



Recommendation 1296 (1996)¹

European Charter for Rural Areas

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Assembly refers to its many recommendations and resolutions on rural development and on the importance of maintaining a living European countryside, in particular the recent [Resolution 1069 \(1995\)](#) on the activities of OECD in 1994. It commends the Committee of Ministers and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe on the many positive actions they have taken over the years in favour of rural society, the protection of the natural and man-made landscapes and their biodiversity.
2. In particular, the Assembly welcomes the recommendations resulting from these activities for sustainable management of natural resources and for the protection of the rural cultural heritage.
3. It also welcomes the positive action taken by the European Union and its institutions in favour of rural development, while calling for a reorientation of production, laying the emphasis on high-quality, safe food products, the same standards being applied to imported products.
4. It highly appreciates the contribution of a large number of European non-governmental organisations to the maintenance and development of rural society.
5. The Assembly considers, however, that further action is needed at the pan-European level for the improvement of social and economic justice and stability between urban and rural regions, in particular by favouring the creation of new rural employment and by the upgrading of traditional employment in rural areas.
6. Consequently, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:
 - 6.1. instruct a committee of experts, in association with the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, to prepare a legal instrument on rural development on the lines of the attached model;
 - 6.2. invite the European Union and the competent organisations and institutions to participate in the work of this committee of experts;
 - 6.3. present the draft text to the Assembly for an opinion before its final adoption.

1. Assembly debate on 23 April 1996 (11th Sitting) (see [Doc. 7507](#), report of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, rapporteurs: Mrs Anttila and Mr Seiler; [Doc. 7517](#), opinion of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, rapporteur: Mr Bartodziej; and [Doc. 7516](#), opinion of the Committee on the Environment, Regional Planning and Local Authorities, rapporteur: Mr Szymanski). Text adopted by the Assembly on 23 April 1996 (11th Sitting).



Appendix 1 Draft European charter for rural areas

Preamble

The member states of the Council of Europe, signatories to this charter,

1. Considering that the aim of the Council of Europe is the achievement of greater unity between its members for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals which are their common heritage and facilitating their economic and social progress;
2. Considering that improvement of living and working conditions in rural areas, through the implementation of appropriate measures will contribute to social and economic progress in Europe;
3. Considering that, in view of the progress of European integration and the increasing interdependence of states and regions, such measures should be pan-European;
4. Being resolved to produce a new action framework for the development of rural areas in harmony and in balance with the management of urban regions in Europe, and at the same time adopt a sustainable resource management policy entrusting the agricultural, forestry, aquaculture and fisheries sectors, in addition to their traditional functions, with new tasks (preservation of nature and landscapes, production of renewable raw materials for industry and the energy sector, participation in rural tourism and leisure activities, etc.);
5. Considering that this framework, called the "European Charter for Rural Areas", should define the principles of rural development with viable agricultural, forestry, aquaculture and fisheries sectors, a healthy environment and a capacity for attracting economic activities and retaining and developing the human capital; it should also protect and foster the rich and diversified European cultural rural heritage;
6. Considering that European co-operation should accordingly be strengthened to facilitate this process and that the principle of sustainable development should be increasingly incorporated in all policies including commercial policies;
7. Taking account of the relevant provisions in existing Council of Europe legal instruments, such as:
 - the European Social Charter (Strasbourg, 1961; European Treaty Series, No. 35), its Additional Protocol (Strasbourg, 1988; European Treaty Series, No. 128) and the Protocol amending the Charter (Turin, 1991; European Treaty Series, No. 142);*
 - the European Convention on the Social Protection of Farmers (Strasbourg, 1974; European Treaty Series, No. 83);*
 - the European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes (Strasbourg, 1976; European Treaty Series, No. 87);*
 - the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern, 1979; European Treaty Series, No. 104);*
 - the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities (Madrid, 1980; European Treaty Series, No. 106);*
 - the Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (Grenada, 1985; European Treaty Series, No. 121);*
 - the European Charter of Local Self-Government (Strasbourg, 1985; European Treaty Series, No. 122);*
 - the European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (Revised) (Valetta, 1992; European Treaty Series, No. 143);*
 - the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (Strasbourg, 1992; European Treaty Series, No. 148); as well as:*
 - the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (Rio de Janeiro, 5 June 1992); Have agreed as follows:*

Part I

Purpose of the charter - Definition and characteristics of a rural area

Article 1 - Purpose

Each party shall take legislative and administrative measures to ensure that policies for their rural areas are developed in accordance with the principles defined hereafter.

Article 2 - Definition and characteristics of a rural area

For the purposes of this charter, the term "rural area" denotes a stretch of inland or coastal countryside, including small towns and villages, where the main part of the area is used for:

- a. agriculture, forestry, aquaculture and fisheries;
- b. economic and cultural activities of country-dwellers (crafts, industry, services, etc.);
- c. non-urban recreation and leisure areas (or natural reserves);
- d. other purposes, such as for housing.

The agricultural (including forestry, aquaculture and fisheries) and non-agricultural parts of a rural area form a whole distinguishable from an urban area, which is characterised by a high concentration of inhabitants and of vertical or horizontal structures.

Part II

Functions of rural areas

Article 3 - Foundations of legal protection

Each party shall draw up and implement a general spatial planning programme which takes account of applicable existing international instruments and which defines the economic, ecological and socio-cultural functions of each rural area to which this charter applies.

Each party shall inform the Standing Committee on European Rural Areas (SCERA) (see Part VI) on the status assigned to its rural areas as well as on the areas which have been excluded from the implementation of this charter in order to allow a follow-up of the application of the charter in the member states.

Article 4 - Economic function

Each party shall ensure that rural areas can fulfil their economic function, in particular:

- a. by guaranteeing a system of agricultural production enabling all of the following:
 1. the food needs of the whole population to be met;
 2. farmers and their families to be assured of an appropriate level of income comparable with that of other professions bearing a similar degree of responsibility, thus maintaining a basic source of income for the rural population;
 3. the environment to be protected, providing for the regeneration of production resources such as soil or water-tables for future generations, in the spirit of sustainable development;
- b. by producing renewable raw materials for use in industry and the production of energy,
- c. by accommodating small and medium-sized firms of an agricultural, industrial, craft and commercial nature as well as suppliers of services;
- d. by providing a base for recreation and tourism;
- e. by preserving genetic resources as the basis of agriculture and biotechnology.

Article 5 - Ecological function

Each party shall ensure that each rural area fulfils its ecological function and in particular:

- a. safeguards the natural sources of life - earth, water and air - through judicious and sustainable use;
- b. protects available and environmentally functional biotopes and "green spaces";
- c. maintains and preserves landscapes;

- d. preserves and protects biodiversity, particularly genetic diversity, the diversity of species and the diversity of landscapes;
- e. protects wild animals by means of the necessary legal instruments, and under appropriate ecological conditions.

Article 6 - Socio-cultural function

Each party shall ensure that each rural area fulfils and fosters the preservation and development of its socio-cultural roles, including through local associations and the development of relations between urban inhabitants and country-dwellers, making full use of modern information technology under equal user and consumer conditions for rural and urban areas.

Part III

Rural development policies

Article 7 - Specific needs of rural areas

Each party, in the definition and implementation of its policy regarding development of economy and technology, regional planning, protection of biodiversity, agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries and forestry, horticulture, social infrastructure, tourism, education and international relations, shall take into consideration the specific needs of the rural areas concerned, respecting the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity.

Article 8 - Guidelines and measures for a policy for rural areas

In the review of its sectoral policies in accordance with Article 7, each party shall take into account the guidelines and measures of a policy for rural areas which appear in the appendix to this charter.

Part IV

Means and instruments

Article 9 - Legal and administrative instruments

For the purpose of implementing the policy for rural areas set out in this charter, each contracting party shall create appropriate legal and administrative instruments, some of which are covered by national legislation concerning spatial planning, others by treaties instituting international or transfrontier co-operation, and yet others by the jurisdiction of regional or local authorities or institutions.

The parties undertake, in particular, to introduce public and private law protection standards for sensitive areas, particularly rural areas containing coastlines or mountain ranges.

In addition, the parties shall draft legislation providing for instruments to protect rural areas from intensive or uncontrolled urban development; such instruments can range from master plans or schemes, governed by town and country planning laws, to contracts between countries or programmes involving municipalities, associations, or citizens' groups, on the one hand, and state, federal or regional authorities, on the other.

Each party shall take the necessary legislative, administrative and financial measures to repair those parts of the rural territory which have been damaged by former economic activities, restore their natural elements, or recultivate them, taking into account economic aspects.

The parties undertake to define and implement an agricultural, aquaculture, forestry, fisheries, etc. policy aimed at maintaining economic activity in rural areas and guaranteeing the functions defined in Articles 3 to 6 of this charter.

For frontier regions, the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities (European Treaty Series, No. 106), known as the Madrid Convention, will serve as a reference in the matter.

Article 10 - Financial instruments

The parties shall endeavour to implement a policy of state and regional financial aid for rural areas using the principle of subsidiarity and the measures set out in the guidelines in the appendix to this charter.

The parties shall co-operate on all the foregoing points with the various institutions, organisations and associations that deal with the development of rural areas.

Part V

Subsidiarity

Article 11 - Local and regional authorities

The parties shall develop the role and powers of local and regional authorities in order to strengthen the endogenous development of rural regions, in particular by implementing the principles and guidelines mentioned in this charter and its appendix, pursuant to the principle of subsidiarity.

PART VI

Standing Committee on European Rural Areas (SCERA)

Article 12 - Composition and functioning

A Standing Committee on European Rural Areas (SCERA) shall be set up within a year of the entry into force of this charter.

Each party shall be represented on the SCERA. The Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE) may be represented on the committee in an observer capacity

Any member state of the Council of Europe that is not a party to the charter may be represented on the SCERA by an observer.

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe may invite any state that is not a member of the Council of Europe to be represented by an observer at the meetings of the SCERA.

Any organisation, non-governmental organisation or institution with the relevant qualifications may apply to the Committee of Ministers for observer status with the SCERA.

The SCERA shall be convened by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe. It shall hold its first meeting within one year from the entry into force of the charter. It shall subsequently meet at least every other year and, in addition, whenever the majority of the contracting parties so request.

A majority of contracting parties constitutes the quorum required for a meeting of the SCERA to be held.

The SCERA shall draw up its own rules of procedure subject to the provisions of this charter.

Article 13 - Powers

The Standing Committee on European Rural Areas shall be responsible for facilitating and improving the implementation of this charter. It may in particular:

- a. keep the provisions of this charter and the appended guidelines under review;
- b. make recommendations to the parties on measures to be taken for the implementation of the charter;
- c. recommend appropriate measures for keeping the public informed of activities carried out within the framework of the charter;
- d. make recommendations to the Committee of Ministers;
- e. make any proposal aimed at improving the effectiveness of the charter.

The SCERA may, on its own initiative, convene groups of experts for the performance of its tasks.

Article 14 - Report on the application of the charter

After each of its meetings, the Standing Committee on European Rural Areas shall transmit a report on its proceedings and on the implementation of the charter to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

Article 15 - Publication of proceedings

The Standing Committee on European Rural Areas shall periodically - at least every five years - transmit a detailed report on the application of this charter to the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe.

Part VII

Final provisions

Article 16 - Signature and ratification

This charter shall be open for signature by the member states of the Council of Europe. It shall be subject to ratification, acceptance or approval. Instruments of ratification, acceptance or approval shall be deposited with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

Article 17 - Entry into force

This charter shall enter into force on the first day of the month following the expiration of a period of three months after the date on which five member states of the Council of Europe have expressed their consent to be bound by the charter in accordance with the provisions of Article 16.

In respect of any member state which subsequently expresses its consent to be bound by it, the charter shall enter into force on the first day of the month following the expiration of a period of three months after the date of deposit of the instrument of ratification, acceptance or approval.

Article 18 - Accession of non-member states

After the entry into force of this charter, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe may invite any non-member state of the Council of Europe and of the European Union to accede to the charter.

In respect of any acceding state, the charter shall enter into force on the first day of the month following the expiration of a period of three months after the date of deposit of the instrument of accession with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

Article 19 - Territorial clause

Any state may, at the time of signature or when depositing its instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession, specify the territory or territories to which this charter shall apply.

Any party may, when depositing its instrument of ratification, acceptance, or accession or at any subsequent time, extend the application of this charter, by a declaration addressed to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, to any other territory specified in the declaration for whose international relations it is responsible and on whose behalf it is authorised to give undertakings.

Article 20 - Denunciation

Any party may at any time denounce this charter by means of a notification addressed to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

Such denunciation shall become effective on the first day of the month following the expiration of a period of six months after the date of receipt of the notification by the Secretary General.

Article 21 - Notifications

The Secretary General of the Council of Europe shall notify the member states of the Council of Europe and any state which has acceded to this charter of:

- a. any signature;

- b.* the deposit of any instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession;
- c.* any date of entry into force of this charter in accordance with Articles 16 and 17;
- d.* any report drawn up pursuant to Articles 14 and 15;
- e.* any other act, notification, declaration or communication relating to this charter.

In witness whereof the undersigned, being duly authorised thereto, have signed this Charter.

Done at Strasbourg, this ... day of, in English and French, both texts being equally authentic, in a single copy which shall be deposited in the archives of the Council of Europe. The Secretary General of the Council of Europe shall transmit certified copies to each member state of the Council of Europe and to each state invited to accede to this charter.

Appendix 2 Appendix - Guidelines and measures for a policy for rural areas intended as guidance for the parties to this charter in the sense of Article 8 of the charter

Guideline 1 - Principles

1. Europe's countryside (including its coastline) is a historical and precious cultivated landscape in which people live and work and whose maintenance is an important social issue, yet is also of economic value.
2. The countryside can only fulfil its role of supplier and source of recreation and equilibrium, as increasingly demanded by society, if it remains an attractive and self-reliant place to live, with:
 - a good infrastructure;*
 - viable farming, forestry, aquaculture and fisheries sectors;*
 - convenient accessibility for non-agricultural economic activities;*
 - a healthy environment and a well-tended landscape.*
3. The existing threats to rural areas, in particular to agriculture, give rise to the calls for an integrated social and economic policy that follows the regional (rural development) and farming policy. These policies should be resolutely brought into line with one another to form a harmonious whole. They should take account of the equality and complementarity of urban and rural areas.
4. The principle of sustainable development should be reflected in all policies applicable to rural areas and these policies (guidelines 2 to 14) should be integrated.
5. Such a plan for the development of the countryside should be based on regional factors, support local initiatives and rely on endogenous development in every way possible; people and their problems should henceforth take centre stage in terms of plans and decisions;
 - a. people and their problems should henceforth take centre stage in terms of plans and decisions;
 - b. the positive aspects of rural society and in particular of traditional family life should be preserved in order to favour the development of young people and their integration into the community;
 - c. community identity should be reinforced, as should a sense of self-reliance, co-operation and creativity;
 - d. the cultural and historical characteristics of the countryside should be preserved and allowed to flourish; diversification, as well as relations between the rural population and the rest of the population, should be encouraged.

Guideline 2 - Spatial planning in rural areas

1. The implementation of spatial planning policies in rural areas should permit the sustainable development of agriculture, forestry, aquaculture, fisheries, craft trades, industry, tourism and services; it should encourage the pursuit of complementary activities and preserve the environment there.
2. All spatial planning policies in rural areas should be based on the humanist principle that people are the focal point of any planning and decision-making. Pursuant to this principle, parties to this charter should implement spatial planning for rural areas that has regard first and foremost to the needs and interests of the populations concerned and at the same time respects the principle of sustainability. The principle of transparency should be applied in connection with any construction or infrastructure project of general interest (airports, motorways, high-speed trains, etc.) by supplying the population concerned with all relevant information in the implementation of such projects and consulting them by means of a referendum.
3. Parties should draw up spatial planning policies fostering closer inter-municipal, inter-regional and even transfrontier co-operation.
4. Spatial planning policies for rural areas should be covered by a general plan that takes account of all the characteristics of such areas in relation to the functions assigned thereto in Part II of the charter.

Guideline 3 - Infrastructures, transport and facilities

Parties should provide rural areas with up-to-date supply and infrastructure networks that meet their needs. As these are prerequisites for enabling rural areas to continue to perform their socio-economic functions, parties should consider that effects of scale should not be the sole criterion for the provision or maintenance of such facilities. This principle applies equally to the telecommunication sector, the road system, public

transport, financial services in accordance with the specific needs of agricultural economy (in the broadest sense), and all kinds of facilities in the educational or service sectors. Parties should integrate rural regions into a modern transport and communication network compatible with the character and the environmental quality of the rural areas concerned and not solely governed by short-term economic considerations.

Guideline 4 - Education, training, research and awareness-raising

1. Human capital (people with their diverse skills) is the most valuable asset in rural communities as elsewhere, and developing and maintaining it therefore should have top priority.
2. To guarantee equal access and entitlement to education, parties should maintain schools in rural areas and organise them in accordance with local requirements. They should also adapt and develop new educational technologies.
3. Decentralised education and further education opportunities should be promoted and geared towards future job opportunities; school children and apprentices in the countryside (boys and girls) should be given the same educational opportunities as those from urban areas.
4. Parties should develop and expand technical and vocational courses in rural areas at primary, secondary and higher levels. They should in particular arrange for the setting up of teams of specialised instructors and the provision of appropriate training programmes, especially in agriculture, forestry, aquaculture, fisheries, rural crafts and advanced technologies, and in general in all the branches of activity necessary for successful rural planning and development.
5. Parties should develop programmes to encourage respect for the natural environment and an appreciation of the historical and cultural heritage of rural areas as well as the significance for society of rural areas.

Guideline 5 - Employment and incomes

If rural communities are to stay alive, rural people need satisfactory levels of income. This requires a variety of attractive employment opportunities, and not just in agriculture, forestry, aquaculture or fisheries. These should, however, be tailored to the specific features of regions and localities. They include:

- a. giving priority to those activities and initiatives that are geared towards endogenous development and above all are managed and financed by the rural community itself;
- b. fostering the diversification and adaptation of production structures, especially in regions dominated by a particular economic branch or sector where the risk of recession is high;
- c. fostering multiple activity and the harmonious integration of different countryside activities;
- d. fostering the production of goods and services when it enhances the rural communities' special non-manual and manual skills and making full use of any under-used resources (timber, water, stone, land or the production of renewable sources of energy);
- e. creating high added value of small and medium-sized businesses by means of technology transfers, tax relief, advice, financial aid, etc.

Guideline 6 - Agriculture and agricultural policy

1. Agriculture and nature maintenance work are vital functions for rural areas in all parts of Europe. A viable agricultural sector that is structured along rural lines (viable family farms), close to nature, sustainable and multifunctional will contribute to maintaining these vital functions. Agricultural policy therefore takes on a central role.
2. The role of agriculture in society has fundamentally changed in European countries since the second world war. Changing values and circumstances (higher incomes, surpluses, agrarian revolution, international trade, environmental demands and so on) have influenced the population's attitude to agriculture. The original and traditional function of agriculture as a food producer and supplier has lost importance, particularly because of continuing overproduction, falling agricultural prices and the international opening and liberalisation of agricultural markets. At the same time other "non-importable" functions of agriculture have gained importance.

3. Today we have multifunctional agriculture, whose main tasks and functions can be summarised as follows:
- a. guaranteeing food security (a priority which will gain in importance in the longer term in view of the population explosion and the destruction of the environment and resources throughout the world);
 - b. the production of renewable raw materials;
 - c. preserving and tending the landscape, also as a recreation area and the basic capital for tourism, while bearing in mind that the rural landscape has also been an agricultural landscape for centuries;
 - d. preserving rural values, lifestyles, cultural assets and similar social functions for the community;
 - e. keeping the elements vital to our survival healthy (soil, water, air, etc.) and seeing to it that they are used for sustainable agriculture with corresponding forms of production and animal husbandry (concern for the long-term balance of our ecosystem);
 - f. helping to ensure that rural areas remain viable and that there is healthy, economic, social and cultural life in the countryside.
4. These functions, which serve the public interest - also known as "public goods" - are linked to the production of agricultural produce. Until now they were fairly well compensated for by the prices of products. However, this is no longer the case in view of the liberalisation of agricultural markets and falling agricultural prices. In general, farmers' relative incomes are falling, many are leaving the countryside, particularly those in less viable areas, and the general functions (social, cultural, economic and ecological) demanded by society are no longer being adequately fulfilled. This fatal process needs to be halted through the creation of alternative employment outside agriculture and an agricultural policy that is geared to the multifunctional type of agriculture, with extended tasks in the service of society.
5. In this context, farm income policy receives a new dimension and needs to be enlarged. The delivery of the above-mentioned "public goods" may need to be encouraged by public support, including direct payments, following the principle: linked functions, but separate payments. This requires an ad hoc system of direct and complementary payments (see the Swiss model introduced in 1992 _ Articles 31a and 31b of the agricultural law); the European Union agricultural policy reform also contains such elements.
6. The policy of decoupling with direct income payments, however, has its financial limits; some countries cannot apply it at all. Therefore, even for the future, the income of farmers will need to come from a comprehensive entrepreneurial activity with the following priority areas:
- a. efficient production and marketing, including exportation and high level of value added, thus retaining economic benefits in rural areas;
 - b. non-farm activities (tourism, etc.);
 - c. direct income payments for general services to society, which have to be higher in less favoured (mountain) areas and which should be supplemented by a premium for special ecological efforts (bio-farming, etc.).
7. Production conditions and the general conditions of agriculture, as well as society's wishes and the requirements of agriculture, vary enormously throughout the world and even within Europe. Accordingly, each region has the right (duty) to find adequate and independent solutions and to take appropriate measures, particularly in three core areas:
- food security;*
- income levels and social protection for farming families;*
- environmental standards.*
8. From this point of view, then, the concept of free trade in its purest form is not suited to agriculture. Reasonable import protection measures, within the framework of rules for fair international trade, are indispensable for many countries, even for agriculture in favoured regions when European agriculture has higher production costs as a result of more stringent ecological requirements and animal welfare legislation or other handicaps to competitiveness. International openness, co-operation and solidarity, as well as binding rules for fair agricultural trade (GATT, World Trade Organisation (WTO)), are, however, equally important. Agricultural policy must in principle remain a national or European Union responsibility, in accordance with the subsidiarity principle, particularly in the spheres of structural and social policy as well as with regard to direct

income payments. Though the indispensable corollary is that each country abide by agreed rules and exercise production and export discipline, further international negotiations are needed to find a better solution to these problems.

9. Within the agricultural policy advocated in this charter, the decision-making power should, as far as possible, be left with each of the member countries (or where appropriate, the European Union) by implementation of the subsidiarity principle.

10. Food policies should, on the one hand, respond to market needs, but, on the other hand, should also be guided by a strategy of guaranteeing access to food for all on a permanent basis. Thus, international trade in agricultural commodities should enhance food security and should also benefit rural development. A careful monitoring of trade policies is needed in order to assure such positive effects. The role of local markets should, however, not be neglected or underestimated. These are of fundamental importance to rural economic development.

11. In the wake of the process of industrialisation, rural areas have lost many of the functions they also used to fulfil for the cities, including the supply of renewable raw materials and sources of energy. Rural areas should again assume these tasks, using modern, appropriate technology, this in view of the global ecological crisis and the fact that fossil raw materials are finite; such developments should primarily be encouraged by using fiscal measures.

12. The ecological consequences of intensive production methods in agriculture can be an insidious process of natural destruction: soil erosion, biological impoverishment, pollution, etc. Appropriate ecologically-balanced production methods should be promoted at national level as well as internationally. Adequate ecological accountability and binding, minimum environmental standards are therefore the order of the day. This poses a major new challenge for the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

13. Concerning farm structure, the parties should promote as far as possible farming businesses of human dimensions and reasonable size (bearing in mind the realities of agriculture in each country), which enable the farming family to be maintained on an economically viable basis in rural areas.

14. In the event of legislation being drawn up on agricultural businesses, parties should give their preference for private-law companies as opposed to public-law companies controlled and financed by the state. Other co-operative structures may co-exist with the "family-run farms".

15. The farmer as an entrepreneur should be able to exercise his or her activity as freely as possible. Private property should be protected; taxation arrangements favourable to the transfer of movable and immovable assets of farming businesses should be adopted.

16. Parties should confer the status of a private individual fulfilling a public service (general interest) function on farmers whose agricultural practices are consistent with the requirements of environmental and nature conservation law and who perform tasks serving to maintain the countryside. To this end, parties could work out a legal set of contractual arrangements that define the role of such farmers and determine their remuneration, while in all cases preserving their status as free entrepreneurs.

17. Finally, the following measures should be considered when deciding agricultural policies, which in all cases need to be tailored to specific local circumstances as well as to international agreements:

- a. investment aid for the improvement of agricultural infrastructure;
- b. start-up assistance and targeted incentive strategies;
- c. production policy geared to demand and local conditions;
- d. increased public efforts within the spheres of advising and education of individual farmers;
- e. the promotion of appropriate forms of animal husbandry that are non-intensive and environment-friendly;
- f. greater rationalisation of production, marketing and sales; encouragement of the development of product sectors by means of incentives for the creation of producers' and interprofessional groups;
- g. introduction of legal instruments to ensure the quality of products and promote their marketing, such as the institution of standards and quality labels for regional products, as well as legislation to protect trade names and marks and, in general, all signs serving to identify the provenance of a product;
- h. public-health monitoring of foodstuffs for the protection of consumers, but never for the unfair protection of certain categories of producers;

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- i.* promotion of ecologically enhanced methods of production and of biodiversity by means of, for example, direct premiums (ecological contribution);
- j.* the encouragement of non-intensive farming and alternative land uses (for recreation, production of renewable raw materials, etc.);
- k.* support for individual efforts and co-operation among farmers;
- l.* programmes and measures for disadvantaged regions;
- m.* promotion of sustainable hunting (of considerable importance for many rural regions);
- n.* the encouragement of auxiliary or supplementary activities;
- o.* a system of effective social protection on a par with other sectors of the economy;

Guideline 7 - Forestry

1. Parties should take all appropriate measures to preserve and protect existing forests and to reafforest areas abandoned by agriculture or set aside as part of the policy to reduce production. Afforestation is a long-term investment.
2. Parties should, moreover, encourage the establishment of forestry businesses by means of aid similar to the start-up assistance granted to farmers.
3. Finally, parties should take appropriate legal and fiscal measures to implement a policy for the development of the timber sector in forest areas where this sector is inadequate or deficient, taking into account the ecological function of the area concerned.
4. The importance of agriculture and forestry as a sector of the economy cannot be adequately gauged from their current share of economic net product or from the number of people they employ. Instead, agriculture and forestry should be viewed in terms of their food security, raw material and ecological balance functions, and their socio-political significance should, in particular, be acknowledged.

Guideline 8 - Tourism

1. Parties should take all necessary legal, fiscal and administrative measures to develop tourism in rural areas in general and agricultural tourism in particular, taking account of the carrying capacity of the areas concerned. In particular this can be done by encouraging the provision of rural hostels and by ensuring that farmers who offer tourist accommodation on their farm in addition to their agricultural activities are encouraged to do so.
2. In implementing this policy, parties should aim for a balance between the indispensable development of tourism, the protection of nature and the potential offered by existing infrastructures and services by maintaining the quality of the landscape and the environment and preserving traditional architecture and materials.

Guideline 9 - Small and medium-sized businesses, commerce, industry and crafts

Parties should take measures for the purpose of:

- a.* promoting small and medium-sized businesses of an industrial, commercial or craft nature: on the one hand, by improving the framework conditions through the simplification of administrative and fiscal procedures and through tax concessions for investment; and, on the other hand, by improving infrastructures and by granting reduced-interest loans to businesses and entrepreneurs. Finally, it could be useful and efficient to reduce taxes to encourage small traders to remain in business in rural communities;
- b.* providing appropriate facilities for the integration and counselling of businesses;
- c.* promoting the establishment of advanced, high-technology companies with high added value, as well as service companies using automatic data transmission and processing systems;
- d.* fostering the improvement of the production, processing and marketing of regional products as well as assisting schemes in favour of high-quality craft activities.

Guideline 10 - Housing and health

In conformity with Article 11 of the charter, parties should take steps to:

- a. make accommodation available to permanent residents and regulate the construction of second homes;
- b. promote the rehabilitation and renovation of dwellings and the restoration of abandoned buildings with due respect for traditional designs and local materials, in particular by granting financial aid; and, at the same time, ensure that providers of public amenities maintain and improve such amenities (water supply, public drainage, street lighting, sewage works, etc.);
- c. ensure the quality of housing and a style of architecture appropriate to the landscape, thus further developing the European cultural landscape;
- d. ensure the provision of necessary health services in rural areas, of a standard equal to those existing in urban areas. Health services can be provided through a permanent link with a doctor and a hospital and regular medical treatment provided through mobile facilities (travelling doctors).

Guideline 11 - Culture

Parties should maintain and protect the richness and diversity of the cultural and archaeological heritage of rural areas and regions as well as promote a cultural momentum there by taking the following measures:

1. inventorying, enhancing and publicising the rural historical and cultural heritage, including the skills of rural life;
2. protecting and developing the traditions and cultural forms of expression as well as regional languages in accordance with the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages;
3. strengthening the regional cultural identity of rural inhabitants and stimulating community activities;
4. promoting the rural and local gastronomic heritage.

Guideline 12 - Environment, nature and landscapes

1. Nature and landscapes need care and attention. It is therefore important:
 - a. to seek to achieve the rational and sustainable management of natural resources and to maintain living environments and biodiversity;
 - b. to conserve all landscapes of outstanding interest and, where possible, restore semi-natural and manmade landscapes;
 - c. to conserve the beauty and special features of the countryside by restoring villages and rustic buildings and if possible repairing the damage to nature and the landscape;
 - d. to record areas where long-standing species or breeds of livestock, traditional rural landscapes, or traditional farming techniques exist;
 - e. to preserve and manage forests - starting with protected forests;
 - f. to ensure that urban areas do not allow their environmental problems (waste) to spill over into the countryside and that rural and urban communities alike take responsibility for their own waste and noxious substances;
 - g. to ensure that the applicable provisions in international legal instruments on the protection of the environment, nature and landscapes, are strictly respected;
 - h. to take due account of the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy.
2. Environmental policy should take measures:
 - a. for the protection and management of land, water and air and for the conservation of flora and fauna and their habitats;
 - b. for the demarcation of areas where building, infrastructures, traffic and other activities detrimental to the environment are limited, avoided or even prohibited by fully applying Article 11 of the charter;

- c. for the determination of the ecological function of each rural area in the framework of a spatial planning programme, ensuring that any function assigned to a rural area is compatible with its ecological function;
 - d. for the establishment of international co-operation of a scientific, technical and political nature to safeguard and manage the rural environment in Europe.
3. Parties should also take particular measures:
- a. to develop their networks of biogenetic reserves and to protect threatened biotopes in rural regions as well as intensify co-operation with existing networks;
 - b. to introduce or strengthen procedures for carrying out environmental impact studies in connection with infrastructural, industrial or tourist projects liable to cause serious damage to the environmental resources of rural areas;
 - c. to establish international co-operation for the purpose of integrated management of water resources, paying particular attention to the possible depletion of watercourses, lakes and ponds as well as to water consumption problems in agriculture, industry and other sectors.

Guideline 13 - Scientific and technical co-operation

Parties should share their scientific experience and research findings, in particular by establishing or reinforcing a system of internationally compatible and comparable information and statistics and by encouraging co-operation between universities and research centres interested in the specific problems of a rural society.

Guideline 14 - Decision-making processes, subsidiarity

1. From a political and administrative point of view, communities in rural areas should be given the greatest possible degree of autonomy. This means, for example, that viable but moderate-scale self-governing units should either be maintained or where necessary created, along with a general respect for the principle of subsidiarity. This is the only way to extend the rural population's room for manoeuvre and increase their willingness to act independently.
2. The financial basis of municipalities and other territorial communities at regional level (cantons, Länder, départements and communes) should be strengthened and built up.
3. It is also important to involve self-help and non-governmental organisations in the development and decision-making processes.
4. Given the enormity of the tasks, partnerships between urban and rural areas should be further developed in future to constantly foster and extend the mutually complementary relations between town and country that ensure survival.

Guideline 15 - Central and eastern Europe

The countries of central and eastern Europe (in transition) deserve special attention and increased support. Special policy strategies and measures are needed to solve specific problems and these should, as far as possible, be devised and determined by the countries themselves. Their efforts towards longer-term European integration should be supported through appropriate measures and treaties. European solidarity, partnership and co-operation are called for. Increased practical help is also needed, however, particularly in extending and building up the infrastructure. In terms of agricultural policy too, special strategies and measures are needed to solve specific problems in the countries of central and eastern Europe, which should be assured adequate access to western European markets (European preference).