



Report n° 8

Activity report for the period
September 2003 – January 2004
For the attention of Euromontana members
21 January 2004

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Dear Colleague,

'Interesting Times'

It is alleged that there is a Chinese curse that says 'May you live in interesting times'.

For the last year it seems from the perspective of the European Mountains that we are living in increasingly interesting - and uncertain – times.

In the Spring, working in partnership with other interest groups representing island and sparsely populated regions, we contributed significantly to achieving the inclusion of the concept of 'Territorial Cohesion' alongside Economic and Social Cohesion in the text of the draft Constitution produced by the Convention on the future of Europe. 'Territorial Cohesion' is the principle that, wherever they might live in Europe, European citizens are entitled to equity –or fair treatment. It is perhaps sad and indicative of the hardening climate of European policy development that we had to struggle so hard to achieve formal recognition of such an unremarkable and self evidently just sentiment.

This impression was reinforced in the Summer when the Sapir report, 'An Agenda for a Growing Europe', was published suggesting that a major contributing factor to Europe's disappointing growth record compared to that of the USA was the emphasis given to Cohesion . Sapir contends that ' policies oriented towards maintaining what is socially regarded as an adequate degree of cohesion may reduce the efficiency and growth benefits arising from market liberalisation and integration'. Although initially dismissed by Commissioner Barnier, the report resurfaced in October when it was debated vigorously by the Commission and at an informal Ministerial meeting in the Italian Presidency. On both occasions Euromontana made written representation which, along with those of our allies, appear to have played a significant part in influencing a moderate decision.

As I write there is evidence of further attacks on Structural Funds which must threaten their deployment on a territorial basis to mountains in the 'pre-enlargement EU.' To these concerns can be added the uncertainty of the impact on mountain areas of the reform of the CAP and the need for an active response to the imminent publication of the DG Regio Mountain study. In respect of the study we not only have to interpret and clarify its complexities to the European policy community but also highlight its limitations.

At this critical period we are faced with the appointment of a new European Commission and the Election of a new European Parliament.

Truly, in the policy field, the mountain areas of Europe can seldom have been in greater need of effective advocacy and strategic reflection. This is a challenge that Euromontana must accept and we are determined to provide those elements efficiently and vigorously.

In the operational and research field the Mountain challenges are just as invigorating. The need for mountains to find a coherent means of exploiting and developing their real comparative advantage in terms of quality products is critical. Euromontana intends this year to ensure that our Quality Project is not simply technically excellent but that it galvanises wider activity to avoid dissipation of the efforts of mountain producers that could lead to major producers profiting from the mountain cachet at their expense.

The Interact Project will not only prove valuable to members wishing to develop or improve their transnational working but also gives us an opportunity to develop closer working links with the AEM, the Association of European Mountain Elected Representatives. We are confident that the major Interreg IIIc application on local services and general quality issues for mountains is now excellent not only in content but in presentation. We now await only the Commissions decision : it is truly in the lap of the Gods as those with past experience of the application process can testify.

Finally we cannot forget that 10 new Member States accede to the European Union this year and so we intend redoubling our efforts both to recruit from, and act for, the extensive mountain areas in these and neighbouring east European States

We have excellent staff in Gaëlle Lhermitte, our Secretary General, and our project manager, Cécile Levret, and our Bureau system will be rationalised and reinforced at the time of the Fourth European Mountain Convention in Rodez in November. Our team is now better placed than ever to address the serious issues that confront our mountain areas, please help us to succeed by paying your subscription as soon as possible and by participating in the crucial events we are currently developing on your behalf.

Kindest regards



*Frank Gaskell
President of Euromontana*

EUROPEAN POLICY – MOUNTAIN REVIEW

With the preparation of new policies for the period of programming 2007-2013, the past months have been very busy at the EU-level.

Euromontana has been following particularly closely the development of the future EU-rural policy, the future EU-regional policy and its related "mountain study".

The future of the rural development policy in the European Union

While the Common Agricultural Policy was reformed fundamentally with a Council regulation approved on the 29 September 2003, it is envisaged that the rural development policy (today designate as the "second pillar" of the CAP) will be further reformed.

In order to launch a consultation on the future of this rural development policy, the Commission convened a major **Conference in Salzburg (Austria) on the 12 and 13 November**, branded as the "Second European Conference on Rural Development" for it was a follow-up of the famous Cork meeting in 1996. Euromontana was represented there by its President and Secretary General. There were about 1000 participants.

The discussions in Salzburg started on the basis that :

- a single European fund could be created for rural development, putting together :
 - o the current EAGGF-Guarantee fund for rural development
 - o the money from the modulation of the direct payments
 - o the EAGGF-Guidance section money, including the Leader+ envelope.This fund would have its own management rules, closely adapted to rural development measures.
- Rural development measures could be identified in 3 categories :
 - o Support for re-structuring in agriculture (helping farmers to become more competitive and adapting to new regulations : investments, support to young farmers etc...)
 - o Support for land management to enhance the environment and the countryside(including the agri-environmental measures and the compensatory payments for Less-Favoured Areas)
 - o Measures to enhance the quality of life in rural areas and to promote the diversification of economic activities (measures targeting the farm sector and other rural actors).

As regards the conclusions of the debate, the main following points are worth noting

(Extract of the conclusions) :

A living countryside is not only in the interests of the rural society but also of society as a whole. Investment in the broader rural economy and rural communities is vital to increase the attractiveness of rural areas, promote sustainable growth and generate new employment opportunities, particularly for young people and women. This must be based on the specific needs of different areas and build upon the full range of potential of local rural areas and communities. A living countryside is essential for farming, as agricultural activity is essential for **a living countryside**.

Preserving the diversity of Europe's countryside and encouraging the services provided by multifunctional agriculture is of ever growing importance. Managing the farmed environment and forests will serve to preserve and enhance the natural landscape and Europe's diverse cultural heritage, particularly in more remote rural areas with their sites of high nature value.

The competitiveness of the farming sector must be a key aim, taking into account the diversity of agricultural potential in different rural areas. This is of particular importance for the new Member

States, given the significant further agricultural restructuring expected in these countries. In all Member States sustainable economic growth of the agricultural sector must come increasingly through the diversification, innovation and value added products that consumers demand.

Rural development policy must apply in all rural areas of the enlarged EU in order that farmers and other rural actors can meet the challenges of on-going restructuring of the agricultural sector, the effects of CAP reform and changing patterns of agricultural trade.

Rural development policy must serve the needs of broader society in rural areas and contribute to cohesion. Strengthening the wider rural community will promote the sustainable development of rural areas sought by all rural stakeholders.

Rural development policy should be implemented in partnership between public and private organisations and civil society in line with the principle of subsidiarity. To respond effectively to local and regional needs, a full dialogue between rural stakeholders in the drawing up and subsequent implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes is needed. Future policy must mainstream EU support for rural areas through bottom-up local partnerships by building on the lessons learnt from the LEADER approach. Scope must be left for exploring new and innovative approaches at local level.

More responsibility must be given to programme partnerships to define and deliver comprehensive strategies based on clearly defined objectives and outcomes. These will require increased transparency and accountability through monitoring and evaluation. In this respect, capacity building is essential. Moreover, partnerships must have greater possibilities to learn from each other through networking and exchange of best practices.

A significant simplification of EU rural development policy is both necessary and urgent. Delivery must be based on one programming, financing and control system tailored to the needs of rural development.

More information on the conference at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/events/salzburg/index_en.htm

It is not clear however which of these conclusions will actually be used, agreed and implemented.

For Euromontana, some particularly important elements to follow will be :

- The place of specific measures which affect mountain areas and farming (LFA payments, development of quality products, agri-environmental measures etc...)
- The territorial approach which will, or will not, be envisaged for the implementation of this new policy.

The Compensatory Allowances for Less-favoured areas to be reviewed

The Court of Auditors of the European Union published a Special Report No 4/2003 in June 2003 concerning rural development: support for less-favoured areas. This report, together with the Commission's replies, is available from the Official Journal : http://www.eca.eu.int/EN/RS/2003/rs04_03en.pdf

The main point that the report makes is that the compensatory payments made in the less-favoured areas have to be closely examined and reviewed, because there seems to be some abuse in their use. The simple "less-favoured" areas – and not so much the mountain areas - seem to be the ones the most targeted by the criticism of the report.

However, because of this report, but certainly also because of the will to find the means to finance new measures within the framework of the rural development policy, the Compensatory Allowances are going to be studied by the Commission in 2004 and reformed probably from 2006. The outcomes

should be a higher concentration of the Payments, more targeted towards areas with specific handicaps.

Within the course of this reform, Euromontana will have to play an active role. An important exercise will have to be carried out related to :

- the use of the compensatory payments in the mountain areas,
- the positive externalities of mountain agriculture (landscape, rural economy etc...).

The Bureau of Euromontana, meeting on the 27 January, will examine these issues.

The future of the EU-regional policy.

Euromontana followed very closely in the Autumn the development of the debates over the future of the regional policy. Euromontana members received in particular 2 information notes on 10 October and 29 October 2003, identifying a future likely framework for the regional policy after 2006.

Reaction to the 'SAPIR' report (end of September)

As Euromontana reported to its members in its e-mail dated 01/10/2003, a report was published in July 2003 which was strongly questioning the European Regional policy (among other policies). Euromontana became aware of the damage that this report could cause in the debate over the future of the regional policy, and wrote a very strong letter to all Commissioners. The letter highlighted the benefits and the added-value of a European Regional policy in particular for areas such as mountainous areas.

This letter was written at that time because, on the 1st of October, the 20 Commissioners had to meet in order to adopt a position on the future of the regional policy. A positive position was adopted with a very tight majority.

Later in the Autumn, Euromontana received a letter from the Director General of the DG Regio of the European Commission, thanking Euromontana for this very useful and positive contribution to the debate.

Meeting Commissioner Barnier in Paris (on 7 October 2003)

The President of Euromontana, together with the President of AEM, met Michel Barnier, the European Commissioner for regional policy in Paris on the 7th of October 2003.

The Commissioner however remained relatively vague about the future of the regional policy and only advised the 2 associations of the necessity to promote the need for a strong regional policy in the future.

After the meeting with the Commissioner and several other exchanges, 2 information notes were circulated to the members with the likely scenarios envisaged at the time for the future regional policy (see e-mails on 10 and 29 October 2003). Since then the version described has been further modified as described at the end of this section.

The Ministerial Taormina meeting which took place on 13 and 14 November, in which our President participated, on the theme of "The specificity of mountain areas in the European Union" was very welcome by Euromontana. It was the first time a European Ministerial meeting had been organized on this theme. It was also very positive that Euromontana was invited to speak at it, and had the opportunity to establish new contacts with Ministerial representatives.

An information note, including Frank Gaskell's speech and the final declaration was circulated to all members on 18 November 2003.

A sort of follow-up meeting should be organized by the Irish Presidency of the Union in May 2004, but probably on a broader theme, such as 'the areas with natural handicaps' and/or "the territorial cohesion". Euromontana has already established some contacts with the involved interlocutors.

Meeting with the Italian Minister for Regional Affairs, Enrico La Loggia

On the occasion of our General Assembly and thanks to IREALP, the President of Euromontana had the opportunity to participate in a close meeting with the Italian Minister for Regional Affairs. The interview took place at a very strategic time, after the Taormina meeting and during the Italian Presidency of the Union.



Today's perspectives = the financial perspectives for 2006-2013

For a long time, the Third Cohesion Report (the Commission's proposals for the future regional policy) was planned to be published on the 3rd December 2003.

It had to be necessarily after the approval of the Financial Perspectives for the period 2006-2013 by the European Council which was itself planned for mid-November. These financial perspectives will indeed dictate the Budget for the future regional policy and the scenarios for the content of this policy obviously depends on the budget available.

However, the difficulties in the debate between the Member States over the future Constitution for the Union - within the framework of the Inter-Governmental Conference - made it impossible to have an agreement on the future financial framework as early as November. The failure of the Brussels' council on 12 December created even more complications in the process of approving the financial perspectives.

While this agreement was postponed at the end of January (and the publication of the Third Cohesion Report on the 3rd February), new complications seem to have emerged in recent days. Another possible date for the agreement of the Financial Framework would be the 10 February and the 18 February for the publication of the Third Cohesion Report. However, it seems again possible that these dates would be moved later in the year.

The Third Cohesion Forum seems to be maintained on the 10 and 11 May

As regards the outcomes of the Financial Perspectives, which will dictate the budget available for the future regional policy, they are very uncertain. After the Council of the 12 December, 6 member states adopted the position that the Budget ceiling should be 1,00% of the EU-GNP, which is much lower

than the current ceiling (1,27% of the EU-GNP, even if the budget amounts to less than the ceiling - 1,12% of the EU25-GNP in 2006). Sweden even suggests a ceiling at 0,80% of the EU-GNP.

The scenarios for the future regional policy are therefore difficult to identify.

Certainly, the proposals reported to members in October have changed as the debate has moved on.

It now seems that the proposal for an excellence fund has been dropped and the purposes envisaged are to be addressed instead by a Reserve operated outside the Structural Funds. This means that the allocation of the total structural funds might be :

Interreg	5%
Objective 1 and 1b (statistical effect regions)	75-80%
Objective 2 (and 3) and the natural transition regions	15-20%

A detailed analysis update cannot usefully be provided to you because the situation is still changing. As described above, the Financial Perspective negotiations have become protracted. Their outcome will have significant implications. For example, if the allocation to the structural Funds budget is constrained, it is likely to reduce the Objective 2 allocation. The Objective 1 and 1(b) allocation is not as vulnerable.

Details of any firmer intelligence about changes in the Commission proposals will be circulated immediately as it is available.

The Mountain study of DG Regio

(for background information, see the previous reports to members or ask us the intervention of Luisa Sanches from DG Regio at Euromontana's seminar in Brussels in May 2003).

Euromontana was consulted in the summer on a draft version and had the opportunity to give some comments in September.

On the 26 November 2003, Euromontana participated in a consultative meeting on the basis of a more developed draft final report. The members of Euromontana were informed of this consultation on the 30 October and were invited to send their comments if they wished.

Euromontana participated in this meeting and afterwards sent its formal comments. Euromontana's comments are in the Appendix of this report in English, split in 3 categories :

- 1) those comments / remarks that we hope can still be added to the report / adjustments that we hope can be made,
- 2) those comments / remarks which can probably not be integrated in the report at this stage, but that should be noted prominently in a foreword of the publication, clearly showing the unavoidable limits of the study or the recognition of some weaknesses,
- 3) Some questions / and suggestions for the “after study”.

The final version is due to be published by DG Regio probably by the end of January or the beginning of February. Because the core report has been ready for weeks, it has been possible to take the results into account in the preparation of the Third Cohesion Report (see above).

Euromontana have requested all members to explore the availability of studies on costs of activity in mountain areas – road/bridge/ house construction, provision of services, petrol prices general food and house hold goods prices etc etc – in comparison with similar activities in lowland areas.

YOU ARE REMINDED OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS APPEAL WE ASK YOU AGAIN TO MAKE SERIOUS EFFORTS TO PROVIDE SUCH INFORMATION AS A MATTER OF URGENCY.

THE "BALKAN" PROJECT

(for background information, see the previous reports to members or consult our web site at www.euromontana.org/balkanfe.htm).

A report on the funds potentially available for mountain development in the 7 countries participating in the project

In December 2003, a draft "Guideline of available external funding in the Countries East and South of the Adriatic Sea" was prepared at the Balkandesk of Euromontana. Elitza Gramadska, from Bulmontana, was the trainee involved in this preparation.

The Guideline has been designed in a way that makes it possible to update it easily. It provides background and practical information on the EU-supports such as Phare, Ispa and Sapard, which should shortly become available for all the countries of the project (and not only Romania and Bulgaria). It also provides information on many other donors and how to obtain information on these other potential sources of supports for projects in mountain areas.

The Guideline should be developed by each Balkan Project trainee in turn..

Commission proposes to extend participation in tenders under Phare, ISPA and Sapard programmes to the Western Balkans

(Extract of a Communication from the Commission)

16/12/2003 - The European Commission proposed on the 16 of December 2003 to open tenders under the pre-accession assistance programmes Phare, ISPA and **Sapard** (Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development) to the Western Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro). This would allow companies in the Western Balkans to establish links with economic operators in the European Union (EU) Member States, the accession countries and candidate countries, to compete alongside European contractors for work under these programmes and potentially, to win more business.

http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=IP/03/1735|0|RAPID&lg=EN&display=

The Brussels' Balkandesk activities...

In the Autumn 2003, the Balkandesk was managed by Elitza Gramadska, from Bulmontana (Bulgaria) who mainly worked at preparing the Guideline described above.

From January to March 2004, the Balkandesk is coordinated by Atanas Krantchev, who is the Director of Bulmontana and acts as Secretary of the project.

One of the tasks he should carry out is the compilation of all the activity reports of the 7 mountain organizations in a single document which Euromontana and the Balkandesk could use to describe the activity of the project.

THE PROJECT ON QUALITY MOUNTAIN PRODUCTS

(for background information, see the previous reports to members or consult our web site at www.euromontana.org/pqme.htm).

The preparation of the TURIN and the CORDOBA seminars

In 2003 the project activity was mainly focused on local studies, with 2 waves of enquiries in 10 study areas, resulting in a database of about 130 products, 20 case studies, and much other information on the legislative frameworks, the mountain definitions in Europe etc...

In 2004, the second and final year of the project, the activity will be much more about :

- comparing these results with other available information,
- identifying proposals and recommendations from the local studies and complementary sources of information,
- organizing consultations at various levels,
- setting up a web based "Strategic Information System" for use by professionals.

The Milestones of this second-year activity will be the Turin seminar, on 12 and 13 February, and the Cordoba seminar on 24 and 25 June which will be a broader open final seminar.

All members of Euromontana are invited to these consultative seminars and even encouraged to participate in this work.

The programme of the Turin was circulated on the 17th December and is available from Euromontana.

The programme of the Cordoba seminar is currently being examined and should be circulated within the next two months.

Collaboration with FAO

The FAO, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation based in Rome, launched in the Autumn a short exploratory world wide project on mountain products.

Euromontana met the team responsible for the project in November and it was agreed that, in view of Euromontana's unique work in this field in Europe, Euromontana would be the European interlocutor for the FAO project.

A trainee was employed in Euromontana for 3 weeks in December (the French Agro-economist Alexia Rouby) in order to fill in the forms prepared by FAO with the results of our project. This FAO form now includes 45 products from Euromontana project, and one of our case study (the "Tome des Bauges" in France).

This collaboration was fruitful and should be continued in 2004. On the 26 and 27 of February, FAO will organized a final meeting for their project in Chambéry (France), involving Euromontana and the

other partners from the other parts of the world involved in the project. Proposals should be identified for the follow-up of this first exploratory work.

Exchanges and meetings

In addition to the meeting with FAO, Euromontana participated in various meetings and exchanges :

- the final conference of the research programme DOLPHINS (on the labeled products) in Parma (Italy);
- the "Olympiads of mountain cheeses" organized by Caseus Montaneus on 23-26 October in Les Rousses (France);
- a closed meeting with some representatives of the Mountain Cheese organization "Caseus Montaneus" in Paris on the 13 January. It has notably been agreed that Euromontana will participate in the organization of a joint conference with Caseus Montaneus on the occasion of their 2004-Olympiads of mountain cheese which will take place in Appenzell at the end of October.

In addition, Euromontana organized the third meeting of the steering committee of the Quality Project on the 25 and 26 November in Brussels (the meeting was hosted by the Representation of the Basque Country in Brussels).

Meetings to come / agenda of the project

In relation to this project, Euromontana will

- participate in the closed "EU-Hearing on the European Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming" on 22 January in Brussels;
- have a closed meeting with representatives of the French Ministry of Agriculture planned for the 28 January in Paris;
- convene the Turin seminar on 12 and 13 February;
- be represented at the FAO mountain products project – final meeting on 26 and 27 February in Chambéry, France;
- convene the final seminar of the project on 24 and 25 June in Cordoba (Andalucia – Spain);
- participate in the organization of a joint conference on the occasion of the 2004 Olympiads of mountain cheese in Appenzell (Switzerland) at the end of October 2004.

Publications to come

Before and in addition to the final report of the project and the other outputs (web sites etc...), the project has already planned to publish 2 intermediary publications :

- the publication of the 20 case studies
- a publication on the legislative frameworks for the development of mountain products in Europe, referring to EU, national and regional regulations and including a special dossier on the delimitation of mountain areas in Europe.

For more information on the project and its agenda, or to receive the full illustrated newsletter, do not hesitate to contact our project manager Cécile Levret at : Quality.euromontana@skynet.be

THE MILAN GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON 20-21 NOVEMBER 2003

The General Assembly of Euromontana was organized in Milan at the invitation of IREALP, the Lombardian mountain institute. The majority of member organizations were represented. A few external participants joined us for this assembly.



The collaboration with IREALP was particularly efficient and allowed Euromontana to organize one of its best General Assembly. All preparatory documents and the minute are available from Euromontana and were circulated to members.

The past activities, the coming agenda and projects were presented to the members. The statutory issues were examined, with some new proposals concerning the internal organization of Euromontana (working groups / colleges etc...) which could be formalized in an internal rules and take effect from the next General Assembly.

A discussion was also developed on the EU-policies, their development and their possible impact on mountain areas. A draft "policy guideline for Euromontana" paper was examined by the assembly and was subject to a very interesting discussion. Some further contributions were received by Euromontana after the assembly, which will have to be taken into account for the development of the "policy guideline for Euromontana" paper.

The general assembly was taking place in parallel to the General Assembly of UNCEM, the Italian association of mountain communes and communities. On the afternoon of the 21 November, a joint seminar was organized at the initiative of IREALP, involving Euromontana, UNCEM and the Region Lombardia.

A closed meeting with the Italian Minister for Regional Affairs was also organized on this occasion.

All these events were very successful. A file showing various pictures of these different events is available from Euromontana in PDF version.



ASK US FOR THE PHOTO REPORT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

(.pdf file 2 Mo)

NEW MEMBERS FOR THE PERIOD

■ The Norwegian County of Buskerud,

The Norwegian county of Buskerud joined Euromontana in September 2003. The person of contact is Mr Sigurd Fjose. The web site is <http://www.buskerud-f.kommune.no/>
On the occasion of the General Assembly of Euromontana, the county was presented to the members (together with the other Norwegian new members of Euromontana).

COMMUNICATION : A RENEWED WEB SITE FOR EUROMONTANA

Tremendous efforts were made in the Autumn to update the web site of Euromontana. The development of the site remained relatively "modest" but the information is now fully accurate and the members must note that it will now be possible to update the information regularly.

The 2 main sections of the web site that will be updated regularly, providing news information will be the :

- "Table of announcements" accessible from the main page;
- "News web pages", accessible from the "Table of Announcements" page or from the "Links" page.

The "Table of announcements" page gives access to Euromontana's own new information (announcement of events, presentation of a new report etc...) while the page "News web pages" simply gives access to external web pages (for example pages of the EUROPA web site) containing recent information on various specific items of particular interest for mountain areas.

Please make use of it and send us your suggestions !

2004 PERSPECTIVES

Participation of Euromontana in various projects in 2004

In 2004, Euromontana will be "partner" in several projects. Of course, many of the members are waiting to know whether the "Euromountains.net" Interreg project will be approved (answer expected for the beginning of March), and this would be the main project in which Euromontana would be involved.

However, Euromontana will also be partner in 2 other projects.

The InterAct Promonte project

Euromontana is a partner in the InterAct "Promonte" project presented by AEM in September 2003 to the Secretariat of InterAct. The project has already been approved and should officially start in June 2004 and end in June 2006.

The project has 10 partners (in addition to the Leadpartner) :

- IREALP, the Lombardian mountain institute (Italy)
- Euromontana
- ADECOHD (France)
- The General Council of Savoy (France)
- The Autonomous Province of Trento (Italy)
- The Province of Belluno (Italy)
- The Province of Granada (Spain)
- ZDANIE (Poland)
- The Prefecture of Lasithi (Greece)
- The Municipality of Itamos (Greece).

The project globally aims at :

- collecting information on Interreg projects implemented in mountain areas,
- collecting information of other mountain projects using the structural funds,
- analysing the data / carrying out consultations and exchanges on these analysis notably through 4 regional seminars and a final conference,
- formulating recommendations for the future EU-policy for cooperation and the implementation of the structural funds in mountain areas.

The project could result in the setting up of a database of mountain projects which could easily be developed even after the conclusion of the project. It is also very strategic because it is a unique opportunity to study EU-instruments in the particular context of the mountain areas and to make recommendations. The project will be carried out with the assistance of the InterAct Secretariat, giving access also to other InterAct projects and sources of information.

All the members of Euromontana will be closely informed of the project developed, and consulted at the strategic stages. It is also expected that the network of AEM and of Euromontana will contribute to the establishment of a database of mountain projects.

More information should be available closer to the beginning of the project.

The ESF funded project in Vallée d'Aoste

Euromontana was invited by the Cooperation and Development Agency of the Vallée d'Aoste (Italy) to participate in a European Social Fund Project called « Mountains in debate 2004. Workshops and reflexions at the Bruil d'Introd House »

The project has been presented in October and already accepted. Euromontana will participate through interventions on the EU-policies and the mountains at workshops which will be organized in the Vallée d'Aoste; the beneficiaries of which will be local elected representatives from the Vallée d'Aoste.

From Euromontana's point of view, this project is a very interesting example of means to increase the awareness of local elective representatives from mountain areas on the EU-policies, the opportunities they offer and their limits. The experience could be encouraged in other regions and Euromontana will be keen to inform its members of the lessons learnt through this initiative.

The preparation of the Fourth European Mountain Convention

Of course, Euromontana's 2004 activity will be focused on the preparation of the Fourth European Mountain Conventions.

As members will have seen from the New Year cards sent at the end of 2003 to all Euromontana's members and partners, this major Conference will be organized on 25 and 26 November, in Rodez, France.

A short information document is already available from our web site, in the "table of announcements".

Draft Content

On the first day of this major event, some new knowledge on mountain areas in Europe on various topics will be reviewed and there will be 4 workshops on specific strategic themes which should offer opportunities for exchanges of experience, for scrutinizing policy issues related to these themes and developing recommendations.

The second day of the conference should address the major EU-policy issues at a more political level.

On the Saturday 27 November, ground visits will be organized in the area of Rodez.

Agenda of the preparation

The Bureau of Euromontana, meeting on the 27 January, should make big step forwards in the preparation of the meeting.

Potential speakers will be contacted in the course of February, as much as possible.

Working groups could be set up as early as February in order to prepare 2 or 3 "dossiers" for the Convention, on the most challenging issues. This approach has to be confirmed and further developed but all members would be informed and invited to participate in these groups.

It is expected that a first announcement would be circulated in May and the programme either in June or in September.

In order to keep some flexibility in the programme – which is particularly important this year with the change of European Commissioners and the change of EU Parliament – all the information on the meeting will be available from the web, were the programme can be updated or amended if necessary.

Meetings to come and participation in various meetings

MEETINGS TO COME AND EUROMONTANA'S DIARY

Title / theme	Organiser	<u>Place</u>	Date
EU Hearing on Organic Farming	European Commission	Brussels	22 January
Bureau meeting of Euromontana	Euromontana	Brussels	27 Januray
"Mountain food products in Europe : which assets and which strategies ?"	Euromontana / Province of Torino	Turin, Italy	12-13 February
Final meeting of the world wide project on mountain products	FAO	Chambéry, France	26-27 February
Mountain policy and EU-enlargement	European Forum Alpbach	Alpbach, Tyrol	19-21 March
Seminar on the future of the Rural Development Policy in Europe	CPMR Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions	Florence, Italy	30 avril
Third Cohesion Forum (to be confirmed)	European Commission	Brussels	10-11 May, to be confirmed
Final conference on "Strategic information for the development of agriculture products from mountain regions in Europe"	Euromontana	Cordoba, Spain	24-25 June
Fourth Olymiads of mountain cheese	Caseus Montaneus	Appenzell, Switzerland	End of October
Fourth European Mountian Convention	Euromontana	Rodez, France	25-26 November

EUROMONTANA

COMMENTS OF THE DRAFT FINAL REPORT OF THE STUDY « ANALYSIS OF THE MOUNTAIN AREAS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE CANDIDATE COUNTRIES ».

The comments of Euromontana could be described in three categories :

- 1) those comments / remarks that we hope can still be added to the report / adjustments that we hope can be made,
- 2) those comments / remarks which can probably not be integrated in the report at this stage, but that should be noted prominently in a foreword of the publication, clearly showing the unavoidable limits of the study or the recognition of some weaknesses,
- 3) Some questions / and suggestions for the “after study”.

1) Suggestions of adjustments to make in the report

- **To highlight comparisons between mountain areas and their surrounding areas** (the other areas or the national averages)

The report gathers a very high amount of information on mountain areas and massifs and a high number of maps which are very interesting.

The vast majority of the maps do not show however a comparison of the information for mountain areas and other types of areas, not even simply with national averages.

- this does not allow then some conclusions to be drawn on the specific mountain situations in their national / surrounding contexts,

- this encourages readers only to compare mountain areas with each other.

We feel this is a major reason why the report had some difficulties to overcome the “diversity” aspects of mountain areas.

We recommend therefore that maps be drawn including figures for the other areas or national averages which allow a comparison with the surrounding areas.

- **To highlight as often as possible the figures per community instead of the averages per massif.**

One of the key points in the conclusion (see first paragraph of Chapter 10.6) is “the core-periphery pattern” *within massifs or within countries* (we do not think the core-periphery pattern applies clearly between mountain massifs at European level). When showing maps with the average figure at the level of the massif, this core-periphery pattern within the massifs can not appear.

In addition these averages per massif hide the differences between mountain cities and mountain remote rural municipalities.

This is certainly particularly relevant for the “accessibility” figures : the average accessibility at the level of the massif is not very meaningful. This study should provide information about the problems of accessibility within massifs mainly and ideally again in comparison with the other areas.

We also fear that this tends to encourage simply the comparison of mountain massifs between themselves.

We recommend therefore that, as often as possible, the maps should be at municipality level.

- **Interpretation of buffer / transition areas.**

Some emphasis is placed on the phenomenon of the sometimes densely populated transition or buffer areas that often abut mountain areas. The implication perhaps is that the isolation and inaccessibility of mountain areas could be illusory because of the proximity of these transitional populated areas.

We would make two points :

- (1) the existence of these transition or buffer areas is not evidence of some unexplained economic advantage of proximity to mountain areas but is inevitable as is evident, for example, from an examination of the map of Italy – the only areas available for development are at the margin of the mountains !
- (2) Even though where mountains are close to populated areas, the benefit accruing is limited by comparison to counterpart plain areas abutting population centres. This is because the functionality of population centres extends far further into lowlands but has severely curtailed impact on adjacent mountain areas. The edges of mountain areas may benefit but this beneficial functionality does not penetrate significantly within mountain areas.

- **Other suggested amendments.**

1) In the maps showing the categories of massifs, we feel the core-periphery pattern does not apply and should not be described as such.

2) The recommendation of the report about the establishment of a network of mountain research and training centres should be clarified. As we wrote in previous comments, we strongly feel that the artificial creation of networks is not a good long term / sustainable strategy.

3) In the three trends (main risks for mountain areas) – chapter 10.6 – we feel the trend of abandonment is perhaps at a different level to the two others. Abandonment is the risk that all but the peri-urban mountain areas increasingly face. The other two trends identified are in reality extremes of inappropriate policy responses to the mountain predicament. Our priority would be to address the pervasive abandonment risk because it is literally terminal to sustainable development of mountain areas.

This involves recognising issues such as the heightened interdependence in mountains of land management activity – agriculture and forestry - , the precious biodiversity and the non-traded benefits this provides and its importance to retention and development of quality tourism and local products production (see comments below). There is a clear economic and social imperative to maintain this balance not only for the welfare of mountain areas but for the broader benefit of Europe.

Should it not be possible to address these aspects in the final report, a clear statement should be made regarding these deficiencies in the covering commentary (see below).

2) Crucial remarks to be stressed in any covering presentation of the report (to be prepared by DG Regio)

This report should not be presented without a covering commentary identifying the unavoidable data deficiencies - and recognising their implications, many of which we outline above – and explaining the need for further complementary work. The responsibility for such a commentary may lie more appropriately with the Commission than with the study authors.

We suggest that this commentary should include the following crucial elements :

- **The image provided in the report of mountain areas is only partial.**

1) there is a major under represented dimension : the environmental dimension including in particular the biodiversity dimension (because of lack of consistent / available data on this topic). We feel this is a serious missing dimension and that it affects the results (the typology notably).

2) the other very important missing dimensions are :

- the ICT dimension
- the on-costs
- the tourism dimension (the summer tourism in particular)

and it will be important to stress why these data are missing, and that further investigations need to be made.

3) Because of these two under-represented dimensions, the report does not provide information on the combination of Agriculture / tourism and the environment which in our eyes would have been particularly relevant for mountain areas.

4) the image is also partial because it does not (could not) provide an evolution in time. The trends compared to the trends at national levels for example are missing. Situations for example where the mountain employment would be higher than the national average today but where the unemployment is increasing while it decreases at national level cannot be described here.

• **The extent of the mountain area / overlap with islands and sparsely populated areas**

Finally in this context, we think it is essential that treatment of mountains as being inclusive of northern areas adversely affected by climate regardless of their typology (which Euromontana recognises) must be clearly explained. The 'headline' statement that Europe's mountains account for 41% of its territory and 21% of its population is seriously misleading. In effect, a significant proportion of this territorial coverage is accounted for by areas whose main feature is their sparsity of population. Likewise the mountain definition developed in the study coincidentally includes many island areas.

In other words the area identified by this study embraces a very high proportion of the territory and population whose interests are equally affected in the insularity and sparsely populated area rationale. Mountainousness, insularity and sparse populated areas overlap almost entirely. Substantially they are not separate categories.

3) Some questions / and suggestions for the “after study”.

- If the map should be used for any policy implementation or reference mountain areas at European level, it should be recognised that anomalies can be found at national / regional / local levels. Therefore we recommend that a margin of adaptation either by increase or reduction (5% in surface or population for example from the European definition) should be allowed at least to the states, and if possible to lower levels.

- If the 6 categories of mountain areas are to be refined, we feel it is important to explain the use that would be made of these categories. Certainly there are a lot of missing criteria in the current categories (and we surprised that GDP is not used, although we agree that alone, it is not the best economic factor to describe an economic situation). Also these categories are made without any connection with the contrast between the mountain areas and the surrounding areas (national context even).

- If the study should be used to make recommendations for the development of European mountain policies, the principle of subsidiarity should always prevail. This is an appropriate comment for this study, because the objective of making an homogeneous analysis of mountain areas across Europe made it difficult to highlight the regional specificities of mountain areas, which are very important to take into account.

- We suggest that this study, which had specific goals (producing a database at European level in particular) and which could not be exhaustive, needs to be completed and further investigations made.

We would suggest that the following themes should in particular be studied more in depth :

- environment,
- tourism and summer tourism,
- ICT

and – on costs.