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Editorial

I hope you did not miss the Chaves Mountain Convention, which we think was our best ever. Ok, we had some problems in finding the bus stops or finding people at the bus stops, and the generator run out of gas once, but these kinds of little mishaps happen in all major events and will only add to the “human interest” side of the stories told about them afterwards. As you can see from Euromontana’s new 10-year publication, people tend to remember most fondly the events where they lost their cars in the snow, travelled in weird wagons to Slovenia etc. Beyond the couple of little incidents, the arrangements by our local partners were brilliant. I am still thinking of and salivating over for example the lunch during our study tour on Saturday at the Casa de Carvalhelhos in the network of the local taverns in Alto Tamega, set up with the LEADER+ support. But when I am talking about

a soaring success I particularly mean the line-up of speakers we had, from the Commissioner to several Ministers, Directors etc. This was the highest level of attendance we have ever had, matched by the equally high level of participants, coming and going altogether well over 300.

I would like to express my gratitude to all of you who attended the Convention, contributed by making a presentation, facilitating sessions and participating in the discussions. The variety, calibre and amount of people and expertise we are able to mobilise for these kinds of events is the real asset of Euromontana as a network. Big applause also for AD-RAT, the Municipality of Chaves and all their local partners whose hard work over many months made this event possible for us.

This is a crucial autumn for the next European programming period. As we heard in Chaves, how

the mountain areas are taken into consideration in different programmes depends a lot on the vigilance of the mountain actors in making sure that the member states and regions use the possibilities in the regulations to provide specific support for mountain areas. If you were not in Chaves take a look at the European Commission speaker’s slides on our website to make sure you know what is going on.

As you can see from this newsletter, a lot is happening again within Euromontana and the European policies. Stay tuned!

Kristiina Urpalainen

5th European Mountain Convention a soaring success

Over 300 participants from the mountain areas from around 16 countries gathered in Chaves, Portugal, for two days on the occasion of the 5th European Mountain Convention organised by Euromontana in cooperation with ADRAT and the Municipality of Chaves.

The impressive list of speakers included the European Commissioner for Regional Policy, Mrs Danuta Hübner, the Portuguese Minister of Environment, Territorial and Rural Development Mr Francisco Nunes Correia, vice-ministers from several countries Romania (the State Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, forestry and rural development Mr Dănuț Apetrei), Norway (the Vice-Minister of local authorities and regional development Mr Inge Bartnes), and representatives of the European Commission, European Institutions, and Euro-

pean, national, regional and local organisations.

The 5th European Mountain Convention concentrated on making the case for mountain areas as contributors to the Lisbon Strategy which sets targets for Europe in the fields of growth, innovation and jobs. Until now much debate on the strategy has been dominated by assessments of the contribution that poles of economic activity and centres of academic excellence can make. The Convention set out to illustrate the significant offering that mountain areas and their unique natural and envi-

ronmental diversity can make for growth in seven distinct contexts through the seven working groups.

As Frank Gaskell, the President of Euromontana stated: "Our massive natural and human assets benefit not just us but the whole of Europe... We need not worry even on the basis of the Lisbon agenda and this event has succeeded in demonstrating that mountains are a real Lisbon asset. There are real dangers if the comparative advantage of the mountains' authentic but



fragile diversity of products is overlooked in an increasingly homogenised global arena. Europe could be sleepwalking into the marketplace for transatlantic blandness where others could already have an unassailable lead."

"This conference reminded us of the truth we often forget – we have good arguments, we have a good product. We are tasked with winning the mountain argument. How could we face lost future mountain generations if we failed to secure recognition of the mountain cause with such a good product and with such good ingredients" concluded Frank Gaskell.

"This Convention takes place at a crucial moment. We are now entering the important phase in our preparation of the

next generation of cohesion programmes for 2007-2013. The Commission has been making a lot of effort to reinforce partnership and territorial cohesion in the course of these negotiations", said Danuta Hübner, the European Commissioner of Regional Policy. She added: "There is now a real opportunity to ensure that the great diversity of potentials and opportunities of mountain areas are taken into due consideration in the new cohesion policy programmes".



A European coordinating group for mountain policies?

During the breakfast meeting with Commissioner Hübner the potential for a more focussed coordination of the mountain relevant policies between different Directorates General was identified. The Commissioner was favourable to setting up a meeting to further discuss the issue with Euromontana and Euromontana is already following this up with the Commissioner's cabinet.

A summary report of the 5th Mountain Convention in Chaves will be available shortly, along with the final version of the declaration adopted in the conference.



EXTRACTS FROM THE COMMUNITY POLICIES PRESENTATIONS IN CHAVES

Regional Policies



Mr Ronald Hall started the presentation by stating that the European Mountain Conventions of Trento and Inverness in 2000 and 2002 represented a breakthrough in the position of mountains in the European Regional policy.

The current programming process requires vigilance from the mountain areas to make sure their interests are taken into consideration by the Member States and regions. The areas suffering from natural handicaps have been taken into consideration in the European Structural Funds regulations. The General Regulation states a political priority for strengthening action for areas with natural handicaps, and that assistance shall support areas with natural handicaps. In the competitiveness objective there is a population density criteria introduced into the national resources. Since these criteria are to be applied by the Member States it is at the national level that the

mountain areas should make sure that the additional resources are allocated appropriately. In programming, the Member States and Managing Authorities may take into account the special features of areas with natural handicaps within the Operational Programme and should pay particular attention to addressing the specific difficulties of those areas. Therefore the percentage of EU support in these areas can be higher, but once again, it is ultimately in the hands of the Member States as to whether they apply the higher funding levels to the areas they were intended to or choose to keep them on the national or regional level.

Growth and jobs are increasingly significant also in regional and cohesion policies that should contribute to the renewed Lisbon agenda. Mountain areas should also target their approach to address the Lisbon goals and ensure the development of innovative projects. In the

National Strategic Reference Frameworks the 60% (for Convergence regions) and 75% (for the Competitiveness and Employment regions) of the funds should be earmarked for the Lisbon targets, whereas the current apportionment is around 50%.

Mr Hall reminded the conference that the European Commission will be approving the regional programmes, but not national strategies which are referred to the Commission simply for information. He also urged the development actors to be active in making sure territorial cohesion is reflected in these documents, making it easier for the Commission to follow-up on the details.

State Aid and Mountain Regions

Robert Hankin gave the Conference a very comprehensive overview of the relevant state aid regulations for the mountain regions. His presentation represents an invaluable synopsis of this complex field and Members are encouraged to refer to it on the Euromontana web page.

The State Aid action plan adopted last year aims to provide less and better targeted state aid. Under the action plan several measures have already been adopted, such as Services for General Economic Interest (July 2005), Regional Aid Guidelines (December 2005) and Risk Capital Guidelines (July 2006). The Regional Aid Guidelines reduced the total coverage of the areas exempt from state aid restrictions to 43.1% of the EU25 population. Significantly for mountain areas in addition to the EU-level set exemption categories, the Member States have a flexibility to select additional regions under Article 87 (3)c by criteria of popula-

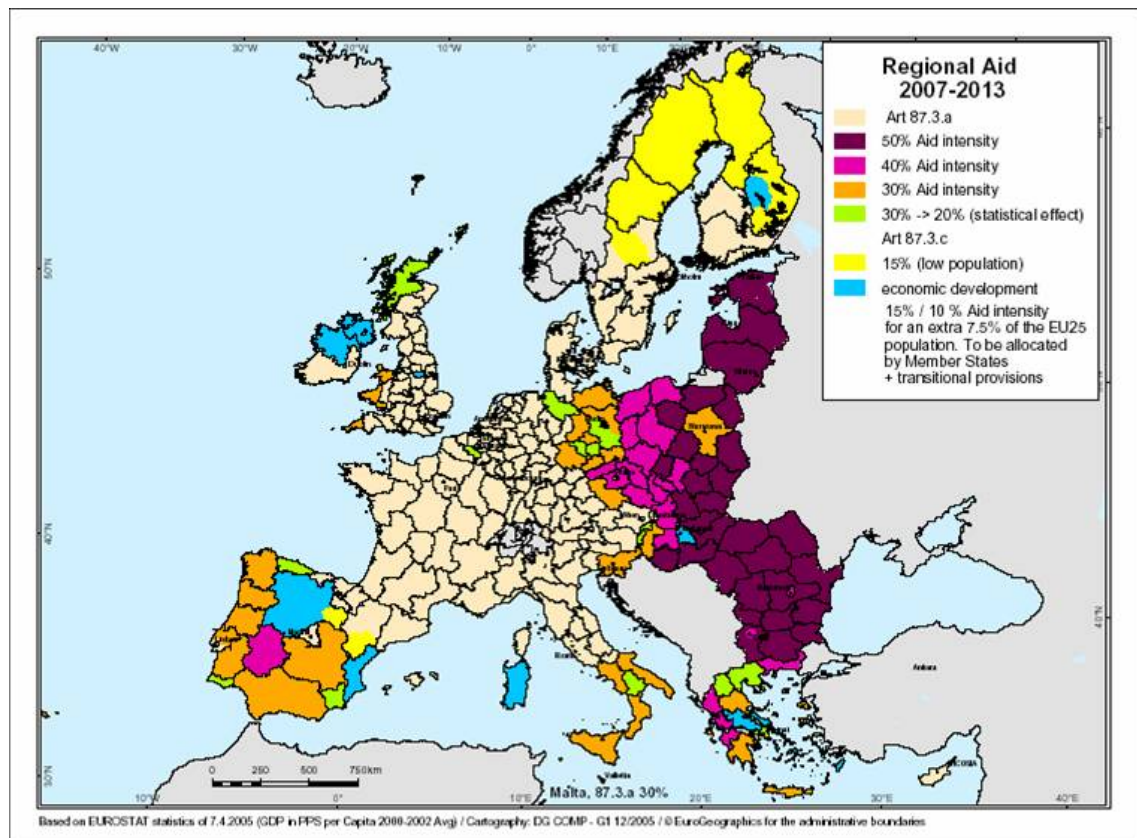
tion density, regions that are adjacent to other exempt category regions or third countries, or for example small communities of less than 5000 inhabitants based on relative isolation.

In enterprise aid, a new form of aid to encourage business start-ups in the assisted areas, there is a possibility for the Art87 (3)a regions that have a GDP less than 50% of the European Union GDP to grant a bonus of € 1 million based on low population density or

geographic isolation.

Finally, in the current revision of the *de minimis* rule the limit of state aid that can be granted without notification over any given three year period is to be doubled to € 200 000. This would cover all sectors except transport and primary agricultural production (note that off-farm activities such as processing and marketing and slaughtering will in future be covered under this industrial *de minimis* rule which significantly in-

creases the permissible ceiling of public finance).



Less Favoured Area Support

According to the presentation by Jean-Michel Courades the future conditions for natural handicaps and other handicaps support (Article 35 and 48) are:

1. to undertake to continue farming in areas designated for at least 5 years from 1st payment.
2. application of cross compliance standards on the whole farming (if no compliance reduction or exclusion)

The future level of compensation (Article 35) is based on:

- compensating for additional costs and income foregone related to the handicap for agricultural production

- Mountain areas: between 25-250 euros/ha
- Individual payments higher in duly justified cases provided that the average at Member State level does not exceed the maximum amount.
- Payments to be degressive above a threshold level of area per holding

Specific handicaps relate to areas where land management should be continued in order to conserve or improve the environment, maintain the countryside and preserve the tourist potential of the area or in order to protect the coastline. These areas are homogeneous from the

point of view of natural production conditions

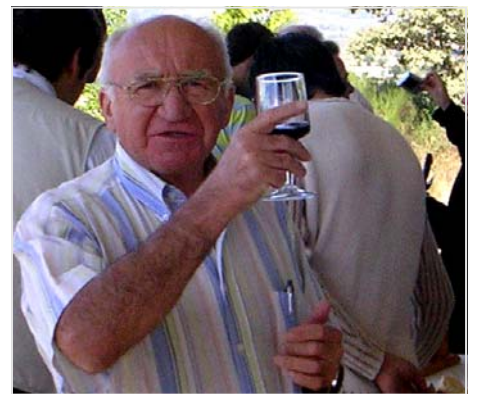
*Presentations made by **José Sousa Uva** on CAP and **Jean-Michel Courades** more specifically on the less favoured areas support, **Ronald Hall** on the Regional Policy, **Robert Hankin** on Regional State Aids, and **Guido Acchioni** on the Bridging the Broadband Gap at the Convention are available at www.euromontana.org and provide an excellent aide-memoire on the current situation in these topics.*



Drew McFarlane Slack, member of the Board of Euromontana interviewed by Portuguese television



Domenico Mastrogiovanni, Vice-President of Euromontana



Robert Duclos, Euromontana Honorary President during the Saturday visits

Regions for economic change—new kinds of thematic networks

DG Regio is launching a new territorial cooperation initiative called “Regions for Economic Change”, which would be aiming to further enhance the contribution of the European Regional and Cohesion policy to achieving the goals of the renewed Lisbon agenda.

The Inter-regional cooperation and Urban development instruments would continue to work as at present, but in addition the Commission is proposing a number of themes to work with cities and regions more directly, with the Commission services playing a leading role in the selection of the participants, animation and reporting. In addition the DG Regio would be working in cooperation with another DG/s on each theme. It is understood that up to 40% of the funding allocated to the ‘Interreg IV (c)’ of the territorial Cooperation Objective might be reserved for this purpose.

Among the 23 themes in the draft version we have seen there are themes that might be relevant for mountain areas, such as:


- Moving to a low carbon economy, in cooperation with DG Environment
- Improving quality of water supply and treatment, in cooperation with DG Environment
- Meeting the demographic challenge, in cooperation with DG Employment
- Making healthy communities, in cooperation with DG Health
- Bringing innovative ideas faster to the market, in cooperation with DG Enterprise
- Integrating marginalised youth, In cooperation with DG Education
- Better connections between regions (ICT in particular in remote and sparsely populated areas), in cooperation with DG INFSO
- Bringing e-government to regions and businesses, in cooperation with DG INFSO

Euromontana has been discussing the initiative with the Commission services and has reason to expect at least a further theme on rural development and diversification will be added to the list, in cooperation with DG Agri. We have also made the vigorous point that mountains should be included in the list.

In practice the European Commission will be approaching the regions selected to participate in this theme through a letter inviting them to participate with a relevant delegation (which should include the agencies responsible for the theme in question, but ultimately this will depend on the regions responding).

In addition to further reinforcing our request for a mountain theme similar in nature to the maritime and coastal themes currently on the list, Eu-

Euromontana has been discussing the initiative with the Commission services and has reason to expect at least a further theme on rural development and diversification will be added to the list



Euromontana will be contacting the Commission services again to point out the themes we consider most likely to be relevant to the mountains, where we will suggest that a territorial dimension in the form of a specific cluster should be included. We will also be able to propose regions that might be relevant to be included in specific themes. The Commission is already drafting potential participants for the first five networks on:

- Bringing innovative ideas faster to the market
- Managing migration and facilitating social integration
- Moving to a low carbon economy
- Bringing e-government to regions and businesses
- Promoting healthy workplaces

available at the Euromontana website on the “members only” section.

Draft version from 20.9.2006 of the Commission working paper is

ESPON 2013—Possibility to propose projects in the future

ESPON is the European observation network on territorial development and cohesion. The organisation that in 2000-2006 had a budget of 17 million Euro will see it almost triple in 2007-2013 to around 47 million. Significantly for Euromontana members, in the next programming period ESPON will be accepting proposals from one or more regions for project ideas. These could be studies on

themes where no consistent data is available identified together. If ESPON takes the project idea on it might then expand the study to other similar areas, but most likely the original proposers could serve as case studies. The annual budget for these studies will be in the vicinity of 1 million euro. Euromontana are in discussion with ESPON on the real opportunity we identify for a mountain theme to

be supported within the new programme.

See www.espon.eu and the Second draft of the ESPON 2013 programme at the “members only” section of the Euromontana website.



Alpine Convention and the rural development

The 32nd Meeting of the Permanent Committee of the Alpine Convention was held in Innsbruck (Austria) from the 19th to 21st September 2006. Among the key points discussed were a political declaration on “population and culture”, a verification report and a report on the state of the Alps. Euromontana - which has an observer status at the Convention - was represented in this event by its treasurer Thomas Egger.

The political declaration on “population and culture” did not quite achieve the level of support sought. The majority of stakeholders refused the Italian proposal. A new proposal should now be elaborated before next Ministers’ Conference in November. Euromontana regrets that the different parties were not interested in elaborating a protocol on the topic. A political declaration does not give the same value to the population issue as to the other domains. Deciding not to create a protocol is a bad sign for the Alpine Convention image.

The first verification report was discussed during the session. This report describes if and how the stakeholders fulfilled the Convention prescriptions and its 8 application protocols. It also demonstrates that there are effectively some defi-

cits in the Alpine countries, such as in the harmonious use of the land surface, maintaining mountain agriculture, international exchange of information, etc.

The Permanent Committee also discussed the first state of the Alps report, which the Alpine Convention committed to publishing regularly. However, the elaboration process turned out to be very complicated, above all due to the lack of harmonised data. The first report is focused on transport in Alpine space. It has a substantial collection of indicators in this field and gives some proposals to follow-up on settling cargo transport, passenger transport and mastering tourist flows. These proposals will be validated by a Ministers’ Conference in November 2006.

We can also note the ratification of 4 protocols

by the European Union: mountain agriculture, soil protection, energy and tourism. Italy has indicated that it would restart the ratification process as consequence of the political change in the country. Italy has equally promised to pay its fees at least for 2003 (balance), 2004 and 2005.

Moreover, the operational part of the protected alpine spaces network has been reconnected to the Alpine Convention Secretariat as a



area covered by the Alpine Convention

Task force. This reinforces the collaboration between the Convention and the network and increases the Alpine Convention's operational capacity. The Task Force is located in Chambéry and is entirely financed by France.

A seminar dedicated to mountain agriculture and rural development took place during the Permanent Committee session, where European policies and several national approaches were presented. It was clear in the discussion that rural development requires a multisectorial approach. Therefore, it is necessary to reinforce the dialogue with regional/local entities which are often the main actors. Further-

more, we have to better coordinate sectoral policies. Some good practices were presented and the Euromontana Charter on Mountain quality food products was mentioned several times.

After the Permanent committee official meeting, an informal meeting followed between the future French Presidency (2007-2008) and the observers. Euromontana also participated. Euromontana asked the future presidency to re-orient the Alpine Convention. During the last years the Alpine Convention has dealt mostly with environmental issues. The Convention has neglected the alpine space socio-economic aspects for a long time.

Euromontana expects the French presidency to focus more on these socio-economic aspects. An entry point could be the Euromontana Charter on quality products which is in accordance with the mountain agriculture protocol.

For more information contact:

Thomas Egger
SAB director
+41 31 382 10 10
thomas.egger@sab.ch

Online consultation on the European Commission's impact assessment system

In 2003, the European Commission developed its integrated approach for the assessment of impacts of its planned significant policy or legislative initiatives. More than 150 impact assessments have so far been carried out by different

Commission departments. Now, the Commission is undertaking an evaluation to review the set-up, implementation and results of its approach to impact assessments, by means of an on-line consultation open for individuals or

organisations until 30 November 2006.

See: http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/consultations/index_en.htm.

European soil protection strategy leaves flexibility to member states

The European Commission proposed on 22 September a strategy to ensure that Europe's soils remain healthy and capable of supporting human activities and ecosystems. It sets a common EU framework for action to preserve, protect and restore soil, but leaves Member States flexibility to implement it in a way which fits local situations best. It is set out in a Communication, accompanied by a proposal for a Framework Directive and an Impact Assessment.

The Framework Directive sets out common principles, objectives and actions. It requires Member States to adopt a systematic approach to identifying and combating soil degradation, tackling precautionary measures and integrating soils protection into other policies. But it allows for flexibility - it is for the Member States to decide the level of ambition, specific targets and the measures to reach those. Member States

are required to identify areas where there is a risk of erosion, organic matter decline, compaction, salinisation and landslides. They must set risk reduction targets for those areas and establish programmes of measures to achieve them. They will also have to prevent further contamination, establish an inventory of contaminated sites on their territory and draw up national remediation strategies. Only nine Member States have specific legislation on soil protection, often covering a specific threat, in particular soil contamination.

The Soils Strategy is the last of the seven Thematic Strategies that the Commission is presenting, in accordance with the 6th Environmental Action Programme.

Source: Commission Press Release IP/06/1241. Full details of the Strategy are available at <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/soil/index.htm>



Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/soil/index.htm>



Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/soil/index.htm>



CALENDAR OF NEXT EUROMONTANA ACTIVITIES:

20 November 2006 at Euromontana offices in Brussels

Euromontana European Policy Consultation Session for members – translation provided in English and French

9.00 Peter MEHLBYE, Director of ESPON, on the ESPON (European Spatial Planning Observation Network) working programme 2007-2013 and new kinds of possibilities for example to propose regional study projects

10.00 Moray GILLAND, DG Regio, on the Territorial Cooperation C-strand and the new “Regions for Economic Change’ initiative

11.30 Coffee

Members and their representatives such as Brussels offices staff are welcome to participate in the sessions. Just send an email to info@euromontana.org if you plan to attend or send us the name of your representative.

(12.00 - 18.00 Executive Board meeting for the members of Euromontana board – Euromontana members are welcome as observers)

Note also the new Rural Europe article at the Euromontana website: “Is rural development money well spent, asks Court of Auditors?”

5-6 December 2006 In Aix-les-Bains, Rhône-Alpes, France

Euromountains.net Interreg III C project’s 3rd thematic seminar on: ‘Defence and Management of the Fragile Rural Areas, Landscape and Natural Resources in Mountains’. Limited space for participants outside the project. See: www.euromountains.net



8-9 March 2007 in Turin Italy

Final seminar of the Euromountains.net Interreg III C project



October 2007 in Romania

Euromontana Rural development Conference and General Assembly 2007

New Euromontana members

“Montana- Borsec”

This agro-tourism association is a local non-governmental organization from Romania. Their mountain area - called BORSEC- has a great tourist potential due to its sources of mineral water of which they are very proud. They are in particular interested in strategy support for the agro-tourism and spa tourism development.

Provincia di Belluno

This new member is a NUTS III level region from Veneto in Italy. It has an area of 3,677 k²m, and a total population of

209,550. They have been very active since the beginning, as we saw in Chaves with their tourism road of cheese project presentation, introduced by Giuseppe Pellegrini. www.provincia.belluno.it

UCCIMAC, France

The Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry from the Massif Central, France, established in 1992 regroups 26 CCI (Chambers of Commerce and Industry) spread over 6 regions: Auvergne, Limousin, Languedoc-Roussillon, Midi-Pyrénées, Rhône-Alpes, Bourgogne. UCCIMAC actions are driven and complemented

by its network, a structure that gives an added value to the CCIs.

Panormos Research Institute, from Nicosia, Cyprus.

The research institute works on medicine, psychology and socio-economic research projects concerning people living in highlands and semi-highlands. For example they are currently working on a project on children and teenagers from highlands and semi-highlands: positive and negative in psychosomatic health and education and social development.

Editorial team: Kristiina Urpalainen
Cécile Levret

Frank Gaskell
Eva Izquierdo

layout: Anna Kociotek

EUROMONTANA



Pl. du Champ du Mars 2
1050 Brussels
Belgium

Phone: +32-(0)2-280.42.83
Fax: +32-(0)2-280.42.85
Email: info@euromontana.org

www.euromontana.org

Euromontana is the European multisectoral association for co-operation and development of mountain territories. It embraces regional and national mountain organizations throughout greater Europe, including regional development agencies, local authorities, agriculture organizations, environmental agencies, forestry organizations and research institutes.

Euromontana's mission is to promote living mountains, integrated and sustainable development and quality of life in mountain areas.

In order to achieve this, Euromontana facilitates the exchange of information and experience among these areas by organizing seminars and major conferences, by conducting and collaborating in studies, by developing, managing and participating in European projects and by working with the European institutions on mountain issues.