Rural development: Community strategic guidelines, support by the EAFRD, programming period 2007–2013

2005/0129(CNS) - 16/02/2006 - Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution drafted by Mairead **MCGUINNESS** (EPP-ED, IE) and made a number of amendments to the Commission's proposal. The resolution was adopted by 455 votes in favour 16 against with 10 abstentions. The resolution suggested a stronger focus on young farmers, the modernisation of agriculture, and the protection of the rural cultural heritage as key strategic guidelines for rural development. Parliament also emphasised the importance of the provision of essential funding to the new Member States in order to reduce the gap between them and the EU 15. The new Member States were characterised by the significant under funding of the agricultural sector and huge disparities in income levels in comparison with the other Member States. The cohesion principle must therefore also be implemented in rural areas.

The amendments focused on the following matters:

- the importance of crafts in the countryside to enable job creation, training of young people through apprenticeships, the transmission of traditional skills and the creation of social ties in the most remote areas;

- the resources devoted to Axis 1 should contribute to promoting the use of ICT and responding to the specific needs of young farmers;

- local and regional products should be promoted;

- encouragement should also be given to organic farming and production by means of traditional methods relating to regional specialities.

Resources must also support:

- improving the transfer between generations; promoting renewable energies in order to combat climate change;

- supporting research into energy crops and the process of producing biofuels;

- maintaining and developing services aimed at maintaining populations and welcoming new dwellers. -- encouraging village renewal and development and safeguarding of the rural cultural heritage help to counter rural depopulation;

- prioritising traditional rural skills and quality-oriented measures such as charters or labels, and training young people in these matters;

- preserving rural culture. The culture of rural communities can provide economic added value, notably for tourism. Crafts, food and drink, agricultural specialities and the related traditional production techniques, folklore and rural architecture are among the elements that need to be protected and, in some

cases, revived. These traditions, despite the added value that they offer, are in danger of extinction because of rural depopulation, the ageing of rural populations and the lack of interest of the young, especially in the most depressed regions.

- promoting the Local Agenda 21 in the countryside and adapting to the strengths and drawbacks of each locality in the light of the diversity of the countryside, with the participation of local agents and supporting full-scale local endogenous development projects. A culture of local participation needs to be developed on the basis of strategic development plans based on the Local Agenda 21.

- the transfer between generations needs to be a priority objective for all the rural development axes. If the humanised landscape is to be preserved, it is necessary to promote traditional techniques of agricultural production and the entire rural culture associated with them. Special assistance should be provided to prevent disasters such as floods, droughts, scarcity and forest fires, which often occur in neglected areas, as well as to prevent desertification.