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on the situation and outlook for hill and mountain farming
(2008/2066(INI))

Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the situation and outlook for hill and mountain farming (2008/2066(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its resolution of 6 September 2001 on 25 years' application of Community legislation for hill and mountain farming¹,
 - having regard to its resolution of 16 February 2006 on the implementation of a European Union forestry strategy²,
 - having regard to its resolution of 12 March 2008 on the CAP 'Health Check'³,
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the Committee of the Regions own-initiative opinion entitled 'For a Green Paper – Towards a European Union policy for upland regions: a European vision for upland regions'⁴,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development and the opinion of the Committee on Regional Development (A6-0327/2008),
- A. whereas mountain areas account for 40 % of Europe's total surface area and are home to 19 % of Europe's population⁵,
- B. whereas mountain areas cover more than 50 % of the territory of some Member States, such as Greece, Spain, Italy, Austria and Portugal and the farming community remains a significant element in those areas,
- C. whereas mountain areas (particularly high mountains and highlands) are cultural landscapes that reflect the harmonious interaction between humans and biosystems and form part of our natural heritage,
- D. whereas mountain areas suffer intensely from the effects of climate change and extreme weather phenomena, such as drought and fires,
- E. whereas the landscape of mountain areas is not uniform but made up of very diverse forms of mountain range at varying altitudes (high mountains, highlands, glaciers, unproductive areas),

¹ OJ C 72 E, 21.3.2002, p. 354.

² OJ C 290 E, 29.11.2006, p. 413.

³ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2008)0093.

⁴ Committee of the Regions, 23-2008.

⁵ Nordregio (2004), Mountain areas in Europe: Analysis of mountain areas in EU Member states, acceding and other European countries.

- F. whereas mountain areas have specific features (gradient, varied altitude, inaccessibility, growth, shorter growing seasons, low soil classification, weather and climatic conditions) which make them different from other landscapes in the European Union and they are in many respects 'disadvantaged' due to permanent natural handicaps, and whereas in some mountain areas this results in their gradual desertification and declining agricultural production,
- G. whereas mountain areas (particularly high mountains and highlands) have the potential or could be a model for high-quality products, services and recreational areas, that can only be sustainably developed through the integrated and long-term use of resources and traditions,
- H. whereas stockfarming products of particular quality are produced in mountain areas and whereas their production process makes integrated and sustainable use of natural resources, pastureland and specially adapted varieties of grazing crops as well as traditional technology,
- I. whereas mountains (particularly high mountains and highlands) are 'multifunctional' habitats, in which the (agricultural) economy is closely tied to social, cultural and ecological issues, and whereas such areas should therefore be given support in the form of appropriate funding,
- J. whereas the economy of mountain areas is particularly sensitive to fluctuations in the economic cycle, because of permanent structural shortcomings, and, in the long term, is dependent on the diversification and specialisation of production processes,
- K. whereas there are already European legal instruments for the protection of a number of mountain areas - the Alpine Convention and the Carpathian Convention - which, accordingly, are important instruments for an integrated policy on mountain areas, although they have not been fully ratified and implemented,
- L. whereas the agro-sylvo-pastoral economies of mountain areas, which often comprise multiple activities, are an example of environmental balance that cannot be overlooked,
- M. whereas the majority of farms in mountain areas are family farms with high financial risk,
 - 1. Points out the vast differences in the actions taken by Member States on mountain areas (particularly high mountains and highlands) which are based on purely sectoral rather than integral development, and that there is no integrated EU framework (as is the case for maritime areas);
 - 2. Stresses that Article 158 of the EC Treaty, on cohesion policy, as amended by the Treaty of Lisbon, identifies mountain regions as suffering from severe and permanent handicaps, whilst acknowledging their diversity, and calls for particular attention to be paid to such areas; regrets, however, that the Commission has not yet been able to draw up a comprehensive strategy effectively to support mountain areas and other regions suffering from permanent natural handicaps, despite numerous requests to that effect from Parliament;

3. Stresses the need for good coordination of the various Community policies aimed at ensuring harmonious development, particularly for regions, such as mountain areas, that suffer from permanent natural handicaps; is concerned, in this connection, about the usefulness of separating the Community's cohesion policy from rural development in the current programming period 2007-2013 (resulting from the integration of the European Agricultural Fund for Regional Development into the CAP); considers that this new approach needs to be monitored closely in order to evaluate its impact on regional development;
4. Points out that mountain areas suffer handicaps which make it less easy for agriculture to adapt to competitive conditions and entail extra costs so that it cannot produce very competitive products at low prices;
5. Proposes that, in the context of the Green Paper on territorial cohesion to be adopted in autumn 2008, and in keeping with the objectives of the territorial agenda and the European Spatial Development Perspective, the Commission should, in cooperation with the Member States, adopt a territorial approach to address the problems in different types of mountain territories and make provision for such measures within the next legislative package on the Structural Funds;
6. Would like the Commission to develop a genuine integrated EU strategy for mountain areas and considers the publication of a Green Paper on mountains to be an important first step in that direction; calls on the Commission to launch a wide-ranging public consultation involving regional and local authorities, socio-economic and environmental actors, as well as national and European associations representing regional authorities in mountain areas, in order to better identify the situation in those regions;
7. Welcomes the Green Paper on territorial cohesion as a method for dealing with the different areas of the European Union and calls, in this connection, for a common agricultural policy (CAP) with a first and second pillar so that in the European Union, with regard to the international challenges, the economic environment can be effectively influenced accordingly with a view to making multifunctional mountain and hill farming viable, for which production-linked instruments, including as regards milk transport, are also necessary;
8. At the same time, urges the Commission to develop, within its remit, an integrated EU strategy for the sustainable development and use of resources in mountain areas (EU strategy for mountain areas) within six months of the adoption of this resolution; also calls for national action programmes containing specific implementation measures to be drawn up on this basis by arrangement with regional authorities and civil society representatives familiar with and defending local interests and needs on the spot (e.g. as regards the different types of massif), with account to be taken of existing regional initiatives¹, accordingly;
9. Emphasises the importance of demarcating mountain areas as a prerequisite for targeted measures, such as, in particular, for mountain and hill farming, and the need for those

¹ cf. 'ZukunftsraumTirol' initiative of the state of Tyrol in Austria.

areas to be properly classified by degree of natural disadvantage, which should be monitored to a greater extent by Member States on the basis of the current eligible-area map;

10. Calls on the Commission to produce an overview of programmes and projects funded on topics of relevance to mountain areas for the purpose of transferring knowledge and promoting innovation;
11. Calls on the Commission, in the context of the European Spatial Planning Observation Network work programme, to pay special attention to the situation of regions that are beset by permanent natural handicaps, such as mountain areas; considers that a sound and thorough knowledge of the situation as regards mountain areas is essential in order to be able to draw up differentiated measures that better address the problems of those regions;
12. Emphasises the role played by hill and mountain farming in production, in the cross-sectoral maintenance and utilisation of landscapes and as a multifunctional basis for other sectors of the economy and characteristic feature of traditional cultural landscapes and social fabrics;
13. Points out that many mountain areas have to tackle urban pressures caused by their attractiveness to tourists and, at the same time, to protect traditional landscapes that are becoming less agricultural and are losing their beauty as well as qualities of essential importance to the ecosystem;
14. Notes that farming in mountain areas (in particular in highland and high mountain areas) involves greater effort (inter alia. high labour intensity and the need for manual labour) and higher costs (inter alia, the need for special machinery and the high cost of transport) due to natural conditions and risks;
15. Calls for specific and greater account to be taken of the multifunctionality of mountain and hill farming in future CAP reforms by bringing the framework directives for rural development and national programmes into line with the role of mountain and hill farmers not only as producers but also as economic forerunners for other sectors and that scope be created for synergetic collaboration (inter alia funding for ecotourism programmes and marketing for high-quality products); points, in particular, to the need for charges to be made for mountain farming's ecological benefits;
16. Pays tribute to the work carried out by mountain farmers; notes that the conditions for mountain farming (above all as regards earning a supplementary income, the work life balance and the ability to start a family) should not be complicated by red tape but should be improved through the fusion of sectoral policies; calls on the Commission and the competent (comitology) committees to review existing and prospective rules (above all on compulsory registers) in keeping with the 'better regulation' initiative and/or to make them less complicated with a view to comprehensive simplification of administrative procedures;
17. Emphasises that compensatory payments for mountain areas (in particular in highland and high mountain areas) should continue, in future, to be exclusively geared towards offsetting permanent natural disadvantages and additional costs stemming from farming

difficulties, that such payments are justified in the long term due to the lack of alternative production and that full decoupling would lead to a systematic reduction in activity affecting all sectors; emphasises that the needs of mountain areas cannot be met by rural development funding alone;

18. Calls for more assistance for young farmers and equal opportunities for women and men (particularly through family-friendly measures, the regulation of full and part-time work, combined-wage models, supplementary-jobs models, the work life balance and the ability to start a family) as vital factors; calls on the Commission to devise approaches, with stakeholder involvement, as part of 'flexicurity' discussions and projects;
19. Calls for demographic balance to be maintained in those areas that often face problems arising from urban migration;
20. Is convinced that priority should be given to maintaining sufficient population density in mountain areas and of the need for measures to combat desertification and attract new people;
21. Stresses the importance of ensuring a high level of services of general economic interest, improving the accessibility and interconnection of mountain areas and providing the necessary infrastructure, particularly as regards passenger and freight transport, education, the knowledge-based economy and communication networks (including broadband access) in order to facilitate connections with upland markets and urban areas; calls on the competent authorities to promote public-private partnerships for these purposes;
22. Emphasises that producer associations, farming cooperatives, collective marketing initiatives driven by farmers and inter-sectoral partnerships that create added value within regions through an integrated development approach (e.g. Leader-groups) and in line with sustainable farming strategies, make an important contribution to the stability of income positioning and security of agricultural production on markets and should be given greater support accordingly;
23. Calls for special financial assistance for the dairy sector (dairy farmers and processors) which plays a key role in mountain areas (in particular highland and high mountain areas) given the lack of alternative production; calls for a 'soft landing' strategy to be adopted for mountain areas during the milk quota reform, and for accompanying measures (special payments) to reduce any negative impact, that leaves room for introducing adjustment processes, which preserves the basis for farming; calls for additional funds to be made available from the first pillar, in particular in the form of a dairy cow premium;
24. Calls on the Member States to establish, with an emphasis on support for a sustainable and adapted agriculture in mountain areas, additional per-hectare payments for organic farming and extensive grazing as well as support for investments in livestock facilities appropriate to the species;
25. Points out that undertakings in mountain areas produce high-quality products by making renewed use of traditional know-how and manufacturing procedures and play a key role in the field of employment and should thus be included in EU aid systems;

26. Calls for special assistance measures as a result of increased costs and efforts needed, in particular for delivering milk and dairy products in valleys; calls for the introduction of a dairy cow premium for mountain areas;
27. Underlines the cross-sectoral importance of typical (high-quality) regional and traditional products; asks that the EU strategy for mountain areas to include measures to protect and promote those products or their manufacturing procedures and their certification (e.g. as laid down in Council Regulation (EC) No 509/2006 of 20 March 2006 on agricultural products and foodstuffs as traditional specialities guaranteed¹ and Council Regulation (EC) No 510/2006 of 20 March 2006 on the protection of geographical indications and designations of origin for agricultural products and foodstuffs²) and to safeguard them from imitations; calls for special provision to be made within the EU promotion programmes for high-quality foodstuffs (e.g. those from mountain pasture and farm cheese dairies as well as high-quality meat);
28. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to support farmer groups and local communities to establish regional quality labels as referred to in paragraph 27; suggests that support be given by improved information and appropriate training for farmers and local food processors as well as by financial support for setting up local processing facilities as well as first promotion campaigns; calls for the establishment of a fund for disadvantaged areas, including mountain areas (containing, for example, resources from the second pillar which have not been used on account of a lack of national co-financing);
29. Calls for the establishment of a fund for disadvantaged areas, including mountain areas (containing, for example, resources from the second pillar which have not been used on account of a lack of national co-financing);
30. Calls for guaranteed targeted special financial assistance for mountain areas, in accordance with Article 69 of Regulation (EC) No 1782/2003 establishing common rules for direct support schemes under the CAP and establishing certain support schemes for farmers³, specific access to this assistance with minimum red tape, and for the upper limit for resources under Article 69 to be raised to 20 %;
31. Points out that mountain areas can provide high-quality agricultural produce and can add to the diversity of agricultural products in the European market, preserve certain animal and vegetable species, uphold traditions and foster industrial and tourist activities as well as combating climate change by protecting biodiversity and capturing CO₂ through permanent grassland and forests and that sustainable forestry exploitation will make it possible to produce energy using wood residues;
32. Calls for the interests of breeders and farmers of livestock in particular of indigenous breeds) in mountain areas and in view of the current risks and pressures to which they are subject, to be taken into account in animal health, animal protection and animal breeding provisions; (e.g. breeding programmes, the retention of herd books, compliance checks);

¹ OJ L 93, 31.3.2006, p. 1.

² OJ L 93, 31.3.2006, p. 12.

³ OJ L 270, 21.10.2003, p. 1.

33. Stresses that the Commission's actions in the fields of competition and international trade policy have consequences on the development of mountain areas; calls on it in this context to address those areas' needs in a more targeted fashion when future adjustments are made, in particular at World Trade Organisation negotiations and as regards the flexibility of state aid rules and factoring public services of general interest into competition law;
34. Calls for particular attention to be given to stock farmers in fire-stricken mountain areas, as the pastureland in those areas requires limited and cautious use over the next five-year period;
35. Calls for the 'strategy' to cover the different types of landscape in mountain areas (mountain pastures, protected forests, high mountains, highlands, meadows, landscapes of particular beauty) and to make provision for ideas and incentives for the protection and the sustainable use of mountain pastures, grassland, forests and other less favoured, sensitive areas in order to regenerate and re-grass them, protect them from erosion, promote rational management of water resources and combat unwelcome developments such as ending grazing on land which then reverts to its wild state, or over-grazing;
36. Points out, with regard to preserving species diversity, the need to establish repositories of indigenous genetic material from animal and plant species, particularly indigenous farm animals and mountain flora; calls on the Commission to examine whether and how to launch an international action plan initiative;
37. Stresses that in some EU mountain areas, particularly in the new Member States, there is a growing risk of depopulation and an impoverishment of the social life of local communities, which are also facing the threat of a curtailment or even a discontinuation of farming and which are likely to result in changes to the landscape and the ecosystem;
38. Stresses that grass premiums are essential to the continuation of farming in mountain areas and should therefore be maintained;
39. Emphasises the importance of a long-term forestry strategy that takes into account the effects of climate change, the natural life cycle and natural composition of the forest ecosystem, and creates prevention, response and compensatory mechanisms in crisis situations (e.g. storms) and incentives for integrated forest management; points to the scope for sustainable transformation and exploitation of timber and timber products from mountain regions at local level (as high-quality products with low shipping costs and hence CO₂ savings, construction materials and second-generation biofuels);
40. Stresses the importance of the issue of water management in mountain areas and calls on the Commission to encourage local and regional authorities to develop a sense of solidarity between downstream and upstream users, including through appropriate funding to support the sustainable use of water resources in these areas;
41. Stresses that mountain areas are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of climate change and calls on the Commission, the Member States and the competent regional and local authorities to promote the immediate implementation of measures to provide protection against natural disasters, in particular forest fires, in those regions;

42. Points out that mountain areas require new means of protecting their territory against flooding (with an emphasis on flood prevention), whilst farmers and foresters can support anti-flooding preventive measures by means of the direct area-related payments which they receive under the CAP;
43. Points out that thorough, comprehensive anti-erosion protection for soil, buildings and the conservation of aquifers must be provided as a constituent part of farming and forestry practice in order to minimise the risks of flooding and soil erosion and to prevent drought and forest fires and also for the purpose of increasing the supply of groundwater and surface water in the countryside;
44. Emphasises that deciduous and coniferous forests need particular care as a sector of the economy, as recreational areas and as a habitat, and that the unsustainable use of forests leads to ecological and safety risks (such as rockfalls and mudslides), which require counteracting measures;
45. Recalls the suggestion in paragraph 15 of its resolution of 16 February 2006 that efforts be made to encourage the separation between forests and grazing land in mountain areas and to introduce the requirement to use paths (not least for safety reasons in general);
46. Points out that mountains form natural barriers, and in many instances are also national barriers, which makes cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation - and the promotion thereof - essential, given the problems they have in common (e.g. climate change, animal diseases, loss of biodiversity);
47. Welcomes efforts in the field of sustainable tourism and those aimed at making efficient use of nature as an 'economic advantage' through sustainable and also traditional leisure and sports activities that take specific local characteristics into account; emphasises the role of people who 'use' nature for the benefit of their own health whilst respecting the natural environment;
48. Urges greater coordination of rural development and structural support and the development of common programmes;
49. Suggests that rural development and structural assistance be combined and that integrated programmes be developed;
50. Stresses the significance of introducing an integrated approach to decision-making and administrative procedures such as regional planning, the licensing of construction projects and the refurbishment of dwellings by means of environmental, heritage and urban-planning practices, with a view to ensuring sustainable development in mountain areas; recommends that the potential of mountain areas should be exploited in order to promote the comprehensive development of tourism and the use of innovation in land development and, to that end, encourages local, decentralised initiatives and cooperation between mountain areas;
51. Emphasises that land that is not suitable for cultivation and production is best used to promote the preservation of forests, sustainable hunting and fishing etc. to prevent it reverting to its wild state and to prevent fire hazards, erosion and biodiversity loss;

52. Cites the importance of mountain areas (particularly high mountains and highlands) for nature protection, biodiversity and habitat preservation but points in particular to the need to maintain farming and forestry in "Natura 2000" areas and nature reserves and calls for increased interlinking of those areas by introducing a minimum proportion of ecological offset land in farming areas (possibly 5%);
53. Calls on the Commission to give its full backing to nominating mountain areas for inclusion on the world heritage list and to avail itself of all the international opportunities available to protect those regions;
54. Points to their unique water resources, which can be used sustainably for natural irrigation and as a source of drinking water and energy and for spa tourism; stresses the need for upstream and downstream solidarity in the management of these resources; highlights the need in this connection, and so as to prevent any conflicts, to devise solutions, collaboratively, for the use of water resources throughout the areas concerned;
55. Calls on the Commission to press ahead with implementing the Mountain Farming Protocol to the Alpine Convention in close collaboration with the Alpine Convention institutions, to give optimum backing to intermeshing mountain and hill farming with other policy areas and, in this connection, to take the necessary steps to ensure that ratification of the Alpine Convention protocols which are not yet part of the acquis communautaire is concluded and that the European Union accedes to the Carpathian Convention as a contracting party;
56. Highlights the importance of the voluntary sector (especially mountain rescue, civil protection, charities) with regard to services and the cultural and natural heritage in the mountains;
57. Applauds the work of organisations and research institutes dedicated to the cause of mountain areas and stresses that use must be made of their expertise and motivation in developing an EU strategy for mountain areas and similar measures;
58. Points to the role played by the promotion of part-time basic and further vocational training and - in the interests of diversifying vocational capacities and opportunities - of 'lifelong learning' initiatives and projects;
59. Considers it necessary to invest in local, advanced training centres in agricultural economy for mountain areas, so as to train professionals with the ability to manage activities in a mountain environment, protect the land and develop agriculture.
60. Calls for particular attention to be given to preserving the landscape and strengthening and modernising the infrastructure in mountain areas which are difficult to access and for the information gap to be bridged and for the results of the research framework programmes (e.g. for e-Government) to be made accessible;
61. Points to the need for efficient local services in maintaining population levels and for competitiveness; calls for targeted support to be given to local entities working as services of general interest;

62. Emphasises the need to focus on sustainable mobility solutions and to adopt an integrated approach to trans-national (transit, long-distance corridors) and local requirements (such as access to areas at very different altitudes and urban mobility);
63. Calls for mountain areas to be given support in the areas of transport management, noise protection and landscape conservation through measures aimed at taking traffic off the roads (e.g. more 'sensitive areas' in the 'Infrastructure Charging Directive'¹), thus forming the basis for a better quality of life and sustainable tourism;
64. Stresses the importance of 'transition zones' between plains and mountain areas for providing high-value private and public infrastructure facilities and services (e.g. universities, airports, hospitals); calls for support to make such facilities more easily accessible, particularly by means of public transport;
65. Emphasises that, through the intelligent use of many different sources of energy, mountain areas are 'models' for a diversified energy mix, energy-efficient building solutions and second-generation biofuels, and that support should be given to research work in those fields; stresses, nonetheless, that the development of second-generation biofuels must not give rise to competition between feedstock production (fallow land, coppices, etc.) and grazing areas;
66. Advises the Member States to improve the structure of and the procedures for the provision of financial assistance intended to support the development of mountain areas and at the same time to simplify administrative procedures and access to resources intended to support the protection and sustainable use of territorial assets: the cultural heritage and natural and human resources;
67. Considers that sustainable, modernised and multifunctional agriculture is necessary in mountain areas for maintaining other activities, such as the exploitation of bio-mass and agri-tourism, thus increasing the incomes of local people and calls on the Commission and Council to take account specifically, in the CAP and in regional policy, of the needs of mountain areas: the arrival of new farmers, compensation of extra costs linked to the problem of inaccessibility, for example with regard to milk collection, the maintenance of services in rural areas and the development of transport infrastructure;
68. Points to the vulnerability of mountains and glaciers on climate change, because of their topographical features and structural disadvantages, as well as to their potential as a 'test laboratory' for innovative technologies on climate protection that imitate Nature (see also COM(2007)0345); calls on the Commission to devise a differentiated climate policy as regards mountain areas and, in the process, to draw on existing knowledge (such as the Alpine and Carpathian Conventions); calls for research activities to be undertaken and transitional measures to be adopted in this area;
69. Calls for coordination arrangements for mountain areas and less favoured areas to be functionally linked with the CAP and the second pillar (rural development);

¹ Directive 2006/38/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 May 2006 amending Directive 1999/62/EC on the charging of heavy goods vehicles for the use of certain infrastructures (OJ L 157, 9.6.2006, p. 8).

70. Stresses that sustainable agriculture and the development of mountain areas are of importance to the population not only in those particular areas, but also of adjoining areas (e.g. plains), and that the EU strategy for mountain areas should also influence sustainability in those adjoining areas as regards water supply, environmental stability, biodiversity, balanced population distribution and cultural diversity; calls on the Commission to examine, in formulating the EU strategy for mountain areas, how existing initiatives for the integration of mountain areas and adjoining areas can usefully be incorporated into the strategy;
71. Instructs its Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development to monitor the progress of this resolution in the Council and the Commission;
72. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Mountain areas as a unique habitat

Some 19% of the population of Europe lives and works in Europe's mountain areas.

Mountain areas provide a unique habitat for people and other living organisms, in which all aspects of human existence are closely linked to the balance and rhythm of Nature. Mountains can be seen as a multifunctional habitat.

As such, mountain areas are characterised by a host of natural characteristics: steep slopes, weather conditions, erosion, height differences, high altitude, rock formations, etc.

This has consequences.

Firstly, these characteristics clearly distinguish mountain areas from other types of landscape in the EU (e.g. maritime or coastal areas), some of which receive special attention from the EU in the form of well-developed political and economic strategies.

Secondly, these characteristics have the effect of 'disadvantaging' mountain areas in many ways. Difficult production conditions in the agricultural sector, high transport costs due to the steepness of the location and height differences, structural deficits in the transport and communications networks and high mobility costs in terms of time and money for transporting goods and people are just some of these 'disadvantages' that have an impact on all sectors of the economy (trade, tourism, crafts, farming, etc.) and shape the daily lives of the people there.

As well as being multifunctional, unique and disadvantaged, mountain areas also display features that may give them a competitive edge or qualify them in many areas as a model for other regions. These features include their wealth of traditional knowledge and manufacturing procedures (e.g. high-quality products), the sustainable management and use of forests and meadows as a factor appealing to tourists and Nature lovers, their recourse to Nature-friendly cost-effective technologies (e.g. the development of rail-based solutions, new climate change technologies), their 'spirit of cooperation' on social matters (voluntary sector, mountain protection) and in other areas (cluster building, cooperatives). As with the disadvantages, however, these advantages are based on the fact that mountain areas are an extremely sensitive natural habitat. This means that in order both to compensate for their disadvantages and to draw on and exploit their potential strengths, there is a need for a sustainable, long-term approach to the management and use of resources that is conducted in harmony with Nature.

The need for a global strategy for Europe's mountain areas

At present, there are as many different legal frameworks for Europe's mountain areas as there are Member States in the European Union itself. In the best of cases, the mishmash of sectoral policies applied might not necessarily hamper the aforementioned need for sustainability and a long-term approach, but it is also not best placed to serve it.

This relates to both regulations and assistance, from which not all mountain areas have benefited to date or which have not necessarily been targeted yet at Community-wide requirements and synergetic convergence.

In this age of intensifying global competition and demographic and ecological challenges, however, no country can afford to take a casual or leisurely approach to the use of resources.

What is required is a sensible framework that combines regulations and assistance in the best possible way to assist Europe's mountain regions in their efforts to achieve sustainable and forward-looking competitiveness.

In doing so, care must be taken not to use funds in the place of operational structures, as this could result in an undesirable and expensive "crowding out" effect. The objective is rather to comply with the subsidiarity principle in mobilising and coordinating EU added value for mountain areas.

Considering the above, the rapporteur believes that the European Union can best serve its mountain areas by developing an overall strategy for the sustainable development and use of resources in mountain areas that should incorporate existing tried and tested formulae for success in a constructive way.

No need to break with tradition

Structural deficits and difficulties linked to natural causes are a constant feature of life in mountain areas that has repercussions on the production conditions facing individual farmers and entrepreneurs in these regions. This in turn has an influence not just on the standard of living for these occupations, but also has a direct impact on job prospects for young people and the demographic trend, as well as on nature conservation and the other sectors of the economy in the region.

Decent production conditions and earnings are therefore the very foundation for a whole chain of economic and social factors that are invariably linked in these regions. This also applies to factors that are supplementary to the actual production conditions and influence people's lives, e.g. the level of services or the transport network.

The rapporteur therefore emphasises that established rules and aid that have helped maintain and develop production and living conditions should also have a future.

Agriculture will remain the lifeblood of mountain regions

People living in mountain areas have forever worked on the slopes and meadows in these regions in harmony with Nature and under the toughest of conditions. Steep slopes, height differences, inaccessibility, growth and weather condition make cultivation and processing difficult and have in the past consigned the inhabitants of these areas to a modest and hard earned existence.

The work carried out by farmers to cultivate the land not only provided the minimum yield required for their day-to-day existence, but has played a part - and continues to do so

- in preserving a wide variety of landscapes, such as meadows and forests. Agriculture does not therefore just play an economic role but is the basis for a host of other sectors that profit from the natural riches and landscapes of mountain areas.

Traditional products and methods of production also play a key role today in trade, the hospitality sector, exports and the craft industry and contribute to the preservation of knowledge and cultural identity.

Given that agriculture is of vital importance, directly or indirectly, for a number of sectors, it should be promoted not just for 'nostalgic' reasons, but as a key factor in employment, growth and sustainable development in these regions.

The rapporteur does therefore stress that these considerations are especially important for the forthcoming reforms of the CAP and its accompanying measures, particularly as regards discussions on milk quotas and support for young farmers: agriculture in mountain areas must receive further support in the form of financial compensation and assistance for quality products and appropriate legislation.

Mountain areas: other important aspects

The harsh natural environment of mountain areas not only has an impact on agriculture, but also shapes day-to-day life in these regions in many different ways through the influence it exerts on other important factors for rural development in mountain areas. These include:

Sustainable use of natural resources, which takes many other forms in addition to agricultural use (e.g. forestry, hunting and fishing).

Transport networks play a key role in the transport of goods and persons from and to the valley floor, and link these areas with more distant regions and urban centres. In this area, it is therefore important to make use of cheaper, environment-friendly solutions (such as initiatives to take traffic off the roads) that pose no threat to Nature and the sustainable-use approach in these regions.

Internet and communication networks are of increasing importance for these decentralised regions, especially for companies that conduct more of their business activities online in the digital age.

Municipal and local services covered by the term 'services of general interest' will assume ever greater importance in view of the changes in the age structure of the population of mountain regions, in order to ensure a decent livelihood for younger and older generations. To achieve this, the municipalities need to be given financial assistance using solutions that can be applied locally.

A sustainable social fabric in the form of an extensive voluntary sector that provides services and social inclusion for the common good in parallel with the public sector.

Alongside agriculture, these are the key components of sustainable development in mountain areas. The rapporteur considers that, given the aforementioned Nature-

dependent factors, these and other core areas will also require appropriate financial and regulatory assistance in the future. This support must, however, be allied to concepts that are capable of developing and exploiting the competitive advantages offered by these fields (especially as regards high quality products and sustainable tourism).

Thus the need for the overall strategy requested above, which should also incorporate all the latest forward-looking developments.

New factors must be included

Global trends are also felt in mountain areas, making it all the more important that they be taken into account at an early stage in order to overcome any disadvantages and derive lasting benefit from potential advantages. Foremost amongst these trends is the need for an innovation-friendly environment to exploit existing knowledge and develop new solutions, the associated need for basic and further training opportunities, and adaptation to climate change, which has a particular impact on the sensitivity and biodiversity of mountain areas. This element also needs to be included in the aforementioned strategy.

In short...

...the rapporteur considers that, given the multitude of natural and global challenges to be faced, the sectoral efforts that have so far been made to advance Europe's mountain areas need to be united under a framework strategy for the sustainable long-term development of these regions. This strategy should be based on a wide range of instruments (financial assistance, legislation, online platforms, etc.), that are best able to eliminate the obstacles whilst activating incentives and mobilising the potential competitive advantages of these regions. The Commission is therefore asked to present such a strategy within six months, on the basis of which - in accordance with the subsidiarity principle - the Member States would draw up and implement national actions plans in tandem with the local and regional authorities. Above all, it is important to emphasise that provision of the necessary financial support at European level, particularly in the field of agriculture, is - and will remain - a prerequisite for the success of this endeavour.

26.6.2008

OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

for the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

on the situation and prospects of agriculture in mountainous regions
(2008/2066(INI))

Draftswoman: Bernadette Bourzai

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Regional Development calls on the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

1. Stresses that Article 158 of the Treaty establishing the European Community on cohesion policy, as amended by the Treaty of Lisbon, identifies mountain regions as suffering from severe and permanent handicaps, whilst acknowledging their diversity, and calls for particular attention to be paid to such areas; regrets, however, that the Commission has not yet been able to draw up a comprehensive strategy to support effectively mountain regions and other regions suffering from permanent natural handicaps, despite numerous requests to that effect from the European Parliament;
2. Stresses the need for good coordination on the ground of the various Community policies aimed at ensuring harmonious development, particularly for regions, such as mountain regions, that suffer from permanent natural handicaps; is concerned, in this connection, about the usefulness of separating the Community's cohesion policy from rural development in the current programming period 2007-2013 (resulting from the integration of the European Agricultural Fund for Regional Development into the CAP); considers that this new approach needs to be monitored closely in order to evaluate its impact on regional development;
3. Points out that mountain regions suffer handicaps which make it less easy for agriculture to adapt to competitive conditions and entail extra costs so that it cannot produce very competitive products at low prices;
4. Proposes that in the context of the Green Paper on territorial cohesion, to be adopted in

autumn 2008, and in keeping with the objectives of the territorial agenda and the European Spatial Development Perspective, the Commission should, in cooperation with the Member States, adopt a territorial approach to address the problems in different types of mountain territories and make provision for such measures within the next legislative package on the Structural Funds;

5. Would like the Commission to develop a genuine European integrated strategy for mountains and considers the publication of a Green Paper on mountains to be an important first step in that direction; calls on the Commission to launch a wide ranging public consultation involving regional and local authorities, socio-economic and environmental actors, as well as national and European associations representing regional authorities in mountain regions, in order to better identify the situation in these regions;
6. Calls on the Commission, in the context of the European Spatial Planning Observation Network work programme, to pay special attention to the situation of regions that are beset by permanent natural handicaps, such as mountain regions; considers that a sound and thorough knowledge of the situation as regards mountain regions is essential in order to be able to draw up differentiated measures that better address the problems of these regions;
7. Urges greater coordination of rural development and structural support and the development of common programmes;
8. Points out that mountain regions can provide quality agricultural produce and more diversity of agricultural products in the European market, preserve certain animal and vegetable species, uphold traditions and foster industrial and tourist activities and can combat climate change by protecting biodiversity and capturing CO₂ through permanent grassland and forests and that sustainable forestry exploitation will make it possible to produce energy using wood residues;
9. Stresses the importance of the issue of water management in mountain areas and calls on the Commission to encourage local and regional authorities to develop a sense of solidarity between downstream and upstream users, including through appropriate funding to support the sustainable use of water resources in these areas;
10. Stresses that these regions are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of climate change and calls upon the Commission, the Member States and the competent regional and local authorities to promote the immediate implementation of measures to provide protection against natural disasters, in particular forest fires, in these regions;
11. Points out that mountain regions require new means of protecting their territory against flooding (with an emphasis on flood prevention), whilst farmers and foresters can support anti-flooding preventive measures by means of the direct area-related payments which they receive under the CAP;
12. Points out that thorough, comprehensive anti-erosion protection for soil, buildings and the conservation of aquifers must be provided as a constituent part of farming and forestry practice in order to minimise the risks of flooding and soil erosion and to prevent drought and forest fires, and also for the purpose of increasing the supply of groundwater and

surface water in the countryside;

13. Stresses the significance of introducing an integrated approach to decision-making and administrative procedures such as regional planning, the licensing of construction projects and the refurbishment of dwellings by means of environmental, heritage and urban-planning practices, with a view to ensuring sustainable development in mountain regions; recommends that the potential of mountain regions should be exploited in order to promote the comprehensive development of tourism and the use of innovation in land development and, to that end, encourages local, decentralised initiatives and cooperation between mountain regions;
14. Advises the Member States to improve the structure of and the procedures for the provision of financial assistance intended to support the development of mountainous regions and at the same time to simplify administrative procedures and access to resources intended to support the protection and sustainable use of territorial assets: the cultural heritage and natural and human resources;
15. Considers that sustainable, modernised and multifunctional agriculture is necessary in mountain areas for maintaining other activities, such as the exploitation of bio-mass and agri-tourism, thus increasing the incomes of local people and calls on the Commission and Council to take account specifically, in the CAP and in regional policy, of the needs of mountain regions: the arrival of new farmers, compensation of extra costs linked to the problem of inaccessibility, for example with regard to milk collection, the maintenance of services in rural areas and the development of transport infrastructure, etc;
16. Stresses that exceptions and special support measures must be confined to particularly disadvantaged areas and not be allowed to lead to distortions of competition in agricultural markets;
17. Is convinced that priority should be given to maintaining sufficient population density in mountain regions and of the need for measures to combat desertification and to attract new people;
18. Stresses the importance of ensuring a high level of services of general economic interest, of improving the accessibility and interconnection of mountain areas and of providing the necessary infrastructure, particularly as regards passenger and freight transport, education, the knowledge-based economy and communication networks (including broad band access) in order to facilitate connections with upland markets and urban areas; calls on the competent authorities to promote public-private partnerships for these purposes;
19. Considers it necessary to invest in local, advanced training centres in agricultural economy for mountain areas, so as to train professionals with the ability to manage activities in a mountain environment, protect the land and develop agriculture.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	25.6.2008
Result of final vote	+: 44 -: 0 0: 1
Members present for the final vote	Emmanouil Angelakas, Stavros Arnautakis, Jean Marie Beaupuy, Rolf Berend, Jana Bobošíková, Victor Boştinaru, Wolfgang Bulfon, Antonio De Blasio, Petru Filip, Gerardo Galeote, Iratxe García Pérez, Eugenijus Gentvilas, Ambroise Guellec, Jim Higgins, Filiz Hakaeva Hyusmenova, Mieczysław Edmund Janowski, Rumiana Jeleva, Tunne Kelam, Evgeni Kirilov, Constanze Angela Krehl, Sérgio Marques, Miroslav Mikolášik, James Nicholson, Lambert van Nistelrooij, Maria Petre, Markus Pieper, Giovanni Robusti, Wojciech Roszkowski, Elisabeth Schroedter, Kyriacos Triantaphyllides, Oldřich Vlasák
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Bernadette Bourzai, Jan Březina, Jill Evans, Emanuel Jardim Fernandes, Ramona Nicole Mănescu, Francisca Pleguezuelos Aguilar, Zita Pleštinská, Samuli Pohjamo, Christa Prets, Richard Seeber, László Surján, Iuliu Winkler
Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote	Anneli Jäätteenmäki, Glenis Willmott

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	14.7.2008
Result of final vote	+: 29 -: 0 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Vincenzo Aita, Sergio Berlato, Bernadette Bourzai, Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos, Giovanna Corda, Albert Deß, Gintaras Didžiokas, Konstantinos Droutsas, Constantin Dumitriu, Michl Ebner, Carmen Fraga Estévez, Lutz Goepel, Friedrich-Wilhelm Graefe zu Baringdorf, Esther Herranz García, Lily Jacobs, Elisabeth Jeggle, Heinz Kindermann, Vincenzo Lavarra, Mairead McGuinness, Neil Parish, Vincent Peillon, María Isabel Salinas García, Petya Stavreva, Dimitar Stoyanov, Janusz Wojciechowski
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Alejandro Cercas, Esther De Lange, Catherine Neris, Maria Petre, Markus Pieper, Karin Resetarits, Struan Stevenson, Kyösti Virrankoski