



**2015/2324(INI)**

26.4.2016

# **OPINION**

of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

for the Committee on Regional Development

on an EU strategy for the Alpine region  
(2015/2324(INI))

Rapporteur: Ulrike Müller

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## SUGGESTIONS

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

1. Highlights the importance of the Alpine region as a natural environment and a place for people to live, work and relax in, thanks to the vital contributions made by agriculture and forestry, sustainable year-round tourism and craft trades; stresses that these sectors are of crucial value in the sustainable development of the region and the sustainable management of natural resources, as they ensure a high-quality food supply, maintain the population in outlying areas, maintain the cultural landscape, and preserve ecosystems by means of biodiversity, soil and water protection; welcomes the EU Alpine Strategy as an integrating framework and a way to improve and enhance sustainable economic, environmental, infrastructural and socio-demographic development in the Alpine region; calls on the Commission and the Member States to take into account lessons learnt from the implementation of other EU macro-regional strategies;
2. Stresses the need for initiatives to improve mobility, digital infrastructure, energy supply, social migration and demographic outlook and to enhance cooperation and coordination among authorities at different levels in order to address common challenges in certain cross-border areas more efficiently and effectively than could be achieved by individual measures; underlines that the strategy should also address challenges imposed by globalisation and deindustrialisation; stresses the need to improve access to public services and infrastructure in order to increase the accessibility and attractiveness of these regions as well as to reduce the decline of small and family farms, which are an important economic and social pillar of the region; considers it necessary for specific traditions in the fields of land use, craft trades and tourism to be preserved when implementing the strategy;
3. Stresses that the economic, social and environmental role played by farming in mountainous areas needs to be supported by targeted policies that offset the disadvantages faced by mountain farmers and to acknowledge the contribution they make to the environmental and social sustainability of large parts of Europe; stresses that particular attention should be paid to small-scale farms which are mostly family-run and to the role of women in alpine agriculture, who drive growth and therefore must be given greater support and recognition; reiterates that sustainable development of mountainous areas is an essential element to the well-being of rural populations, their intergenerational cohesion and the prospects of family-run farms;
4. Reiterates that the future development of the Alpine region is associated with rural areas, rural development, 'the future of the village' and agriculture in particular;
5. Is concerned by degradation of ecosystems and the risk of natural disasters in certain parts of Alpine areas and urges, in this respect, the Commission and Member States to ensure that land and forests are managed in a sustainable way that is adapted to local conditions, with a particular attention to soil health, and to encourage such development so as to preserve both the cultural and the environmental diversity of the region and ensure economic prospects by safeguarding natural resources for the long term; stresses the

importance of implementing the principles of the circular economy and synergetic cooperation between farming and other economic activities on areas protected under the Nature 2000 network and all other protected areas;

6. Laments the increasing abandonment of – and scrub encroachment on – farmland, which adversely affects not only the landscape, agricultural productivity and in particular traditional practices with regard to small-scale livestock and arable farming but also water management and hydrogeological balance, biodiversity and sustainable energy generation;
7. Notes that the Alpine region is Europe's 'water tower' and that the Alps provide enough water to provide up to 90% of the needs of the foothill areas in summer; notes also that the Alps constitute Europe's main biomass reserve; stresses that water is important for hydroelectricity, the irrigation of agricultural land, the sustainable management of forests, preserving biodiversity and the landscape and providing drinking water, which will be even more crucial in coming years in view of climate change; stresses, therefore, the need to step up the exchange of best practices and cross-border cooperation in connection with the Alpine Convention's Water Management Platform between the national bodies responsible for the management of water and river basins;
8. Notes that the Alpine region was able at a very early stage to benefit from its waterways by producing hydroelectric power; takes the view that it should be possible to subsidise exchanges of good practice and the modernisation of structures using EU funds, with a view to responding to the growing demand for energy and the influx of tourists;
9. Finds it regrettable that there is currently an increasing tendency towards the indirect expropriation of landowners as part of the implementation of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC and the Biodiversity Strategy; urges the Commission to take action to safeguard property rights as a key component of the development of the Alpine regions;
10. Points out that the return of large predators is putting traditional agriculture and pasture farming at risk in many Alpine valleys as sheep, goats and cattle are increasingly being attacked by wild predators; underlines that management and reintroduction of birds of prey and carnivores must be better coordinated among various authorities while exchange of information and best practices needs to be enhanced in order to improve cross-border protection and management of these species as part of the Alpine strategy and in connection with the Large Carnivores, Wild Ungulates and Society Platform of the Alpine Convention;
11. Insists that the strategy should contribute towards meeting the targets set at COP21 and also outline how the region should cope with climate change challenges, particularly bearing in mind its vulnerability and exposure to natural disasters (e.g. mudflows, wildfires);
12. Points out that cascading use of renewable resources is a principle which if regulated and enforced by law will become a large interference with property rights and might hinder innovation especially for SMEs;
13. Stresses that it must remain possible to use traditional arable and livestock farming practices in mountainous areas, in order to preserve agrarian structures and settlements in those areas; calls for monitoring procedures and cross-compliance requirements to be

harmonised, simplified and reduced, particularly for smallholders and mountain farmers;

14. Considers it important to set up regional programmes to promote decentralised, macro-regional structures for processing and marketing agricultural and forestry products (e.g. cooperatives and producer organisations), in order to strengthen their position in the timber and food value chains and improve employment, food supply and innovation in the regions; points out the advantages of securing a broad variety of market opportunities;
15. Calls for the enhancement of the value of agricultural products, by encouraging initiatives to increase the use and dissemination of the 'mountain products' label on the basis of practical arrangements, promoting the protected geographical indications of products from the Alpine region and developing new high-quality products in order to meet consumer demand and provide them with information about the traditional basis of these products and their distinctive characteristics and quality; considers that more effective safeguards are needed against imitators and pirate producers of products claiming to originate in the Alpine region and for protected geographical indications; furthermore, calls on the Commission to introduce special operational programmes for high-quality mountain products, with a view to improving the promotion and marketing of those products;
16. Emphasises the importance of milk production in mountainous parts of the Alpine region, and in particular of the high-quality dairy products that come from that milk; points out that, in many instances, the dairy industry cannot compete with more favourable locations; calls on the Commission and the Member States to introduce specific offsetting measures for producers under the CAP, in order to ensure that livestock farming and dairy production in mountainous areas is financially sustainable, in particular for small and medium-sized family-run farms, as well as support for processors turning Alpine milk into high-quality products;
17. Underlines that it is important to boost the competitiveness of mountain farms by, inter alia, promoting the formation of producer organisations as well as stimulating the activities of local producers by launching public procurement; stresses that networking and the formation of associations between mountain farmers can increase their bargaining power vis-à-vis distributors and help to mitigate in general the structural weaknesses of mountain farming; furthermore, believes that short supply chains in mountainous areas and local markets are of key importance for preserving agricultural production on small scale farms located in these areas;
18. Believes that the marketing of agricultural products could be improved if they were included within the general tourism products of a given geographical area;
19. Considers it particularly important to give young farmers long-term prospects in order to address rural depopulation in the Alpine region; calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote transnational initiatives to support entrepreneurship, emerging industries and the labour market in agriculture and forestry; underlines the importance of integrating farming more effectively in the local economy, in particular in the tourism, crafts and SME sectors, in order to raise farm incomes and make agricultural jobs more attractive to young people;
20. Highlights the importance of agri-tourism as a source of income for small-scale farmers (e.g. farm holidays); calls on the Commission and the Member States to establish

programmes to support investment and entrepreneurship; considers it important to support those farms through specific tourism campaigns;

21. Points out that the climate and topography of the Alpine regions make it difficult to intensify farming and forestry; urges the Commission and the Member States to promote research and development in the use of grassland, livestock farming and forestry by capacity building to make production more efficient, to preserve traditional forms of farming and livestock breeds and to assist the conversion of forests into climate-resilient mixed forests;
22. Calls on the Commission to expand education and consultancy structures for agricultural and forestry workers (e.g. training for alpine farming consultants), to provide a macro-regional training network and to intensify cooperation and networking between educational, economic and scientific actors (e.g. inter-branch trainee schemes and exchange programmes) with a view to promoting sustainable growth in the context of joint, cross-border and international research programmes and projects; notes that mountainous areas have always been a major source of innovation, particularly for overcoming natural handicaps; notes that, in the Alps, the same person is often required to carry out different activities over the course of a year, sometimes across borders; calls on the Commission, the Member States and local authorities to encourage cooperation between (initial and continuous) professional training operators; takes the view that training and information on innovations in farming and forestry must be provided in order to enhance the competitiveness of smallholders and family-run farms;
23. Points out the important role of agriculture and rural resources in providing social and educational care for vulnerable people in particular; calls on the Commission to promote social agricultural activities, given that for mountain farmers in particular, they represent a new way of providing alternative services;
24. Points out the importance of access to a high-speed internet connection and to digital services and, in addition to purely infrastructure-related development, calls for a holistic 'digital villages and regions' approach, providing sustainable, liveable and family-friendly environments;
25. Notes that SMEs in mountainous regions experience administrative difficulties when applying for funding from the EAFRD; calls on the Commission to align the corresponding support programmes in order to ensure better access to funding and greater success in implementation, which should be of more benefit to small municipalities;
26. Calls for the prospective and current regulatory framework for farms throughout the Alpine region, in particular under the CAP, to be harmonised and simplified respectively; points out the need for specific additional support based on factors such as soil assessment and gradients in order to make it possible to farm sustainably on steep hillsides;
27. Welcomes the establishment of a macro-regional governance model for the Alpine region so as to foster cross-border cooperation in agriculture and forestry; regards it as important in this connection that there should be improved exchanges of information and experience, on a transnational basis, between associations and producer organisations in the areas of livestock and crop farming and forestry by setting up regular symposia;

28. Emphasises that the development of new initiatives requires regional solutions and participatory approaches, including the harmonisation of existing and new initiatives, in order to maximise the benefit for mountain farming in the Alps and reduce administrative barriers; calls for the direct involvement of regions, local authorities and individuals in all measures under an EU Alpine strategy, with particular attention to agriculture and forestry stakeholders that should be instrumental in carrying out the Commission's action plan at regional level; points out that the Alpine Convention, EU cohesion policy and existing EU initiatives must be taken into account;
29. Considers it important that the EU Alpine strategy should be carried out with existing financial resources, such as the 2014-2020 Structural and Investment Funds, and that no new funding should be introduced; stresses that they must be used efficiently in order to carry out the strategy with greater coordination;
30. Calls on the Commission and Member States to expand support programmes such as INTERREG and LEADER within rural development policy for agricultural and forestry smallholdings in order to exchange information and best practices and to develop synergies between these various programs and focus on a limited and clearly defined set of priorities; underlines the importance, in this connection, of multifunctional small-scale farming in the Alpine region;
31. Notes that mountainous terrain remains an obstacle to bringing European citizens closer together and that the EU has committed itself to increase funding for cross-border transport infrastructure.

## RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

<b>Date adopted</b>	26.4.2016
<b>Result of final vote</b>	+: 36 -: 5 0: 0
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	John Stuart Agnew, Clara Eugenia Aguilera García, Eric Andrieu, Richard Ashworth, José Bové, Paul Brannen, Daniel Buda, Nicola Caputo, Matt Carthy, Viorica Dăncilă, Michel Dantin, Paolo De Castro, Albert Deß, Herbert Dorfmann, Norbert Erdős, Edouard Ferrand, Luke Ming Flanagan, Martin Häusling, Anja Hazekamp, Jan Huitema, Peter Jahr, Jarosław Kalinowski, Zbigniew Kuźmiuk, Philippe Loiseau, Mairead McGuinness, Ulrike Müller, James Nicholson, Maria Noichl, Marijana Petir, Laurențiu Rebega, Bronis Ropė, Jordi Sebastià, Jasenko Selimovic, Maria Lidia Senra Rodríguez, Czesław Adam Siekierski, Marc Tarabella, Janusz Wojciechowski, Marco Zullo
<b>Substitutes present for the final vote</b>	Pilar Ayuso, Franc Bogovič, Jean-Paul Denanot, Jens Gieseke, Ivan Jakovčić, Anthea McIntyre, Sofia Ribeiro, Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso