



SIXTH EUROPEAN MOUNTAIN CONVENTION
BRIG, SWITZERLAND
Friday 10 October

How to generate added value from Europe's Mountains?

The Declaration of Brig

Mountain areas represent 40.6% of the landmass of greater Europe, and 19.1% of the European population.

We, the representatives of mountain Europe assembled here in Brig on 10 October 2008 at a time of global economic instability and European policy transition call for recognition of:

The potential geopolitical influence of mountains in stabilising and binding together Europe faced with economic and political flux.

The unique role that Europe's mountains can play in delivering the territorial cohesion of Europe.

The economic and social value to the entire European community of mountain land management and settlement.

The high quality but fragile assets represented by mountains and their rich biodiversity and authentic diversity of local food products, crafts, and culture.

We draw attention to the specific significance for mountain areas, and therefore for Europe, of the emerging challenges and current policy review exercises:

- Climate change is with us regardless of the merits of the continuing debate about its scale and timescale. The impact on mountains already exists and here it will be more extreme earlier than elsewhere.¹
- Depopulation and aging population – mountains are prominent among the areas of Europe demonstrating loss of population. Where population is retained the age profile is commonly increasing significantly.
- The pressure for a Territorial Cohesion² perspective in European policy. This is driven by accelerating realities including economic polarisation in capitals, excessive metropolisation, urban sprawl - and the associated negative externalities of pollution, congestion, decline in viability of other areas such as mountains, their access to economic activity and services, and the threat of dereliction of their priceless assets.
- The imperative to refine the Common Agricultural Policy after 2013 in order *inter alia* 'to preserve the balance of rural areas and maintain territorial cohesion' and 'to develop an agriculture that reconciles economic performance with environmental efficiency' as recognised at the French Presidency's launch of the debate on 23 September 2008 at Annecy - and the immediate pressing need to achieve sensitive modifications through the CAP Health Check process. Mountains are implicated strongly on both counts.

¹ A 1° C increase in average temperature will reduce the mountain snow line by 150 m: a 4°C warming would reduce snow volume by 90% at 1000m and by 30-40% at 3000m in Switzerland.

² Now see Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion 'Turning territorial diversity into strength' – 6.10.2008 Com (2008)616 final

We offer to Europe the solutions that mountains and their communities are uniquely equipped to bring to these challenges and we advocate European policy provisions that can support, enable and enhance the delivery of these solutions:

Turning our challenges into opportunities

Climate change - Although mountain areas must, of course, share in the universal effort to mitigate climate change there is little that mountain communities can do specifically to target the effects of climate change that they already demonstrably experience. Mountain communities can however concentrate quite effectively on adaptation to these changes. Tourism provision can be modified to identify and respond to market opportunities arising for example from loss of snow and mountain actors can take positive advantage of changes in flora and fauna and associated new land management opportunities.

Policy Proposal:

Regional policy and cohesion policy should support the transformation process necessary to adapt to climate change in mountain areas.

Depopulation – can be reversed by improving and innovating service provision and by development of access to centres of educational excellence. The universally recognised opportunity for mountains and other remote places of environmental excellence to attract high level technology businesses through Information and Communications Technology can at last be transformed to reality by providing at key nodes the most advanced ICT standards *simultaneously* with their provision elsewhere in the market.

Policy Proposals:

Broad band access should be integrated in the services of general economic interest and considered as a minimum standard.

The European Commission should encourage the use of ICT through territorial cohesion policy and e-government policy.

The threat to mountain agriculture and the prospect of environmental degradation and loss of primary products to which value can be added locally – stock losses and the threat of land abandonment evidenced in mountains following the decoupling of farm support payments and the prospective end of milk quotas - can be retrieved by readjusting support provision so as to respect certain stock production and to reward the excellence of the positive externalities/public goods generated in mountains.

Policy proposals:

That action be taken immediately to provide member states with maximum discretion under Article 68³ to utilise modulated funds flexibility to support stock raising in specific areas.

That steps be taken immediately to identify the simplest options for an operational methodology to reward the production of positive externalities by sustainable land management activity in areas where the survival of these activities is under the greatest threat.

That steps be taken immediately to facilitate the provision of a European quality designation for mountain products produced in conformity to the European Mountain Quality Charter.⁴

³ Council Regulation (EC) No 1782/2003 [as amended]

⁴ The European Mountain Quality Food Product Charter inaugurated 7 December 2005 at the European Parliament, Brussels (see Appendix)

Territorial Cohesion – is fundamentally an exercise in enlightened self interest for the majority of the European population who live in the major cities or within their area of direct functional influence. The competitiveness - as well as the economic and social well being - of the whole of Europe can not be other than improved by a will to innovate in the optimal and sustainable use of the assets of the whole territory. Mountains face extraordinary challenges in respect of climate terrain and access and fully justify their specific inclusion as identified objectives of territorial cohesion in the Article 158 text proposed in the Lisbon Reform Treaty along with islands, sparsely populated regions and areas of industrial transition. Mountains also, however, provide the major proportion of Europe's valuable biodiversity, water, diversity of foods, crafts, culture and high quality managed landscapes. The submission of all relevant European policies to a territorial impact assessment must inevitably reinforce the stability of mountain areas and so facilitate the better valorisation of mountain assets for the benefit not only of mountain dwellers but also for the broader competitiveness of the economy of Europe as a whole.

Policy proposals:

Within the terms of the current consultation on the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion [SEC(2008) 2550] recognition be given to the orthodox interpretation of Territorial Cooperation based on the text of Art 158 proposed by the Lisbon Reform Treaty and the principles of equity and balanced territorial development.

That a system of broad territorial impact assessment in respect of all relevant European Policy proposals be instituted but avoiding either a heavy bureaucratic burden or the irrelevance of a simple box ticking routine.

Beyond the Green paper on Territorial Cohesion

Finally it is recalled that mountain stakeholders were dissuaded from pressing their recent requests for a Green Paper on Mountains that would identify a coherent treatment of the issues described above - and numerous other aspects of mountain reality - by assurances that the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion would adequately fulfil that purpose.

The Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion was published on 6 October and we will respond diligently and responsibly to it. However we are disappointed by the superficial and wholly inadequate treatment that the Green Paper affords to mountains. **We therefore renew the request for a Green Paper specifically devoted to a serious and more detailed treatment of our mountain circumstances, the threats they carry and the opportunities they present.**