Agricultural policy: protocol on mountain farming attached to the Alpine Convention

2006/0059(CNS) - 25/04/2006 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to conclude a Protocol on Mountain Farming attached to the Alpine Convention.

PROPOSED ACT: Council Decision.

CONTENT: in 1991 the European Community signed the Convention on the Protection of the Alps. The Contracting Parties to the Convention are Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Slovenia and Switzerland. The objective of the Convention is include the EU in international activities relating to the protection of the environment. The protection of the Alps is of significant importance to all of the EU Member States given their cross-frontier nature.

One of the key features of the Alpine region is its abundance of natural resources such as water and unique agricultural produce. The region is also famed for its historical and cultural heritage as well as its tourism. At the same time, however, the Alpine climate and topography render farming activities difficult. Hence the need for a Protocol unique to Mountain Farming. The Protocol acts as an instrument which allows the European Community to help support environmentally sound agricultural activities. It offers a single framework in which to formulate a cross-border policy which is capable of integrating shared objectives.

The objectives of the Convention are implemented through various Protocols. This Protocol is being presented with the specific aim of boosting Mountain Farming in the Alps. Based on the principle of "sustainable development" the objectives of the Protocol, as outlined in Article 1, include:

- the promotion of environmentally friendly agriculture in the Alps;
- the continued production of high quality products typical to the region;
- safeguarding the natural environment;
- the introduction of measures protecting mountain farmers from natural risks; and
- the conservation of the Alpine landscape.

In addition, the Protocol specifies that the Contracting Parties to the Alpine Convention must optimise the multifunctional role of mountain farming.

As the Commission points out, the pursuit of the objectives outlined above are fully in line the EU's agricultural policy. Ratification of the Protocol would confirm the EU's commitment to the Alpine region. The Commission, therefore, invited the Council and Parliament to conclude the Protocol.