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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 of implementing the Community regulation to promote farming in mountain areas¹,
 - having regard to its resolution of 12 March 2008 on the Common Agricultural Policy 'Health Check'²,
 - having regard to its resolution of 16 February 2006 on the implementation of a European Union forestry strategy³,
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development and the opinion of the Committee on Regional Development (A6-0000/2008),
- A. whereas mountain areas account for 40% of Europe's total surface area and are home to 19% of Europe's citizens⁴,
- B. whereas mountain areas are cultural landscapes that reflect the harmonious interaction between humans and biosystems and form part of our natural heritage,
- C. whereas they have specific features (gradient, height differences, inaccessibility, growth, weather conditions) which make them different from other landscapes in the European Union and they are in many respects 'disadvantaged',
- D. whereas mountain areas 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,
- E. whereas mountains are 'multifunctional' habitats, in which the (agricultural) economy is closely tied to social, cultural and ecological issues,
1. points out the vast differences in the actions taken by Member States on mountain areas which are based on purely sectoral rather than integral development, and that there is no integrated EU framework (as is the case for maritime areas⁵);

¹ OJ C 72 E, 21.3.2002, p. 354.

² Texts adopted, P6_TA(2008)0093.

³ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2006)0068.

⁴ Nordregio (2004), Mountain areas in Europe: Analysis of mountain areas in EU Member states, acceding and other European countries;

⁵ COM (2007)0574.

2. welcomes the Green Paper on territorial cohesion as a method of dealing with the different areas of the European Union;
3. at the same time, urges the Commission to develop, within its remit, a specific, integrated strategy for the sustainable development and use of resources in mountain areas within six months; also calls for national action programmes containing specific implementation measures to be drawn up on this basis;
4. emphasises the need for a European definition of mountain areas based on scientific criteria, that can also be used in re-assessing 'Less Favoured Areas' and in reforming the CAP;
5. calls for an overview of programmes and projects funded on topics of relevance to mountain areas for the purpose of transferring knowledge and promoting innovation;
6. emphasises the role played by hill and mountain farming in production and 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;
7. notes that farming in mountain regions involves greater effort (e.g. labour intensity) and higher costs due to natural conditions;
8. pays tribute to the work carried out by mountain farmers; notes that the framework conditions for mountain farming (particularly as regards supplementary jobs or combined wage models) should not be complicated by red tape, but should be improved through the fusion of sectoral policies;
9. emphasises that compensatory payments in mountain areas are also justified in the longer term due to the lack of alternative production and that full decoupling would lead to a systematic reduction in activity affecting all sectors;
10. calls for more assistance for young farmers and equal opportunities for men and women (particularly through family-friendly measures and rules on part-time working) as vital factors;
11. emphasises that producer associations make an important contribution to the stability and security of agricultural production and should be given greater support;
12. calls for special financial assistance for the dairy sector which plays a key role in 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 additional measures to reduce any negative impact;
13. points out that SMEs in mountain areas produce high quality products by making new 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;

14. underlines the cross-sectoral importance of typical (high quality) products; asks that the 'strategy' include measures to protect these products or their manufacturing procedures;
15. 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);
16. calls for guaranteed financial assistance for mountain regions, in accordance with Article 69 of Regulation (EC) No 1782/2003, and specific access to this assistance with minimum red tape, and for the upper limit for resources under Article 69 to be raised to 20%;
17. calls for the interests of mountain livestock breeders to be taken into account in animal health, animal protection and animal breeding provisions;
18. calls for the 'strategy' to cover the different types of landscape in mountain areas (mountain pastures, protected forests, high mountains, meadows) and to make provision for ideas on the sustainable use of mountain pastures, grassland and forests in order to combat unwelcome developments such as over-grazing;
19. emphasises the importance of a long-term forestry strategy that takes into account the natural life cycle and natural composition of the forest ecosystem, and creates compensatory mechanisms for crisis situations (e.g. storms) and incentives for integrated forest management;
20. 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 issues (rockfalls, mudslides) that require counteracting measures;
21. considers that endeavours should be made in mountain areas to encourage the separation between forests and grazing land and to introduce the requirement to use paths (not least for safety reasons in general)¹;
22. points out that mountains form natural barriers, which makes cross-border cooperation - and the promotion thereof - essential given the problems in common (e.g. climate change, animal diseases, loss of biodiversity);
23. welcomes efforts in the field of sustainable tourism and those aimed at making efficient use of Nature as an 'economic advantage' through sustainable leisure and sports activities; emphasises the role of people who 'use' Nature for the benefit of their own health whilst respecting the natural environment;
24. 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;

¹ See point 15 of the aforementioned resolution of 16 February 2006.

25. recognises the successes achieved in mountain areas in the fields of nature protection, biodiversity and habitat preservation by the designation of "Natura 2000" areas and nature reserves;
26. 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 these regions (e.g. ratification of the Alpine and Carpathian Conventions and protocols); applauds the work of organisations and research institutes dedicated to the cause of mountain areas;
27. points to their unique water resources, which can be used sustainably for natural irrigation and as a source of drinking water and energy;
28. 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;
29. points to the role played by the promotion of part-time basic and further vocational training and of 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;
30. calls 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;
31. 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 (e.g. access to areas at very different altitudes, urban mobility);
32. 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'¹);
33. 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 support should be given to research work in these fields;
34. points to the dependence of mountains and glaciers on climate change, as well as to their potential as a 'test laboratory' for innovative technologies on climate protection that imitate Nature; calls for research activities and transitional measures;

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).

35. calls for responsibility for mountain areas to be assigned to one single Member of the Commission when future Commissions are formed;
36. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and 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.