A new strategy for mountain and hill farming

1998/2059(INI) - 28/09/1998

The Committee adopted the report by Giacomo SANTINI (EPP, I). The report does not seek to put forward a specific new structural policy or a new cohesion policy applying the same criteria to all mountain regions (which account for around 25% of the EU's farmland). Instead it wants the existing instruments to be adapted to take account of local situations, so as to ensure economic and social cohesion and to support local schemes for promoting endogenous development through diversified, regionally-based activities and products. The committee contends that, from an environmental standpoint, such schemes should aim to disseminate the knowledge and skills needed to ensure rational management of natural resources and balanced land-use. Account should be taken of the special needs of mountain areas: -basic infrastructures (schools, roads, social services), so as to prevent desertification; -geomorphological barriers (e.g. altitude, gradient, irregular rainfall, fragmentation of land ownership and low population density), which make mountain farming uncompetitive with agriculture in lowland areas or even other disadvantaged regions as well as creating major difficulties for communications and transport. The committee believes the Commission should: -gather and update all available information, issue periodic reports and submit a communication to the Council and Parliament on EU mountain regions; -submit a Community action plan for these areas; -devise a special programme for mountain regions as part of cross-border cooperation; -strengthen assessment and monitoring procedures, in connection with the reform of the Structural Funds (particularly the new Objective 2 under Agenda 2000), by precisely defining the areas eligible at local level through criteria based on the latest data; facilitate improvements to transport and communications; increase EU compensation for environmental services of public interest which are provided by the population of mountain areas and arid or semi-arid zones; -encourage national and regional assistance policies, with Union support via partnership agreements, for mountain areas not falling within the new Objective 2.