Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 1322 (2003)[1]

Challenges for a new agricultural policy

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly wishes to emphasise the link between agricultural and forestry policies and rural development. This traditional link is even more relevant today with the development of the concepts of multifunctional and sustainable farming. In addition to producing food supplies and industrial and energy raw materials, agriculture has a duty to help conserve and protect natural resources, landscapes and the countryside, while taking account of human needs and the obligation to respect animals.

2. Agriculture has always been an important economic sector for our countries, at both the national and European levels (the introduction of the Common Agricultural Policy is an excellent example of this), and although its importance has declined in terms of Gross Domestic Product and of the workforce employed, it remains a key sector, especially given its role in providing our population with food supplies in sufficient quantity and quality.

3. Rural areas make up 80% of Europe's territory and are home to 25% of its population. They are also still very important in terms of employment (agriculture, craft trades, tourism), natural and cultural heritage, the environment and biodiversity, and are a major asset for Europe. Efforts therefore need to be made to protect Europe's countryside and, to this end, to adjust agricultural policies so as to promote these new dimensions of farming that are more quality-oriented, with respect to both food safety and the environment.

4. Consequently, the Assembly calls on member states and the European Union:

a. to pay particular attention to the agri-food industry, in order to prevent excessive concentration in the sector and ensure fair payments for producers, reasonable prices for the consumer and maximum food quality and safety;

b. to guarantee that the new multifunctional objectives of agriculture are not compromised by international trade agreements and the gradual liberalisation of trade, or by the reduction of subsidies to farmers;

c. to continue to guarantee balanced rural development by adopting integrated measures that take account of the complementary roles of the various sectors concerned;

d. to guarantee the maximum possible degree of food safety through appropriate national and European bodies and supervision, by applying the precautionary principle and establishing permanent health monitoring systems and food traceability schemes;

e. to promote sustainable farming practices that respect the environment (water, soil, biodiversity, landscapes) and do not endanger the natural resources on which agricultural production is based;

f. to promote high-quality local production, capitalising on particular locations or specific features related to traditional production methods and expanding the use of recognised quality marks or labels that guarantee the characteristics of the relevant produce;

g. to promote both the conservation of the natural heritage (landscapes, traditional farm produce and foods, typical fauna and flora) and the protection of the cultural heritage (traditions, built heritage, folk customs);

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1. Assembly debate on 1 April 2003 (11th Sitting) (see Doc. 9636, report of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, rapporteur: Mr Floros). Text adopted by the Assembly on 1 April 2003 (11th Sitting). Text adopted by the Assembly on 1 April 2003 (11th Sitting).

h. to ensure that essential infrastructure and public services (transport, education, health, etc.) are maintained in rural areas in order to guarantee rural populations non-discriminatory living conditions and access to public services, compared to urban populations;

i. to develop varied activities in rural areas, particularly in the tourism and leisure sector, as part of a comprehensive rural development policy, differentiated from and complementary to the agricultural policy;

j. to make provision for paying farmers for non-agricultural activities related to the new environmental and health requirements of the agricultural policy or for services they provide (landscape, forestry, biodiversity, etc.), thereby offsetting the losses in income caused by reductions in farm subsidies, by adopting relevant legislation recognising the usefulness of these activities;

k. to defend the European agricultural model and the new role of agriculture in multilateral trade negotiations, in particular in the context of the World Trade Organisation.