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The problems of Europe's countryside

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PRELIMINARY EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

Report to be examined by the Committee on Sustainable Development on 20 March 2002 with the view to its transmission for examination and adoption by the Members of the Standing Committee to the Mini-Session of the Congress on 21 March 2002.

* *Objections to the Standing Committee procedure must reach the Chief Executive of the Congress a clear week before the meeting of the Standing Committee; if 5 members object, the report will be submitted to the Plenary Session.*

Les éventuelles objections à l'examen en Commission permanente doivent parvenir au Directeur exécutif du Congrès une semaine avant la réunion de la Commission permanente ; si 5 membres du Congrès présentent des objections, le rapport sera soumis à la session plénière.

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. The anatomy of the countryside	4-7
Living in the countryside	
Rural areas, with all their structures and problems	
Globalisation and market liberalisation as development trends	
Increasing problems of land use and spatial planning	
Infrastructure under the influence of privatisation and concentration	
Multifunctional agriculture versus competitive production conditions	
The role and situation of rural municipalities	
Population developments, migration from the countryside and the structure of earnings	
Developments in the traffic situation	
Environmental damage	
3. Strategic principles for rural development in Europe.....	8
4. Thematic main points for rural development	9-11
Integrated policy on the multifunctionality of rural areas	
The preservation and use of rural resources	
Financial equalisation systems related to functions and operated in partnership	
The countryside as a location for economic activities; regional policy	
EU enlargement	
Region-based development strategies	
Evaluation of EU policies: not an end in itself, but an instrument for improving efficiency	
Equalisation strategies for Europe's fringe areas and regions with poor infrastructure	
5. Priorities for local and regional authorities.....	12-16
Investing in quality services	
Delivering services in better ways	
Establishing better transport connections	
“Green” energy sources in the countryside	
The management and economical use of water	
The village as a social and cultural centre	
Rejuvenating market towns and creating a thriving modern economy	
Ensuring that everyone can enjoy the countryside	
Giving rural communities a bigger say in their own affairs	
6. Agriculture and the European model for the farming sector	17-23
Agriculture and rural development: the necessary convergence	
The European rural model of multifunctionality	
7. Conclusions: Real policies for real people.....	23

1. Introduction

How we live our lives is shaped by where we live our lives. But wherever that may be, people want the same basic things: jobs, homes, good public services, a safe and attractive environment and a society offering opportunity for all. North or south, rural or urban, all parts of Europe, though different, affect and are affected by each other.

That is why the CLRAE Committee on Sustainable Development decided to investigate the question, how all communities, rural and urban, can achieve their full potential. The guiding principle in both is that people must come first. European policies should be based on engaging local people in a partnership for change.

But many rural communities are going through difficult changes. Basic services have become over-stretched. In traditional industries, such as farming, incomes are falling and jobs are disappearing. There has been pressure for unwelcome development. Wildlife diversity has declined. Many European governments have failed to tackle these problems. Over the past 20 years we have seen post offices disappearing, council-owned property sold off, rural schools closed, building on green fields and village bus services cut.

The CLRAE should call on governments to turn this round: Stop the closure of rural schools and introduce measures to reduce closures of post offices in rural areas. All levels of governments should work to help farmers through very difficult times, providing additional support and a new direction in agricultural policy. Safety of rural areas should be reinforced by recruiting extra police force if necessary. As part of an integrated transport plan, there should be more investment in rural bus and train services.

Our vision is of a countryside in which we all take the opportunities which change brings to build sustainable rural communities in an improved countryside environment. It is of towns and villages where people can choose to live in the communities in which they grew up and find affordable homes, send their children to good local schools and have access to high quality public services – services often delivered in new ways, and through new outlets.

Our vision is of rural areas evolving in ways which enhance landscape and biodiversity. It is of a forward looking and competitive farming industry, delivering good stewardship of the environment as well as producing our food. It is of a rural economy based on information technology as well as on traditional skills. In short, not a theme park, but a living, working countryside for real people. We want a countryside which can shape its own future, with its voice heard by governments at all levels.

This paper is a short summary of our approach, and the new steps we are suggesting to help country people build the future they want: a future based on real policies for those real people.

2. The anatomy of the countryside

Living in the countryside

Living in the countryside has a great deal to offer. People value the quietness and sense of space, the beauty of natural surroundings, the traditions and sense of community.

But over the last twenty years, the pace of social and economic change has put increasing pressure on rural communities. While some have attracted new business, many have lost local services and jobs in agriculture and other traditional industries. Poor quality development has encroached on some valued landscapes and wildlife habitats have declined. Young people have left remote rural areas, while some villages close to cities have become commuter dormitories.

We want to reverse the decline and help country people build a better future.

Our vision is of:

- a living countryside, with thriving rural communities and access to high quality public services;
- a working countryside, with a prosperous and diverse economy, giving high and stable levels of employment;
- a protected countryside, in which the environment is sustained and enhanced, and which all can enjoy; and
- a vibrant countryside which can shape its own future and whose voice is heard by government at all levels.

Rural areas, with all their structures and problems

Europe's countryside is not made up of homogeneous areas, but presents a huge variety, on account of differing local circumstances and under the influence of the prevailing economic, political and social conditions.

In those rural areas where growth is tending to occur, it is the services sector in particular that is expanding, as a long-term process of centralisation and concentration continues.

On the other hand, not least because of marginal local conditions, prevailing economic policies have brought economic and social decline in many parts of rural Europe, with lasting and, to some extent, irreparable consequences.

Both the after-effects of over-intensive use in the broader sense and a social and economic retreat from rural regions bring problematic consequences, necessitating specific strategies to counter them, tailored to deal with the various causes.

Globalisation and market liberalisation as development trends

In periods of globalisation and liberalisation, an increase in well-being should be brought about mainly through a choice of location that is as free as possible, with economic activities being global in scope.

Economic liberalism solely calculated to optimise profits, without any regulatory framework covering fundamental ecological and social issues as well as regionally relevant aims and necessities, is nevertheless inconsistent with fundamentally balanced development strategies. The worst affected rural areas in this context are those which lack competitive characteristics and locations.

Increasing problems of land use and spatial planning

Where the most economical use of land as a finite resource is concerned, rural areas are increasingly seeing contradictory developments conflict.

Close to conurbations, and in regions visited intensively by tourists, in particular, pressure to develop housing and the utilisation of land have led to extraordinarily large challenges in terms of both forward planning and practical implementation.

In contrast, peripheral areas have shown the long-term effects of a decline in population and in economic activity.

Infrastructure under the influence of privatisation and concentration

An essential precondition for the countryside to be able to fulfil its multifunctional role is a long-term social and technical infrastructure appropriate to its functions. To date this has been predominantly a matter for various tiers of government.

The withdrawal of central government and the concentration in certain areas of infrastructure facilities touch on existential questions for country dwellers about the requisite density, quality and sustainability of various rural infrastructure facilities and services.

But fundamental questions also arise as to the regional balance in terms of equal living and working conditions and, where increased population mobility is concerned, as to optimisation in accordance with the principle of an efficient non-centralised concentration.

Multifunctional agriculture versus competitive production conditions

All rural regions have agriculture and forestry, to varying extents, but always playing a crucial part in the allocation of responsibility for land in rural areas.

Whereas agricultural operators are the economic focal point for production in the areas where production conditions are more favourable, the importance of countryside stewardship has grown in those areas with poor infrastructure and with disadvantages inflicted by nature. Growing numbers of farms combine farming with a non-agricultural main source of income, as their yields and incomes are inadequate. The structural changes in agriculture have very much left their mark, and some of the stewardship activities connected with land management are no longer guaranteed in the long term.

Common Agricultural Policy reforms have usually resulted in liberalisation of the instruments relevant to the markets, and thus to lower producer prices for farmers. At the same time, compensation payments have been raised for various reasons, but first and foremost to compensate for services to the environment.

The role and situation of rural municipalities

The role and situation of municipalities, as providers of administration and services, are not only directly affected by the various general development trends, but also involve considerable problems, according to local conditions.

Municipalities with below average tax revenue and receiving inadequate redistribution benefits through national redistribution machinery, in particular, are not in a position to provide the necessary services in the longer term.

It is precisely these municipalities, in contrast, not least because of the large amount of land they cover, which have to perform certain tasks that can be done and maintained with incomparably greater profitability in conurbations.

Population developments, migration from the countryside and the structure of earnings

Services and economic activities, and their maintenance, very much depend on infrastructure and conditions in the region. In more than a few regions the population has declined as a result of ageing and migration, not least because of the insufficient opportunities to earn a living, and a consequence of this has been a withdrawal of public facilities, and so on.

Developments in the traffic situation

The constant increase in vehicle use for professional and private purposes has reached the point in many parts of the countryside where not only the capacity of the road network but also the ecological limits have been reached, or even surpassed. It had been the intention that some road traffic would shift to the railways, but greater efforts need to be made, in view of the huge rate of traffic increases. A considerable proportion of the countryside is directly affected, as is the ecological sensitivity of its fairly natural cultivated landscapes.

Environmental damage

Both traffic and economic activities, to an extent determined by their intensity, have given rise to lasting pollution and damage to the environment. Extensive efforts to clean up and to avoid causing pollution notwithstanding, problem regions do exist, also encompassing rural areas.

3. Strategic principles for rural development in Europe

Europe's rural areas are not just the outcome of historical development, but also reflect local circumstances and various policies. For rural areas, long-term stability particularly depends on balanced multifunctionality, especially through synergy between the different economic sectors, with account being taken of endogenous resources.

It is not just market-related mechanisms that are prerequisites for balanced living and economic conditions, but also rules and regulations, so that ecological and social aims in particular may also be taken into account.

Urban and rural areas are not antagonistic, but fundamental, and therefore necessary, parts of people's living and working environment as a whole. Development strategies for the countryside must allow for this fact, so a co-operative culture of partnership is needed.

Rural areas have to perform not just a vital function for the state in terms of land use, but also fundamental roles vital to the population. Equal living and working conditions are therefore a vital precondition for the balanced development of the state as a whole.

In any case Europe's rural areas are the very embodiment of its natural resources. Respect for the limits of growth and the acute potential for internal and external danger require a policy of sustainability and implementation of a responsible policy for future generations.

The effects of omnipresent globalisation have led to greater value being attached to small and manageable social systems. Regionalisation and rural areas must be linked to each other during future development, as this is the only way of achieving sustainable effects for rural areas through endogenous and regional policies.

Equal living and working conditions and fair opportunities are largely brought about in rural areas through efficient public and private services. Sustainability of supplies, taking into account people's great mobility in their professional and leisure activities, therefore has to be a vital principle.

Europe's rural areas base their distinctive character and originality, as well as their development opportunities, on the variety of regional resources. Sustainability out of a sense of responsibility to future generations is a matter of priority, also urgently needing to be supplemented through express subsidiarity of action, in particular. But this does not absolve the political world and other tiers of government from their specific tasks of ensuring appropriate conditions for rural areas.

4. Thematic main points for rural development

Integrated policy on the multifunctionality of rural areas

In the future, too, a fundamental and socially significant role will have to be played by a countryside that is capable of functioning, with account being taken of its mutual relations with towns and conurbations.

Policies that relate to rural areas therefore need to be harmonised. Of particular importance in this respect are the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the Rural Development Programme, Structural Fund intervention under Objectives 1 and 2, and public and private infrastructure.

In the enlarged European Union, too, rural areas must be the priority subject of a comprehensive policy.

The preservation and use of rural resources

A distinctive multifunctionality and a scarcity of land are features of extensive tracts of Europe's countryside.

Planning for future provision which endeavours to make sparing use of resources therefore has high priority, it being vital at the same time to strike a balance between retention of property and the needs of society as a whole.

Their immediate proximity to the problem situation gives municipalities a high degree of responsibility, which needs to be safeguarded in the light of general conditions and harmonisation efforts at supra-regional level.

Financial equalisation systems related to functions and operated in partnership

The major and vital role of municipalities as the authorities responsible for administration and the provision of services significant for rural areas' economic and social stability necessitates the further development of function-related financing systems based on partnership and solidarity.

Discriminatory regulations therefore need to be superseded by transfer systems more appropriate to the aforementioned principles and demands relating to the desired functions.

The countryside as a location for economic activities; regional policy

The natural, technical and social infrastructure of rural areas provides good conditions for economic activities in regions where circumstances are favourable. Tourism quite simply provides people with a living in many parts of Europe. But industry and commerce also have an important base in rural regions.

Under the influence of extensive market liberalisation, however, concentrations are building up to the detriment of regions with poor infrastructure. Regional policy must play an active part in the context of this process, preventing larger disparities between regions. A particular objective in this context is long-term employment policy effects for the rural population:

- greater use of the development programmes of the European Social Fund (ESF) to support the population in rural regions, in the face of new economic and social needs, with particular account being taken of structural change;
- greater backing for the Rural Development Programme from supporting measures by the EU Structural Funds;
- increased flexibility of the EU framework for state support supplementing EU structural assistance for the countryside, especially enabling account to be taken of specific regional needs.

EU enlargement

EU enlargement necessitates a policy on future provision for the predominantly rural regions adjoining the future member states. Above all, specific advantage must be taken of existing possibilities under EU policies.

A separate programme of assistance for the border regions, in accordance with the ideas of the EU Council, ought to provide the requisite support over a limited period of time for the measures applied to give the border regions a sustainable economic and social boost.

Region-based development strategies

The great variety of regional resources gives many rural areas sustainable development potential. It also offers good foundations for inter-sectoral strategies, which have been implemented and given support through the LEADER Community Initiative in particular, over the years.

The new LEADER+ Community Initiative offers new, as well as traditional, starting points, of which greater use should be made so that rural areas can work towards sustainable, innovative and comprehensive development.

Evaluation of EU policies: not an end in itself, but an instrument for improving efficiency

Evaluation is already proving to be a distinctive instrument for the Structural Funds and the Rural Development Programme. More of a problem is the application of the findings of evaluations so as to alter and improve EU policies as necessary.

Another challenge is that of actually targeting evaluation efficiently on the vital basic structures of policies. Evaluation must not become an end in itself, but perform its own specific task.

Equalisation strategies for Europe's fringe areas and regions with poor infrastructure

Many rural areas have regressed substantially, especially because of unfavourable local conditions. Nor, to some extent, are endogenous resources enough for economic and social stability to be achieved through the use of endogenous development potential. An equalisation strategy with a view to solidarity is needed in such cases, providing a basis for further phases of development through structural assistance and public funding. National and EU policies should both be applied with a view to achieving this.

5. Priorities for local and regional authorities

Investing in quality services

Governments should publish a rural service standard, setting out minimum standards and targets and explaining how they will be delivered. This pledge is a starting point. It should be updated as the modernisation of public services proceeds and governments are able to improve those standards. It should be reviewed every year.

Rural policies should:

- safeguard rural schools against closure, and invest to improve them;
- connect all rural schools to the internet;
- create more childcare and early education places;
- increase resources for rural ambulances to cut response times;
- improve medical services through mobile units; and
- set up new one stop primary health care centres, offering video and telelinks to specialist health advice without the need to travel far.

All levels of government should work to make communities safer through initiatives such as crime reduction partnerships and local watch schemes. Police modernisation should target rural policing as a priority.

Delivering services in better ways

Providing services effectively to people living in small, scattered rural communities means being more customer-orientated. And it means being more innovative in the way we deliver those services: for example, using new technology; sharing buildings between several providers; using mobile units and offering appointment bookings which take account of the distances people may have to travel and what transport they have. We are asking all rural service providers to adopt these principles.

The authorities should aim not only to retain the rural post office network, but to extend both its range of business activities and the other services it offers. For example banking, one stop internet access, pensions, benefits, prescriptions and health advice as well as normal post office business could be offered.

‘Community service funds’ should be established to help local groups, including churches and voluntary bodies re-establish vital services which villages have lost. Village shops, cultural and social centres should be able to apply for grants from this fund for providing facilities such as community meeting rooms, cash machines or technology access points like internet kiosks.

The possibility of tax relief to clubs, garages and other service providers which benefit the rural community, as well as to village shops, should be investigated.

The internet provides a great new opportunity to bring information and services to rural people. There should be internet access and learning points across rural areas so that people in the countryside have easy and convenient use of information and communications technology to help them access, for instance, health advice, employment opportunities, legal and court services.

Establishing better transport connections

Transport connections are the lifeline for villages. But public transport is not so readily available in rural areas. And for many agricultural households, private motoring is not an available option. To be responsive to rural needs, transport needs to be flexible. Governments should increase the range of options people have for getting about and encourage more locally-based and innovative solutions.

We want to make it easier for people to get to and from their local market town, wherever they live. Subsidies for rural buses should increase, so as to have an hourly or more frequent bus service within ten minutes walk for the majority of rural homes.

Governments should support all sorts of transport schemes especially suited to local circumstances, including innovative bus and minibus services.

Smaller communities should be able to apply for subsidies for small scale projects such as buying a minibus, setting up a social car scheme, or a car or moped pool, or paying a bus company to divert a route through an outlying village. This will give them more freedom to decide on the kind of help they need.

Tax reductions for rural motorists should help those who depend on car transport. Rural bypasses and schemes to reduce traffic speed through villages should improve road safety for people living in the country.

“Green” energy sources in the countryside

The relatively low prices of fossil fuels have over a long period led to wasteful and polluting behaviour and production methods. Strategic development of alternative energy sources led nowhere, for lack of competitiveness. Clear successes have been scored only by technically more advanced procedures such as those relating to biomass, not least thanks to a policy of promotion.

Renewable energy, especially in the form of biomass, but also the already practised use of wind and solar energy, needs long-term positioning with appropriate supporting measures in areas such as taxation.

The management and economical use of water

High-quality water is a resource that is becoming increasingly scarce throughout the world. Sustainable supplies to the population are increasingly a subject of discussion, as is the economical use of water resources. Thus rural areas - particularly mountain regions - have absolutely huge future potential, with ecological and economic implications.

This situation makes it necessary to adopt a forward-looking strategy calculated to preserve water as a valuable and vital resource, to develop ways of using it economically, and to give greater attention to waste water treatment and the protection of the environment.

The village as a social and cultural centre

As a result of the attachment of greater value to smaller units on the grounds that they are manageable places where communication is easy, villages are again taking on a more central function than they had been fulfilling in the countryside. Mutual relations between villages and open countryside with its scattered small settlements lend rural areas great variety and a strong sense of identity.

Village “renewal”, in the sense of a comprehensive approach encompassing social and cultural components, is crucial, with many beneficial effects for the countryside as a whole.

We want young people to be able to live in the communities where they grew up. New homes should be built in small rural settlements which will be affordable to local people, especially young couples.

The authorities should establish special rural programmes to provide subsidised homes for rent, as well as support people on modest incomes to buy their own homes. Planning authorities should make better use of their powers to secure affordable housing as part of new developments. They should insist on a proportion of social housing even on the smallest site. Where necessary, they may look for one affordable home for every house developed for the open market.

Local authorities should be allowed to raise property tax on second homes and to use the money to meet local housing needs.

Building new homes on previously-developed land should relieve unnecessary pressure for building in the countryside.

Rejuvenating market towns and creating a thriving modern economy

Market towns are the essential drivers of rural economic prosperity. All levels of authorities should be committed to strengthening them, to help them create new job opportunities, new workspaces, restored high streets, better amenities and good transport links to their surrounding areas. Market towns should be consulted and allowed to define their priorities.

Rural businesses should be offered better business support through special programmes and through information and communications technology. Governments should stimulate wider broadband coverage to make high speed internet access and business data transfer available in more rural areas. Skill levels should be raised, using the internet to extend training opportunities. Transport policies should also improve infrastructure in rural areas.

Small rural businesses should be provided with a special tax relief.

More than any other activity, farming defines the fabric of European rural life. Agriculture's primary role will continue to be producing the bulk of Europe's food and contributing to exports. But its contribution to maintaining an attractive and diverse country environment and to the wider local economy is increasingly important.

Governments should work to reform the European common agricultural policy away from production quotas and subsidies and towards more competitive markets and supporting objectives for protecting the environment and developing rural economies.

Agri-environment schemes should be supported, as well as vocational training to improve farming methods, develop new farm businesses and promote environmentally sensitive practices. New rural enterprise schemes should help farmers diversify, provide new grants for energy crops, marketing and processing.

It should be made easier for farmers to develop new businesses by reducing unnecessary legislation and planning restrictions, for instance, on converting farm buildings. There should be targeted help for small and medium sized abattoirs. This would benefit animal welfare and boost local jobs as well as help farmers who are preparing products for specialist and organic markets.

Ensuring that everyone can enjoy the countryside

Tourism is an important rural business. We want more people to be able to enjoy the pleasures of the countryside, that is why we are proposing opening up more rights of access to mountain, moor, heath and registered common land as well as protecting and improving the network of historic rights of way.

In future, tourism-related businesses such as forestry and horse riding will provide increased sources of rural income, as will distinctive local products.

Local and regional authorities should produce a joint strategy to help promote rural tourism beyond the oversubscribed 'honeypot' sites. They should focus on better visitor information, better business advice and co-operation, access to start-up finance and a review of planning guidance.

At the same time as encouraging visitors, we must preserve the things that make the countryside special: peace, space, wildlife and the natural beauty of the landscape. The planning system should be used to cut development pressure on the countryside in favour of recycling previously-developed 'brownfield' land.

The countryside should be protected for its own sake. We should not provide protection only to the most valued landscapes in designated national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty, but ask planning authorities to try to maintain valued and distinctive local features of the countryside everywhere.

Disappearing wildlife species and habitats should be restored, also by supporting farmers to farm in ways which benefit wildlife and enhance the landscape. There should be national guidance for local wildlife sites and new biodiversity strategies for species and habitats most in need.

Giving rural communities a bigger say in their own affairs

Every part of rural Europe is different. Our approach is not 'one-size-fits-all', rather to give communities a toolkit of measures. Local people are best placed to identify their individual challenges and opportunities and to shape their future. Rural communities should be assisted in developing town and village plans to put to the local planning authority. They should set out what people want their communities to be like: how housing should be built; what features should be preserved; what design is in keeping with the character of the area.

Therefore the most local tier of administration should be strengthened and given a bigger role. Councils which meet certain criteria, including being well managed and good at representing local views, should be able to work more closely with partner authorities to take on more responsibility for shaping their area's development and running its services.

Co-ordination of policy at national, regional and local level should improve. All levels of authorities must be committed to joined-up policies which recognise that economic, environmental and social issues are interdependent and cannot be tackled successfully in isolation from each other.

Rural people should be given a strong voice on delivery of services. People and organisations who live and work in the countryside should be asked for their views, suggestions and priorities. This dialogue should be facilitated by establishing national rural sounding boards. There should also be regional rural sounding boards to monitor the regional and local delivery of policy in rural areas. All government departments should consider and report on how their policy decisions will impact on rural communities.

6. Agriculture and the European model for the farming sector

Contemporary society makes much greater demands on agriculture, and especially on agricultural policy, going beyond specific supply targets to encompass qualitative aspects, in particular, including environment-friendly methods of production.

Multifunctionality, especially in the way in which the land is looked after, and the maintenance and care of fairly natural cultivated landscapes logically throws up the question, within a liberalised agricultural system, of how these services and appropriate payment for them are to be assessed, since market-determined prices for agricultural products cannot take account of the services provided by agriculture in terms of its multifunctionality.

The measures listed below need to be taken as a matter of great urgency, bearing in mind current development trends and the specific demands made of, and the general conditions for, the application and safeguarding of the European agricultural model:

- continued development of the CAP as an EU area of common policy, with a sustainable guarantee of its financial basis, extending to the enlargement of the EU and the effects of the WTO's activities;
- a EU Community preferential system, accepting the agricultural sector on the whole as it exists under the European agricultural model, without this being undermined by WTO rules;
- a safety net, with the assistance of market-related instruments and function-based equalisation payments, so as to secure for European agriculture, with its specific nature and requisite multifunctionality, fair international competition conditions;
- the system in which all inputs have to be sourced from the land used for production is closely connected with the varied tasks involved in multifunctionality. It is therefore necessary for the rules on equalisation payments to take account of this, as well as of specific function fulfilment;
- further development of the Rural Development Programme to secure the multifunctionality of agriculture and to promote synergies through the interlinking of agricultural activities in rural areas;
- the environment, hygiene and animal protection standards introduced through the latest EU agricultural policy reform, in particular, necessitate EU-wide harmonisation and consistency, so as to ensure that preconditions and competition conditions are equal.

Agriculture and rural development: the necessary convergence

The future of Europe's rural areas cannot be envisaged without taking into account the role of agriculture in the management of these spaces. Rural development is faced with two pitfalls: the first consists in only thinking of rural development in terms of the development of agriculture; the second is to think of rural society as separate from the agricultural world, when not against it.

The paradox with which we are faced is the following: at the same time as it becomes a very great agricultural and agri-industrial power, Europe stops being an agrarian civilisation and some of its areas become optional for agriculture. A prodigious movement of concentration is under way, tending to relocate productions according to the places of processing and distribution.

Agriculture can be doing well while a large number of rural areas are doing poorly. We therefore cannot think of the future of rural areas without weighing the role of agriculture in the management of these spaces.

How can this conclusion be taken into account and an agriculture imagined that is in keeping with the expectations and interests of European societies and areas as a whole. To devise this programme, we must first take seriously the fact that agriculture does not only produce tangible goods but intangible goods as well; not only food products but non-food products as well; not only market productions but non-market productions as well.

The history of the 20th century has taught us that developed societies can mine, extract and utilise natural resources less and less and become societies that invent and produce their energy raw material. In this context, the organic and biotechnological production of energy (ethanol, ether from colza, etc.) becomes a long-term strategic and environmental challenge, comparable in importance to yesterday's food challenge, even if still quite often we are talking about courses of action that require long-term experimentation and involve risk-taking by different partners, particularly industrialists.

In addition to these energy productions, agriculture is called upon to provide basic molecules for industries of synthesis, textiles or pharmaceuticals. To introduce the agricultural world through these non-food productions into a new energy and environment culture is a novel direction of great significance.

But agriculture is not only an activity creating tangible goods and commodities. It is also - and can become more and more so - a sector producing intangible goods, and this in two main categories.

The first category comprises everything related to culture, health, gastronomy, tourism, education and training of children. New occupations are to be invented to meet the expectations of consumers and citizens. This demand should be less and less a "secondary" or "subsidiary" demand, associated with the recreational activities and entertainment of city-dwellers deprived of the open air. Not only does the consumption of culture and recreational activities represent a growing share of the expenses in the household budget, but this demand is also the expression of a more profound aspiration to redefine - going beyond the museums, parks and other exhibitions intended to explain to these city-dwellers an agricultural world that is further and further removed from them - the link that society maintains, through agriculture and farmers, with nature.

This educational expectation is an important challenge. It refers back to one of the essential paradoxes of a situation experienced by a growing percentage of the European population which has never eaten so well in terms of diversity, quantity, freshness, etc., but never known so little about what it was eating: in an increasingly urbanised Europe, less and less families have rural roots and everyone has met children who at eight or nine years old had still not made the connection between a hamburger and a cow! Culturally, it is without question a loss. Politically, it is a risk if one accepts that this ignorance can generate at any time irrational collective reactions. School alone or even the family alone will not be enough to disseminate this knowledge and learning. The professional circles concerned, in particular farmers, should make their contribution. Imagine what the cultural contribution in the broad sense would be if each European child had the possibility at primary school to visit a farm to see what an animal is, what a plant is, how they are cared for, what is done with him...

The second category of intangible productions comprises productions of nature, the environment, water, the landscape, balance in the areas. It is obvious that a country - and even more so a continent - that has these natural assets is richer, including from an accounting point of view, than a polluted, run-down, depleted... space. In the past, this wealth was the fruit of an agricultural activity whose purpose was the global development of the land. In this sense, the patrimonial concept of the land had the advantage of having the individual interest (that of the farmers) converge with the general interest (that of society). By treating the land like real estate capital which is only worth what it "yields", the logic of strongly favouring productivity has detached farming from the mission of preserving the environment which was associated with it (at least implicitly) in the patrimonial concept.

In other words, if we want harmonious landscapes, rich land, limpid water, areas full of life, a viable environment, a varied nature, we must now choose to produce them, that is to say make them the objective of a deliberate and publicly debated policy. In this perspective, a vast site is opening up for farmers and all those who want to practice the professions relating to spaces.

Another way of practising the profession of farmer is looming on the horizon. To move beyond the standard, technical accountant, model of today's farmer, the new generation is not being asked to reinvent yesterday's farmer but to invent a job of synthesis, a short-term and long-term job, a job of the market and the area. Not only manager, not only technician, not only gardener, not only coordinator, but probably all of that at the same time.

This redefinition means that the relationship that the agricultural world maintains with the public authorities has to be set in a new context. Rather than an abstract contract between agriculture and Europe, it is a contract defined between each one of tomorrow's farmers and the public authorities that has to be imagined. It is an individualised contract, with specifications, stipulating the rights and duties of each side.

Since agriculture is necessarily a public affair and therefore everyone's business, it is the relationship between the farmer and the public authorities that has to be modernised today. By explicitly directing public money towards the preservation and improvement of the area, environment, water, landscape, we will at the same time avoid introducing a definitively dual agriculture: on the one hand, an exporting agriculture monopolising public money, yesterday in the form of export refunds (according to the difference between the guaranteed price and

world price), today in the form of compensations, and tomorrow in the form of repairs of the damage caused to the environment; on the other hand, an agriculture weakened on the markets, occupying space and requiring national solidarity to avoid complete impoverishment.

To put the requirements of balanced area and management of the environment and landscapes back at the heart of the definition of public intervention is to refuse this dualism that is developing to the benefit of the diversity of agricultures, farmers and areas. It is to invent a new agricultural mission, at least as mobilising as the food mission that had to be carried out in the post-war period. It is to put the area at the heart of the definition of agricultural policy. It is finally to explicitly have agricultural development converge with rural development.

The European rural model and multifunctionality

In the conclusions of the "Millennium Round" negotiations of the World Trade Organisation, the Council of Ministers for Agriculture underlined that the protection of the agricultural world was of fundamental importance for Europe given the multifunctional nature of European agriculture and the role that it plays in the economy and society as a whole.

Defending the European agricultural model as an essential objective in the multilateral trade negotiations, is a strong political statement expressing the distinctiveness and importance of the European agricultural and rural model for European society as a whole. It is recognition that the debate on agricultural and rural policies cannot be limited to an exclusively technical kind. It also promotes the European agricultural and rural model on the international scene, a model that reflects the specific history, cultures and choices of European society and which is therefore not negotiable.

It echoes the concerns of our society and the socio-economic changes of a world increasingly affected by the globalisation of trade, a world where the search for and assertion of identities are perhaps especially strong because our societies are increasingly torn between the international and local levels.

"Agricultural model vs. European rural model"; "rural vs. agri". These two terms, which in the past sometimes seemed to be at odds with one another or at least compete with one another, are today totally complementary. Politically speaking, Agenda 2000 dispelled any ambiguity by making rural development the second pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). This integration, sanctioned at the political and legal level, is also to be found in the promotion of the concept of "multifunctional agriculture".

This concept recognises the fact that agriculture has several roles in addition to the production of agricultural goods and food. Because of this distinctive feature, agriculture deserves special treatment in international trade negotiations in order to preserve the roles that agriculture plays for the environment, for rural landscapes and also for rural development. The countries that are "friends" of multifunctionality do not, however, have a monolithic view of the concept. They accept certain differences in the definition that each country can give, reflecting its history, its culture and also its level of development.

But how does Europe see multifunctional agriculture? Where is the connection with the European rural model?

Simply stated and at the risk of repeating ourselves, multifunctional agriculture is not just about the production of agricultural goods and food. It is also an agricultural activity that fulfils others purposes, other functions.

The European Union is 44% farmland but an additional percentage consists of other areas maintained by farmers in the countryside (wooded areas, natural areas, buildings and infrastructures). These farmers, along with other people working in rural areas, therefore manage over half of Europe's territory. Consequently, there is an obvious link between agriculture, rurality and territory and the non-market functions of agriculture are patent.

Thus in the European Union, agriculture contributes to the preservation, maintenance and development of landscapes. Furthermore, rural roads, green areas, woods and other elements of the landscape and rural heritage are increasingly fulfilling a recreational purpose.

Farming also contributes to environmental protection by preserving biodiversity, managing biotopes in an integrated way, retaining soils and maintaining the quality of water. What is more, it helps prevent certain natural risks thanks, for example, to grazing and the clearance of underbrush, which prevents fires, to the maintenance of river banks and small hydraulic structures or to the replanting of hedgerows.

Because farming is first of all tied to the land, it being above all an action affecting the natural environment, agriculture and the environment are closely linked. Furthermore, it is scientifically recognised that in rural Europe the working of the land over several decades and quite often several centuries has produced very special and extremely rich ecosystems, which would be irremediably threatened if agriculture were abandoned.

Of course, it would be absurd to deny the devastating role that certain farming practices have had, and in some cases continue to have, on the environment. It should nonetheless be recalled that the European Union has gradually built up a legal arsenal to fight against pollution and promote more environmentally-friendly farming practices. The inclusion of environmental protection requirements in the definition and implementation of Community policies is, moreover, since the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty, a legal obligation for the Union, an obligation strengthened following the entry into force of the Amsterdam Treaty on 1 May 1999.

Agenda 2000 is thus a continuation and deepening of the "greening" of the CAP. The objective is to have European farmers comply with minimum environmental requirements and to encourage them to go further, meaning to adopt practices beneficial to the environment.

Agriculture also plays a role in the development of rural areas, particularly in the areas of the European Union where farming remains one of the foundations of the local economy. Because of its decisive hold over the land and the fact that it perpetuates certain practices, agriculture plays an essential role in regional planning and in the preservation of cultural assets and traditions (eg. certain old rural buildings or concrete know how of the production of typical products). This is at the heart of the interwoven relationship between farming and rural development: the concrete expression of what multifunctional agriculture is can be seen

in the synergies between farming and rural development, revealing in this way our European rural model.

The notion of rurality is generally defined on the basis of population density, and according to this indicator nearly 80% of the European Union is rural. In addition, with the transformation of agriculture these past few decades and the wider socio-economic changes affecting European society, the role of agriculture and society's expectations of it are no longer the same. There is today a growing demand for those non-market goods and services that agriculture provides at lower cost and in addition to its primary purpose of producing agricultural goods. The revival of old practices and traditional local products, the success of green tourism and the interest in local cultures and traditions are all proof of this.

Europeans want their countryside to remain a living place. The European vision of rural development is not to create museums far from cities, in the heart of rural areas, where people from the city can spend their holiday admiring a landscape or discovering past traditions. Nor should it evolve towards a world without country folk where food is produced by a small number of owners of agricultural holdings.

Europeans are truly attached to the idea of preserving the extreme wealth of farming activities and rural areas in the Union. The aim is to maintain a living rural Europe, integrated in the economy thanks to its resources and local initiatives. The ultimate aim is to keep our areas alive.

This vision is not incompatible with competitive agriculture, which is one of the objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy. Strictly speaking, rural policy and agricultural policy are complementary. This is clearly stated in Agenda 2000, which makes rural development the second pillar of the CAP but does not limit it to agriculture.

These complementary policies are a response to the fact that the economy of rural areas is becoming diversified and moving beyond farming. Moreover, this diversification is encouraged in order to strengthen the economic fabric of rural areas, weakened by agriculture's transformation in the second half of the 20th century. Thus what makes the European rural model so original is basically the integration between these various activities; the awareness that the development of rural areas must be planned in a holistic manner by incorporating the economic, social and cultural dimensions; and finally the recognition that this development is based on people, on dynamic rural communities.

The European countryside has visibly suffered to differing degrees from the unprecedented transformation of these past decades.

Agricultural practices and structures have radically changed, and the rural exodus has been on an impressive scale, even leading to desertification in some areas. The socio-economic horizon of the countryside has been bleak. But little by little, rural areas have been regaining hope from development, even if a lot still remains to be done. This has been achieved with the mobilisation of the people living in rural areas, with the intervention of the public authorities backed by European Community policies from the mid-1980s and with a growing demand from our societies for a better environment, beautiful landscapes, living villages and quality products.

That is therefore what the European rural model is: an incredibly rich heritage coupled with local development initiatives implemented by rural communities, both of which are supported by a strong political will to bring rural areas out of their isolation and to develop them; in other words, to give them their chance.

7. Conclusions: Real policies for real people

If we are to take full advantage of the potential of the rural world and recognise the socio-economic but also historical and cultural importance of agriculture in rural Europe, the multifunctional nature of European agriculture must be maintained.

For country residents:

- investment in better public services – schools, health, transport and crime reduction – and a rural service standard, reviewed annually
- new affordable homes in small settlements
- access to a wide range of day-to-day transactions through post offices, internet and local small businesses
- a bigger say in community planning

For rural businesses:

- investment in market towns and more targeted help from regional development agencies
- better transport, ICT coverage, skills training and business advice
- potential reduction in rate bills

For farmers:

- more money for agri-environment schemes; marketing grants, and tailored business advice to help modernise and improve agricultural, horticultural and forestry holdings
- help with planning to enable farmers to use surplus farm buildings and, less burdensome regulation generally
- help with diversification, marketing and skill training
- support for small and medium sized abattoirs

For everyone:

- stronger protection for landscapes, wildlife and habitats
- more access and a better rights of way network
- a living, working countryside maintained for the benefit of us all, wherever we live
