

## FOREWORD

I would like to thank Euromontana for organising the European Mountain Convention – certainly one of the major European events of the Year of the Mountain 2002 for professionals.

The Convention provided an important opportunity to reflect on the most appropriate policy instruments for the further development of mountains regions.

I am convinced that this meeting raised the profile of mountain regions and highlighted their importance to Europe.

I have always considered that these regions, which represent 30% of the European territory, are a key element of the rural economy and that agricultural and rural development policies should take their specificities and needs fully into account.

The European Commission supports the sustainable development of mountainous regions through our rural and regional development policies. As you know it is already possible under the second pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy to provide targeted support for hill and mountain farming through compensatory payments, which form and shall continue to form our basic support for mountain regions. Aid for mountain regions is also possible through environmental measures, aid for forestry, processing and marketing aid or through diversification aid, for example in the tourism sector.

Since every mountain is different, it is essential that rural development programmes are tailor-made to take into account the specific characteristics of each area. The Commission therefore supports a decentralised approach for the drawing-up and the management of these programmes.

In addition, we should not forget, with reference to the Structural Funds, that 95% of mountain regions are already designated under Objective 1 or Objective 2. These mountain regions can all apply under current support rules and the Member States can tailor the measures needed to individual demands, be it in relation to transport or telecommunications networks, basic public services or support for economic activities.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that sustainable development of our mountain areas is a long-term project, which is in all our interest. Therefore discussion fora, organised on a regular basis, like the European Mountain Convention, are essential for the improvement of our policies. In this regard, I warmly thank all those who actively participated in the organisation of this conference.

**Franz Fischler**