculture and forestry, rural infrastructure and assistance for SMEs. On the other hand, the

[2]Note should be made here of the Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS) set up in 1992 for certain CAP commodity aid schemes, and since extended. This is a purely bureaucratic device (though nonetheless significant) and is not investigated in this paper.

financial allocation to Leader was much lower, amounting to 440 million ECU for Leader I and 1755 million ECU for Leader II.

A further stage in “integrated rural development policy” was urged in the second (of ten) “Points” of the 1996 Cork Declaration, as follows: “Integrated Approach: Rural development policy must be multi-disciplinary in concept, and multi-sectoral in application, with a clear territorial dimension. It must apply to all rural areas in the Union, respecting the concentration principle through the differentiation of co-financing for those areas which are more in need. It must be based on an integrated approach, encompassing within the same legal and policy framework: agricultural adjustment and development, economic diversification - notably small and medium scale industries and rural services - the management of natural resources, the enhancement of environmental functions, and the promotion of culture, tourism and recreation”[3].

The Agenda 2000 reforms (Commission, 1999) introduced a new Rural Development Regulation (no. 1257/99) as part of the CAP’s “second pillar”. Rural development plans (RDPs) for the period 2000-2006 are to be the basis for all rural development measures, implemented “at the most appropriate geographical level”. They include the rather general ‘Article 33 measures’, along with the “global” approach of the Leader+ Initiative[4]. However, the financing of EU rural development policy has become somewhat complex (see Peters, 2002).

In the Commission’s Mid-Term Review proposals for CAP reform (Commission, 2002), the term integrated was used even more intensively: the integrated rural development approach “has provided the basis for new ways of tackling problems facing rural areas, through measures such as the Leader+ Community Initiative. The new framework has improved the scope for targeted policies focusing on investments in competitiveness, rural viability, quality of life and sustainable agriculture”.

[3]See europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/rur/cork_en.htm.
[4]The evaluation criteria for Leader+ programmes speak of “a global approach based on the interactions between actors, sectors and policies”. The programmes have been allocated Euro 2 billion of EAGGF Guidance funding over 2000-2006. See http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/guidelines/eval1_en.pdf.

The Commission's paper also stressed the integration into agricultural policy via decoupling (i.e. direct payments tied to land use rather than commodity output) and cross-compliance (i.e. conditions attached to such direct payments) of efforts to address concerns over the environment, food safety and food quality, and animal health and welfare.

However – perhaps because the vagueness of the term "integrated" inhibits its use in more legal documents – the Commission's later "Long-Term Policy Perspectives" paper, with its specific proposals (Commission, 2003) seemed to avoid the term, except as regards an agri-environmental objective, and administrative simplification. Similarly, the eventual June 2003 agreement on further CAP reform (Council of the EU, 2003) contained some further mention of the term, e.g. the addition of "management of integrated rural development strategies by local partnerships" into Article 33 of the Rural Development Regulation 1257/1999 (Commission, 2003). Nor was its use much involved in the various speeches by the Commissioner (Fischler) or other Commission officials.

Some Alternative Interpretations

It is clear from the above historical account that in European rural development policy, great stress is currently being laid on an "integrated" approach to rural development as an alternative or accompaniment to the CAP. However, in much of this explanation and discussion, it is not so clear precisely what is being integrated, nor how this concept should apply to the relevant structures or processes. For example, it may be intended that rural development itself - i.e. changes in the structure and process of the rural economy and perhaps society - should be guided by policy in such a way as to encourage interdependence between different sectors and actors. A second interpretation might be that the policy measures directed at rural development should be designed and/or implemented jointly in some sense. This section discusses – non-exhaustively - some possible interpretations of the term.

Integration in the Rural Economy

Whether or not an identifiable "rural economy" exists in many of the more developed parts of the European Union is debatable: the increase in mobility of goods, services, labour (commuting) and customers (e.g. tourism) has meant that there is little to distinguish urban from rural areas (both highly diverse) except differences in population density, and the external (non-settlement) environment (see PIU, 1999 as regards England). However, this may be an overstated point of view, and in any case government administration, including EU policy, still recognises a more-or-less definite division between the two types of area, together with their populations and economies - hence the very term "rural development" itself. Certainly, in less developed regions, and/or where agriculture is still a major land use and income generator, the “rural economy”, and the desirability of some kind of more-or-less specific form of “rural development”, is usually taken for granted. In this context, what might be meant by “integrated rural development” is the greater internal cohesion of the various sectors of the rural economy, and/or a higher level of self-sufficiency.

Economies in general can be visualised in a number of ways[5], most notably in terms of macroeconomic “models” such as the classical, Keynesian or neoclassical versions, Marxian views of an economic class structure based on labour as the basic factor of production, and sectoral analyses focussed mainly on the production side, such as input-output (I-O) and more recently Social Accounting Matrix (SAM) models. Other visualisations such as those of Veblen, Schumpeter and Galbraith based on corporatism might also be relevant to considering whether and how a rural economy may be more or less “integrated”.

The macro-economic approach based on production, consumption, savings and investment might be related to integrated rural development either through the rate of local or regional savings and investment, designed to promote economic growth through the mobilisation of rural resources towards new enterprises located in the same areas, as advocated by the school of endogenous rural development (van der Ploeg and Long, 1994). Alternatively (but to some extent contrarily), a rural economy

[5]We ignore monetary aspects here, since few rural economies have their own money supply.

might be "integrated" more closely into the national, continental (e.g. EU) or global economy by developing enterprises such as tourism and exportable production which strengthen external links.

From a Marxian economic point of view, the question would involve the extent to which the rural working class control and benefit from the surplus generated by their efforts, rather – as is increasingly the case in some rural areas of Europe – land, business and other assets are owned by external persons (natural or legal) so that, economically at least (and often socially), there is separation of local residents from expatriates or occasional visitors. This has implications for the schools of thought focussed on "social capital" (Putnam, 1993; Bryden, 1998) and "embeddedness" (Granovetter, 1985) as important factors in the performance and development of rural areas.

More quantitative measures of "integration" can be attempted by using the I-O/SAM models, since the size of the matrix coefficients explicit represent the extent to which sales and purchases (and savings, investment and fiscal flows in the case of a SAM) link together the various components of a rural economy, or alternatively are linked to the "rest of world". Formally, the magnitude of the off-diagonal coefficients could be used to calculate an index of (internal) integration, and hence an objective indicator of the success or otherwise of policies aimed at integration of the rural economy itself (Jackson et al., 1990).

Integrated Financial Mechanisms

A different interpretation of "integration" focuses on how two or more different budget sources, financed under separate authorities, may be combined (usually in a fixed proportion) to create a larger integrated fund for a specified purpose. This would include the "co-funding", "co-financing" or "matching" arrangements between the EU and national budgets used for most structural measures, and currently for "modulation". It would also cover the amalgamation of separate public funding budgets at the same level although this is usually limited by the different legal objectives for each budget, which limit the virement (switching) of funds from one focus to another. True funding integration would be a formal and once-for-all act of budgetary consolidation, e.g. to a single EU Structural Fund, or a new Rural Fund (Ahner, 2003).

In applying funds from one or more sources, integrated expenditure of EU policy funds (and probably other measures, e.g. regulations and programming) would take place across a wider area of eligibility than under a non-integrated system. Policy would be thus integrated from a financial point of view, with significant implications for the complex trail of budgetary approval, monitoring, reporting and audit which nowadays accompanies all public expenditure. Politically, too, the identification of a single funding source creates a simpler target for those interested in the raising, spending or scrutiny of government finance, with probable implications (positive or negative) for the total amount of funding allocated to rural development.

Even an existing single-purpose fund may, of course, have its scope altered. Thus EAGGF Guidance Section funds are no longer focussed on increasing farm output quantities, but are used for afforestation, farm-related diversification and other rural purposes such as Article 33 village infrastructure improvements[6]. Increasingly, EAGGF Guarantee Section funds, though still formally used for "market support", are instead devoted to farm income support "decoupled" from commodity output, and, outside Objective 1 areas, to a range of rural development measures including those above. The recent CAP reform decision to introduce compulsory modulation of Single Farm Payments (itself a significant sign of "integration", though in this case not explicitly for development reasons) will provide further funds for rural development from a new source. However, the extent to which these funds are integrated into existing sources of rural development finance remains doubtful; it is perhaps more likely that special rules such as ring-fencing and annual programming will be applied.

Integrated Policy Administration

In this interpretation, policies would be designed, approved, monitored and evaluated in an integrated manner, involving (e.g.) a single planning body or

[6] However, this last applies only to a very limited extent, both by the terms of the Article and by Commission approvals of member state proposals for Article 33 expenditures.

approval committee. Common criteria in any of these stages may be limited; for example, the long-term employment consequences of remedial environmental work may be hard to estimate and thus to compare with those of a food processing investment. Apart from the usual economic indicators, such as jobs, income and rates of return, biophysical criteria such as pollution emissions or risks, wildlife impacts and landscape effects can be considered for all proposals, but are often minimal or irrelevant. This reduces integration in this respect to a limited and sometimes rather formal set of procedures designed to ensure "cross-checking". An equivalent but wider approach to government interventions in rural areas is represented by "rural-proofing" in the UK[7], and by "rural impact testing" in Canada[8], while a much more limited – in concept as well as practice – one is represented by cross-compliance (Commission, 2002; 2003), i.e. the tying of standard expenditure such as direct CAP payments to farmers to the recipient's obedience to other policy objectives such as environmental improvement.

Furthermore, recent developments in terms of the CSF administration system have rather complicated the integration of policy administration. In more detail, the partnership between the European Commission, national and local authorities in terms of design, approval, monitoring and evaluation of policies that existed in both CSF I and II, does not exist anymore. According to Reg. 1260/99, the Commission still participates in policy approval, but monitoring and evaluation is now a matter for the national and regional/local authorities. Taking account of the rich variety of development programmes that influence rural areas (sectoral programme on agriculture, EAGGF section of regional operational programmes, Leader+), this particular 'transfer of responsibility' raises considerable doubts with regards to issues such as policy-measures coherence and complementarity. Also, even at the point when the Commission authorities 're-appear' (inspection and auditing) any interference concentrates on the issue of compatibility of programmes and projects with the CSF Regulations. Naturally, this process is certainly associated to the considerable 'transfer' of rural development policy responsibility from EAGGF Guidance to EAGGF Guarantee. Certainly, this is a rather important development,

[7]See http://www.countryside.gov.uk/netscape/ruralproofing/
[8]See http://www.agr.gc.ca/cb/news/1998/n80209ae.html

which gives more emphasis on strict inspection-mechanisms (through guarantee procedures) rather than procedures of collective administration and decisions (Christidis, 2002).

Integrated Policy Institutions

The above aspect of integration can be institutionalised much further than the joint Programming Committees set up under EU Structural Directives. Amongst EU Member States, only 7 non-integrated Ministries of Agriculture (with or without Food, Forestry and/or Fisheries) remain; the titles of the rest either include “Environment” or “Rural Development (or Affairs)”, or omit “Agriculture” altogether (see Table and Map)[9]. This may be contrasted with the situation amongst the 15 European neighbouring states, where words in the Ministry title apart from Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and/or Food are found only in Cyprus (Environment), Poland (Rural Development) and Turkey (Rural Affairs). At regional level (e.g. in the German Länder, or in Scotland), institutional integration has often gone further, at least formally. Still, few member states report that (e.g.) the ministry of environment has a key role in rural development policy[10]. Moreover, changes in name - and presumably in policy intentions - do not always reflect balanced and truly integrated policy activity, as a glance at patterns of budget expenditure reveal.

The overall distribution and coordination of EU and national funds for rural development is usually the responsibility of another ministry, e.g. the Ministries of the Economy in Spain and Greece. However, this does not guarantee coordination of policy objectives and measures; one may observe the design and implementation of development plans in rural zones that do not take into account (e.g. currently in Greece) their classification as Natura 2000 sites or their zoning in regional spatial development plans. In extreme cases, development policy in rural zones is simply the aggregation of sometimes-conflicting sectoral policies.

As a possible solution, several member states have opted for intervention at the highest level (e.g. the Chancellory in Austria), or the establishment of interministerial

[9]In Greece, the Ministry of Agriculture is due to be renamed as the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

committees, which however do not have executive responsibilities. A rather similar situation exists when local authorities and agencies design and implement multi-sectoral programmes such as Leader, which explicitly calls for partnerships – a weak form of integrated institution. Even though Leader follows the principles of integrated rural development policy, it usually (especially in Objective 1 areas) represents a small slice of the development action pie (in period 1994-99 it represented around 8 per cent of rural development spending in Objective 1, 5b and 6 areas).

Economic Aspects of Integration

From an economic point of view, the attraction of an integrated policy approach is two-fold. First, by forcing choices to be made together, it should promote more equal marginal costs and/or more equal marginal benefits between sectors[11], thus promoting greater economic efficiency. Of course, success in this respect is not guaranteed; even an integrated approach may remain biased in one direction or another if non-efficiency forces such as distributional considerations so dictate. Second, it may increase the net benefits of policy action by (i) reducing expenditure on conflicting policy-encouraged actions (e.g. aid to large-scale livestock processing facilities alongside stricter animal pollution regulations) and (ii) encouraging "synergies and complementarities" (Delgado and Ramos, 2002) between different sectors. However, there may be cases where complementarity contradicts economic efficiency, as less efficient projects may be funded, just because they seem to be complementary, e.g. agri-tourism establishments with restaurants serving only local cuisine, in situations where there is no demand premium attached to such "packages".

With the exception of specific cases (e.g. coordinated environmental improvement with tourist facilities), complementarity is a rather nebulous concept unless placed in a general-equilibrium framework (see above remarks on the SAM approach). In a

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[10] In Sweden, the leading ministry for rural development is that of Industry, Employment and Communications.

[11] The question whether marginal costs equal marginal benefits of policy action within any sector or project is not dealt with here. In many cases, this standard economic criterion is irrelevant because public funds are so limited that net benefits are always expected, at least by some of the most interested parties, and/or the calculation of benefits requires difficult and controversial evaluation of long-term and "social" gains.

rural economy, it is also necessary to take account of household behaviour and to deal with "imports" and "exports" of both private and public income and expenditure streams. The smaller the rural area, and the more "disadvantaged" and remote it is, the larger the latter flows (especially the public ones) tend to be (Efstratoglou et al., 1998), and the more difficult the data collection. Most “integrated” EU funding is focussed on development, i.e. the restructuring of the economy, over time, usually by means of investment to create physical or human-resource assets designed to produce higher-value gains over a future period (Tsoukalis, 1997). Static techniques such as input-output analysis are not well suited to appraising such policy approaches, and a combined – though relatively simple - multi-sectoral and dynamic approach is needed to explore whether integrated development (rather than policy itself) is beneficial or not.

To sum up, it seems that the concept and term "integration" has been used rather too freely and loosely in describing EU rural affairs. The different possible aspects of integration deserve more careful attention by both academics and policy makers.

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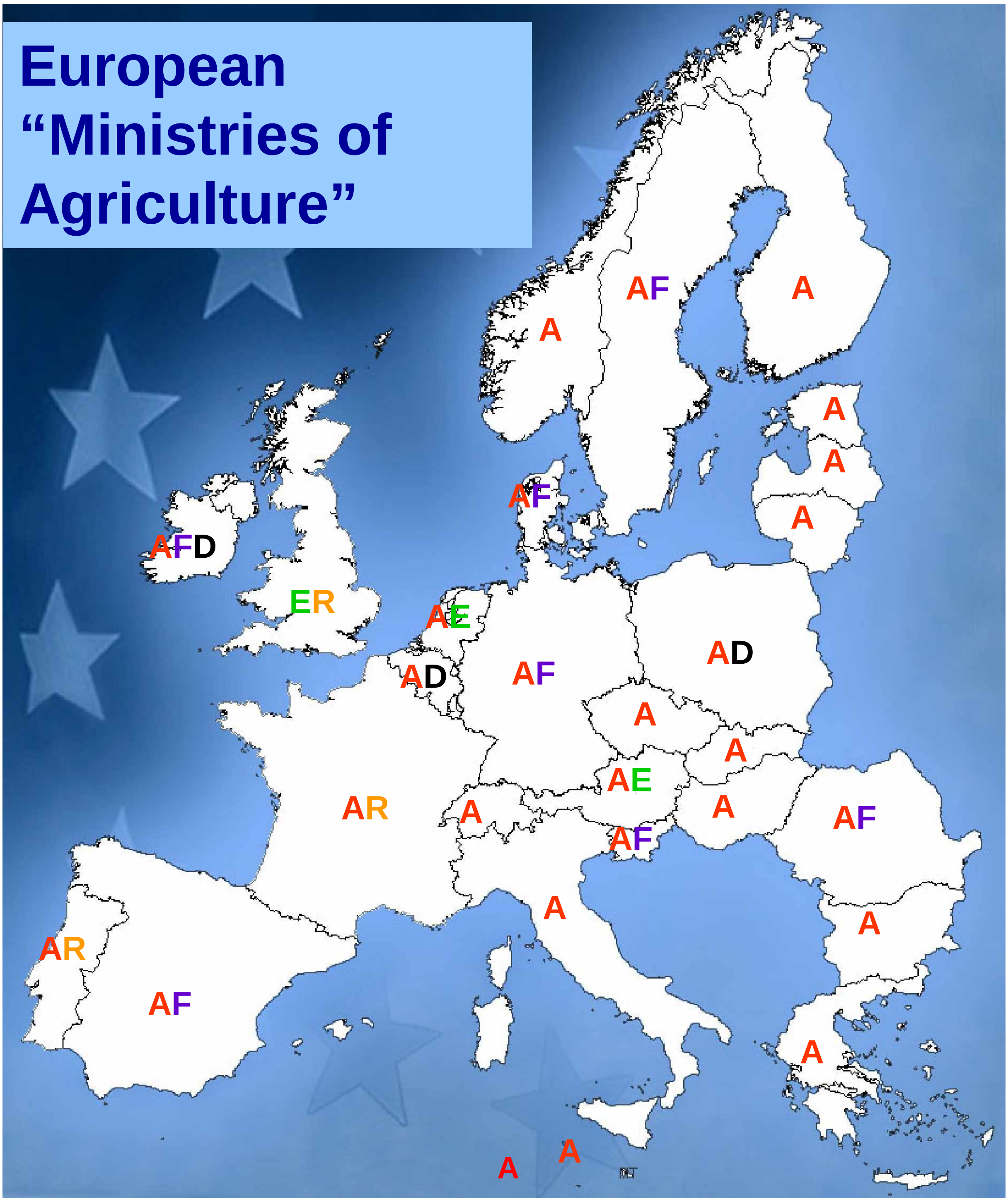
Table: "Ministry of Agriculture" Titles in Europe

Austria	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management
Belgium	Ministry of Small Enterprises, Traders and Agriculture
Denmark	Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries
Finland	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
France	Ministry of Agriculture, Food, Fisheries and Rural Affairs
Germany	Federal Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture
Greece	Ministry of Agriculture
Italy	Ministry of Agricultural and Forestry Policy
Ireland	Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development
Luxembourg	Department of Agriculture, Wine-Growing and Rural Development
Netherlands	Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries
Portugal	Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Affairs and Fisheries
Spain	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Sweden	Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries
United Kingdom	Department of Environment and Rural Affairs
Cyprus	Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment
Bulgaria	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
Czech Republic	Ministry of Agriculture
Estonia	Ministry of Agriculture
Hungary	Ministry of Agriculture
Latvia	Ministry of Agriculture
Lithuania	Ministry of Agriculture
Malta	Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries
Poland	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
Romania	Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forests
Slovakia	Ministry of Agriculture
Slovenia	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food
Switzerland	Ministry of Agriculture
Norway	Ministry of Agriculture
Turkey	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs

Source: national websites and www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/contacts/sites.asp

Note: Ministers may have different titles from Ministries. Some Ministries are federal, and/or there are sub-national Ministries and Departments.



Terms in Title of "Ministry":

A – Agriculture (and Forestry, Fishing)

F – Food

E – Environment

D – (Economic) Development

R – Rural