

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

RESOLUTION (74) 7

ON THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS OF MOUNTAIN REGIONS

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 27 February 1974,
at the 229th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers,

Conscious of the increasing importance which mountain regions assume in the context of a balanced development of differing European regions,

Recommends the governments of member states of the Council of Europe to base their action on the principles contained in the following "European Declaration on the economic and social problems of mountain regions" having regard to the particular situation of each state and each region :

DECLARATION

1. General principles

1.1 The first step should be to fix the boundaries of the mountain region on the basis of physical features such as altitude, topography, climate and physical isolation. In order to define the situation more clearly, account should also be taken of social and economic conditions in the regions concerned, in order to give the authorities more latitude for their intervention.

1.2 Mountain regions have a threefold function :

- to provide living space for the resident population ;
- to provide recreational facilities for town dwellers and reserves of natural resources to safeguard the continent's ecological balance ; this is a social function ;
- to provide an alternative form of economy and settlement pattern for the more densely populated metropolitan areas.

1.3 A first objective in mountain regions therefore appears to be to ensure the continued existence of a dynamic, settled mountain population, so that the rural areas

will be permanently occupied and the mountains thus enabled to perform their social functions now and in the future for the benefit of the community as a whole. The effort required of the authorities with a view to perpetuating and increasing occupation of the mountain areas should be regarded as a contribution to the entire national, or even European, "community".

1.4 The stability and safety of living conditions in mountain regions depend on the creation of a mixed-economy structure. Hill-farming and the tourist industry can as a rule supply a sound economic basis on a regional scale, and this should be supplemented to the utmost by the integration of forestry, industry and crafts.

1.5 Hill-farming and forestry have a unique contribution to make towards ensuring protection of the landscape and the natural resources (including soil, water, hydrology and biological equilibrium) and the common heritage.

1.6 Industry and crafts should be developed mainly through local initiative, in particular by encouraging existing crafts production and setting up handicrafts co-operatives for the purchase of raw materials and the sale of the finished products.

1.7 Tourist development in mountain regions should be integrated with the regional and local economy, in particular with the area's agriculture, crafts and industries. The type of tourism encouraged should suit regional conditions and the possibilities of the resident population.

1.8 With a view to retaining the permanent population essential for a rural use of mountain regions, satisfactory living conditions must be ensured throughout such regions.

1.9 The principle of the right to education, including permanent education, should as far as possible be applied in mountain regions so as to give the people living there real equality of opportunity with those living in towns.

2. Hill-farming and forestry

2.1 One of the main tasks of regional development in mountain regions is to promote functional exploitation of the soil in order to preserve its fertility and a varied landscape, and to protect sites against natural damage.

2.2 The part played by hill-farming and forestry in thus protecting the landscape, natural resources and the public heritage should be remunerated. Such remuneration should at least compensate for the permanent natural handicaps of hill-farming and should take the form of allowances for uneconomic services or be based on head of livestock and on areas cultivated and afforested.

2.3 The action of the authorities to promote hill-farming and forestry should be supplemented by a series of measures designed to :

- ensure the establishment and upkeep of a road system adapted to the needs of agriculture and forestry;

- ensure additional income for full-time and part-time family farms, especially through loans on favourable terms and tax concessions;

- encourage the growth and distribution of high-quality mountain farm produce, with special attention to the preservation and reclaiming of mountain pastures, taking account of Europe's present and future requirements in animal protein.

2.4 Land-use plans, making special provision for the future of hill-farming and for the protection of the landscape and natural resources, should be drawn up for mountain regions. These plans should stipulate the areas to be reserved for farming (crops and pasture-land) and those schedules for reafforestation in the public interest. Rural development and land-use plans should be complementary.

2.5 All reafforestation operations should be undertaken in accordance with the land-use plans. The authorities should where appropriate :

- forbid the clearance of land for cultivation in mountain regions, except where very special conditions make this desirable;

- give financial encouragement to reafforestation considered desirable in the interests of soil and landscape protection;

- for this purpose, give financial support to forestry campaigns by local authorities, those in certain regions, in particular dry mountain areas, being encouraged to undertake reafforestation.

3. Industry, crafts and trade

3.1 The following factors should be borne in mind when deciding what branches of industry and crafts to encourage to settle in mountain regions :

- the need to meet the demand for industrial and craft services which result from development of the tourist trade (the building trade in particular);

- the need to establish, through independent development of the secondary sector, a range of economic activities unaffected by seasonal tourist variations and the fluctuations of agriculture;

- the capacities and training of the local population;

- the effects of such industries on the environment and landscape.

3.2 Support by the authorities for industry and crafts in mountain regions should include :

- extension of the infrastructure and public amenities necessary for industrial development in zones considered suitable for the siting of industry;

- encouragement of handicrafts, in particular through a policy of technical assistance and promotion implemented, for instance, through professional organisations;

- financial support, for instance by more widespread use of improvement loans.

4. Education, training and rehabilitation

4.1 In these regions, as in others, there is a need to provide regular schooling on the spot as far as possible. For pedagogic reasons it is nevertheless necessary to provide a certain concentration of educational facilities and then the authorities should provide free school bus services and give supplementary boarding grants.

4.2 Teaching in mountain regions can be encouraged by the adoption of various special systems such as "country classes" and "snow classes", and also by using school buildings for a variety of purposes, e.g. as adult information centres.

4.3 The opportunities for training should be as wide as possible. They should take account of, on the one hand, differing economic structures, and on the other, in the case of rural depopulation, prospects of professional advancement and equal social status with urban populations.

4.4 Vocational training should be encouraged in mountain regions and should take account of local and regional employment needs. To this end, the first step should be to make an inventory of all existing training establishments, co-ordinate their activities and draw up a regional programme for the installation of new centres.

4.5 The authorities, in particular local authorities and professional organisations, have a proportional part to play in encouraging initiative and providing pre-training designed to inform the rural population of new training opportunities, in particular to prepare them for the new jobs created by the tourist industry.

5. Tourism

5.1 Care should be taken to ensure that as far as possible the local population shares in the economic benefits deriving from tourism, including the expansion of local trade and crafts. As a general rule small and medium tourist resorts benefit the local population economically more than do large ones, whose size takes them beyond the range of local enterprise. As regards the latter, their creation and extension will require the establishment of adequate procedures by the public authorities in order to settle all problems connected with integrating large tourist units into the local economy, interesting the local population and protecting the environment in accordance with this Declaration. Encouragement should therefore be given to the development of rural tourist resorts more in harmony with the mountain environment and landscape. Moreover, everything should be done to diversify mountain tourism and render its various forms accessible to different social categories and age groups.

5.2 In selecting the type of tourism to be promoted care should be taken, above all, to avoid giant schemes out of proportion to the region, by controlling large

tourist resorts and ensuring their conformity with the region's general development policy.

5.3 The authorities could promote local tourist enterprise in mountain regions by :

- giving financial support for tourist infrastructure work by local authorities, provided that the infrastructures are consonant with the development plan ;

- contributing towards the cost of private undertakings in areas not developed for tourists (the building of housing, small boarding houses and restaurants) ;

- encouraging agriculture and forestry in regions where the tourist trade is already highly developed ;

- dealing with safety problems, in particular protection against avalanches and landslides, and the consequences of floods or earthquakes where the general interest is at stake.

6. Protection of the environment and landscape

6.1 Protection of the environment in mountain regions is of particular importance and calls for a general plan for safeguarding landscapes and sites and maintaining their diversity, and at the same time conserving natural resources. Of these, the quality and quantity of water resources are of great importance. It is the duty of the authorities to ensure a minimum flow in water courses on which concessions have been granted for the building of dams for the production of electric power.

6.2 Protection of the environment in and around tourist resorts also presupposes :

- solutions to the problems of sanitation and waste water disposal ;

- arrangements for the collection and disposal of household refuse ;

- special measures to safeguard landscapes and sites near large resorts, for instance by including special clauses in agreements with builders ;

- creation if necessary of a system of architectural assistance to local authorities and builders, as well as wide distribution of documentation and information and training of local officials.

6.3 In sectors which require protection but which, mainly on account of their small size, do not qualify as natural parks, nature reserves should be set up with special regulations capable of protecting flora, fauna and fish-breeding for instance.

7. Bases of regional development policy

7.1 Each member state of the Council of Europe and all the authorities concerned with the problems of mountain regions should take a basic decision on the future of the mountains, stating the main principles to be followed there. In particular, this would involve :

- general and specific measures to assist mountain areas in accordance with the principles stated in this Declaration ;
- a pledge of the necessary continuity in official action in those areas ;
- a definition of structures, for the application of this permanent policy by the states and at regional and local level.

7.2 A development programme should be drawn up for every homogeneous mountain area. It should be based on an analysis of the original situation and of the regional potentialities for development. This programme should harmonise the priority objectives specific to the region as a whole and the priority objectives specific to the mountain area within the region.

7.3 Measures to help mountain regions depend ultimately on the resident population. The objectives should be selected in close co-operation with them and their elected representatives. Inter-regional co-ordination should be ensured supra-regionally by the state.

8. Financial aid to carry out programmes

8.1 The carrying out of development programmes in mountain areas demands supplementary financial aid for the various different sectors enumerated in this Declaration (agriculture, industry, crafts, tourism, protection of natural resources).

8.2 The release of credits and subsidies should be granted for the purpose subject to approval of the relevant development plans.

8.3 As a general rule, especially favourable rates of subsidies and loan conditions should be available to authorities in mountain regions.

8.4 Finally, where necessary, a system of special contributions for the protection of the environment and the landscape should be provided within the framework of national legislations.

9. Competing uses of rural land

9.1 The general rules on use of rural land, which are normally dictated by agricultural considerations, should be adapted to the special circumstances of mountain regions. They need to be made more effective in those areas and to be brought to the notice of the population. Such rules should state in practical terms how grazing, agricultural, forest and building land are to be zoned.

9.2 The state should help local authorities to establish land reserves and so influence the real estate market in the way best suited to each country's legislation. Special attention should be given to exploring means whereby local authorities could use waste land suitable for agriculture or forestry and of promoting pastoral activities, the judicious and controlled construction of second residences and other urban activities in the mountain areas.

10. Action on the part of local authorities

10.1 Generally speaking, it is expedient to strengthen local authority structures in mountain regions so that the authorities in question may be effective in enlisting local support for promoting social, economic and cultural development.

10.2 For satisfactory living conditions to be guaranteed in mountain areas, certain public and private services essential to the life of the region should continue to be provided. If private enterprise does not provide these services, local authorities should, with the assistance of the public authorities, step in to ensure that they are maintained, in particular :

- schools and vocational training facilities;
- social and cultural amenities (cultural centres etc.), health and hospital services, domiciliary care etc.;
- communications (roads, railways, telephone systems etc.);
- water and power supply;
- sanitation systems (drains, water purification, household refuse disposal etc.);
- creation, upkeep and supervision of protected areas.

10.3 It is important in mountain regions to encourage co-operation among local authorities with a view in particular to the sharing of certain amenities. The development of certain villages as resorts should not constitute a threat to the existence and prosperity of other villages.

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Everyone is conscious of the fact that the problems of mountain regions are, on the one hand, very close to those of all rural areas, hence the mountain regions are only a specific case. Moreover the general problems of rural areas have already been examined by the Council of Europe particularly in connection with Resolution (73) 3 of the Council's Committee of Ministers.

Examination of the problem of development of rural areas has shown the need for a study in depth of questions of more particular concern to mountain regions. Mountain regions present the same characteristics and handicaps as rural areas, but in intensified form. Moreover, they have certain specific characteristics which are due to factors such as altitude, topography, climate and the great difficulties of access. It is especially these more specific aspects which have been gone into thoroughly, together with the supplementary means of action necessary for mountain regions, even if a number of the conclusions drawn could apply *mutatis mutandis* to the other rural areas.

The principles stated in this Declaration are based mainly on the conclusions drawn from the study by the Committee on Co-operation in Municipal and Regional Matters of the economic and social problems of the various mountain regions of Europe.¹

Since the study could not cover all the mountain regions of Europe in detail, it concentrated on certain mountain areas regarded as being especially representative of European mountains as a whole as regards their topographical and climatic features and their geographical situation.

The comments appearing below on the situation of mountain regions in Europe are designed to explain the actual Declaration.

Perimeters of mountain regions

All the states considered have statutory definitions of "mountain regions", but the basis for demarcation varies greatly from country to country. Certain states apply complex criteria which include such factors as altitude, topography, communications and climate, whilst others are content with simpler criteria. Generally speaking, these methods of demarcation, though more or less appropriate for purposes of assistance to hill-farming, take insufficient account of the region as a whole.

Importance of mountain regions

Mountain regions constitute a considerable part of the surface of the states of central Europe. Although the population of these zones is small in relation to that of European states as a whole, the problem of how to protect all the varied cultivable and recreational areas is of considerable importance. It is therefore essential that the states concerned should define a policy of mountain planning and take the necessary steps to attain the objectives laid down for this policy as part of an overall European regional planning policy.²

1. Reference : Publication No. 5 in the "Local and Regional Authorities in Europe" study series.

2. One should note that the second European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning (La Grande-Motte, 25-27 September 1973) has recognised this requirement and undertaken to put it in hand prior to its next meeting.

Population changes in mountain regions

Generally speaking, and more particularly in the Alpine region of central Europe, there is no real depopulation on a regional scale, since the exodus from certain valleys or localities is offset within the region by an increase of population in the centres of development, so that the region remains inhabited and its upkeep is ensured. This is not so in the less central mountain areas, such as those in France and Italy, where large regions are losing more and more of their population.

Population structure

Migrations of mountain population are selective : it is mainly the young and dynamic who leave the valleys. As a result, the average age of the population is gradually rising and the local and regional economies are becoming weaker, with increasingly serious long-term cumulative effects.

Trends in agriculture

It is in agriculture that we find the most critical features in the majority of threatened mountain regions. In particular, the flight from the land has accelerated markedly since the second world war. Assuming that present trends continue, it may be predicted that agriculture in those regions where living conditions have become more difficult will be practically non-existent in the year 2000. The disappearance of hill-farming, apart from accentuating the depopulation of many zones, would also make the protection impossible which hitherto has been ensured thanks to agriculture; this would lead inevitably to the deterioration of the sites and of the mountain region as a whole. The function of the authorities is to ensure that rural areas in the mountains are inhabited.

Trends in forestry

Among the many functions of forests, the most important, in mountain areas, is to provide protection and recreation. From this angle forests are essential as an element of the landscape, as an ecological factor and as a recreational area. Mountain forests, unlike those on the plains, are unable to fulfil their functions if abandoned to natural processes : they need intensive care, which is often lacking at present in most of the mountain regions under consideration, largely for lack of adequate roads.

Industry and crafts

Many of the experiments in setting up industries in mountain regions have failed. Most of the working population now depend indirectly on the tourist trade; the building industry, which is the most important, serves mainly to meet the tourist demand. It may well be asked therefore, whether it is possible to develop the secondary sector independently; but experience appears to indicate that industry and crafts can be developed in mountain regions up to a point, subject to careful planning.

In certain regions, having regard to the limited possibility of forestry and agriculture and in particular when tourism is seasonal, it is advisable to promote the relocation of industry and factories.

The tourist trade

In view of the natural character of mountain landscapes, judicious tourist development should logically prove the soundest economic investment for these regions. The experience of the past few decades has shown that economic growth in the centres of development in mountain areas has been due mainly to the growth of the tourist trade. Nevertheless, because of the trade's seasonal fluctuations, and, more obviously, its dependence on general economic trends, and its tendency to concentrate in giant resorts, one-sided tourist develop-

ment does raise certain problems, and it is important to avoid encouraging purely quantitative growth.

Living conditions

The study has enabled it to be established to what extent good living conditions and the maintenance of a certain number of public and private services condition the effectiveness of renewal in mountain regions. It is equally apparent that it is only by re-structuring and strengthening local structures in these regions that it is possible to improve the public services available to the residents.