

# CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES OF EUROPE

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## **Resolution 128 (2002)<sup>1</sup> on the problems of Europe's countryside**

The Congress,

Having regard to:

1. The report on the problems of Europe's countryside, presented by Mr Pumberger (Austria, L) and Mr Tobler (Switzerland, L) on behalf of the Committee on Sustainable Development;
2. The "Guiding principles for sustainable spatial development of the European continent" adopted by the 12th European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning;
3. The European Landscape Convention, opened for signature in October 2000 in Florence;
4. The "Motion on Council of Europe activities for sustainable development" adopted by the international non-governmental organisation members of the European Center for Rural and Environmental Interests in January 2001;
5. Recommendation 1296 (1996) of the Parliamentary Assembly on a European charter for rural areas;
6. Resolution 1265 (2001) of the Parliamentary Assembly on the role of interregional co-operation for agricultural and rural development;
7. Earlier CLRAE resolutions relating to the problems of sustainable rural development, including:
  - a. Resolution 210 (1990) on the revitalisation of the countryside: local and regional government action;
  - b. Resolution 211 (1990) on the regional impact of the reform of the common agricultural policy;
8. The conclusions and declarations of the European Campaign for the Countryside organised by the Council of Europe at the initiative of the CLRAE;

Considering that:

9. Europe's countryside, and the people who live in it, are a highly valued and varied asset for the whole population of the continent: the largest part of rural Europe is covered by agricultural land and forests, which have a strong influence on the character of European landscapes;

10. The great diversity of nature and of human culture enriches the quality of life for all Europeans. It is our duty to understand, protect and enhance this heritage;

11. At present, in many parts of Europe, the rural heritage is being rapidly eroded and even destroyed by social or technological changes, modern agriculture, urban growth, neglect and other forces;

12. The local economies of many rural areas have become narrow and relatively weak, with an over-dependence upon economic decisions made in distant cities;

13. Although its role is diminishing in many parts of Europe (especially in the west), agriculture is and must remain a major interface between people and the countryside, and farmers have a duty as stewards of many of the natural resources of rural Europe;

14. In many rural areas, the decline of population and a certain isolation have weakened the vitality of communities, and has led rural people to underestimate their own abilities and to under-value their traditional resources and culture;

15. A vital element in the quality of life for rural people is quality of, and reasonable access to, services – such as shops, post offices, banks, hospitals, surgeries, schools, public transport. The last thirty years have seen a widespread decline in such services within villages and small towns;

Convinced that:

16. Local and regional authorities have a leading role in formulating local policy for their own area, in harnessing financial and other resources to the needs of rural areas, in stimulating the understanding and involvement of the people and in ensuring that necessary action is taken;

Calls on local and regional authorities of Europe's countryside to:

17. Raise public awareness about the importance of initiating a new start in rural development policy, to make rural areas more attractive for people to live and work in, and to turn them into centres of a more meaningful life for a growing diversity of people of all ages;

18. Devise a rural strategy for their area in partnership with other relevant actors, especially by consulting and involving the local people, who often have a far better feel for what is appropriate and sustainable in their area;

19. Enlist the understanding, enthusiasm and positive involvement of the population, particularly those who live in each locality, about their own local heritage. Support the work of many public and voluntary bodies which seek to interpret the heritage to the public;

20. Place great importance upon the activity of voluntary, private and non-profit groups within rural communities. They include co-operatives, foundations, societies, syndicates, associations, women's organisations, church groups, youth clubs and many other agencies. The special strength of such bodies is their close knowledge of, and commitment to, local issues and their directness of action;

21. Stimulate the understanding and involvement of rural people, by offering activities, education and training. It is of great importance, for example, that children learn about the history, wildlife and modern life of their own village, small town or rural area. Also vital is the education of the urban population about rural life and the rural heritage;

22. Encourage continued use of traditional houses, farm buildings or churches, or their sensitive conversion to new uses. The protection and interpretation of heritage features should preferably be done on their original site, in order to give the public a truthful impression of their origin, context and supporting landscape;

23. Apply policies of housing and planning control which permit and encourage the provision of adequate housing, using both inherited buildings and new ones. The aim, within a living countryside, should be to achieve high quality in the meeting of modern needs while respecting local traditions of building;

24. Recognise farmers as the stewards of our heritage, and reward them for this role. Encourage them in their efforts to protect, maintain and enhance the locally-distinctive qualities of landscape, wildlife or culture, and to provide for public access to their land;

25. Support the continuance of traditional farming practices, which created the cultural landscape and are the best guarantee of its future, maintaining terraces, hedges, drystone walls or other landscape features;

26. Encourage farmers and other country-dwellers to gain extra income from local "adding of value" to farm products – turning milk into cheese, meat into traditional local products, fruit into preserves, wool into garments – and (where possible) retailing them within the region to tourists or to city-dwellers;

27. Encourage farmers, and particularly those on small farms who may not be able to make a living from farming alone, to diversify their income through other activities on or off the farm. This may be in non-food crops; forestry, or woodland management; farm-based tourism; agricultural contracting or similar activity; or part-time work of many kinds within the wider local economy;

28. Encourage a revival and new growth of manufacturing, craft and service industries in rural regions. The focus should be on adding value to local primary products; on use of traditional skills and products from each area; and

on local control of individual or co-operative enterprises, rather than dependence on subsidiaries of distant firms; In each area, the precise solutions will depend upon the local heritage, upon local or regional products, markets and opportunities;

29. Make use of modern telecommunications to assist the revival and strengthening of rural economies and services. They encourage decentralised economic activity, and offset the rural handicaps of distance and sparse population. They can permit small and medium-sized enterprises in rural areas to gain access to markets, suppliers and collaborators at any distance, and to increase their work efficiency. They can bring training and education to people where they live;

30. Elaborate a programme for local tourism development which is culturally compatible with the host population. It demands the development of programmes which are based directly on the resources of the area and on local entrepreneurship. It should secure quality in new development and bring financial benefits directly to local people. The quantity of tourist activity should be controlled, avoiding excessive development or heavy traffic;

31. Encourage the use of local financial resources to promote local rural development projects. Use financial engineering in rural credit techniques in order to mobilise better the synergies between public and private funding, reduce financial constraints on small and medium-sized enterprises, promote productive investment, and diversify rural economies;

32. Reverse the decline in rural services: service providers should be made aware of the suffering caused in rural areas – particularly to the elderly, children and those without private transport – by withdrawal of services. Services should be sustained, for example by use of multipurpose facilities, provision of mobile services and distant services via the Internet, or encouragement of self-help by village communities;

33. Support the vitality and well-being of rural communities in social and cultural terms, by encouraging traditional customs and festivals, the use of minority languages and cultures, which have high importance to the people and which also contribute to the cultural richness of Europe;

34. Ensure that opportunities for education and training are readily available to rural people, on a geographically dispersed basis. Promote, in all possible ways, local capacity building for sustainable development in rural areas and, in particular, private and community-based initiatives which are well-integrated into global markets;

35. Provide secure and good housing with modern amenities to the rural population. Particular priority should

be given to adequacy of housing for people who have their roots, or jobs, in rural areas, but whose income is low;

36. Enhance the administrative capacity and effectiveness of regional and local governments and community-based groups, through the provision of technical assistance, training, better communications, partnership and the sharing of research, information and exchange of experience through networking between regions and between rural communities throughout Europe;

37. Work towards a system of intermunicipal co-operation in each country which permits both the expression and

fulfilling of local needs within each village or similar small settlement, and collaboration between a group of towns and villages within a region to meet needs of a wider kind;

38. Play an active role in promoting sustainable rural development in an international context.

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1. Debated and adopted by the Standing Committee of the Congress on 21 March 2002 (see Doc. CG (8) 28, draft resolution presented by Mr G. Pumberger and Mr E. Tobler, rapporteurs).