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## TWENTY-FIFTH FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR EUROPE

Riga, Latvia, 8-9 June 2006

**Main conclusions and list of recommendations stemming from the debate in the 34<sup>th</sup> session of the ECA on item: The role of agriculture and rural development in revitalizing abandoned/depopulated areas**

### I. Extract from the document ECA/06/REP/1

9. The Commission welcomed the document and thanked the Secretariat for the practical and pragmatic analysis in the document and noted that agriculture has a role to play beyond production.
10. The Commission took note that the document used the EU experience, among others, as a reference for defining different policy options.
11. The Commission highlighted that sometimes the EU policies were presented in the document in a distorted manner and that the reformed rural development policy of the EU was not designed to simply ensure its consistency with the WTO rules but that rural development policy has a much wider scope to fulfil, such as contributing to economic growth and employment opportunities, to satisfy consumer demand for food quality and to provide attractive livelihoods.
12. Member countries suggested to consider agriculture and rural development policies as a result of a more complex and diversified process, implicating different sectors of the economy, different demographic structures, different systems and preference of livelihoods, different stages of development and a changing global context, each having a differentiated impact on processes of land abandonment and depopulation of rural areas.
13. The Commission noted that in developed countries land abandonment no longer coincides with depopulation, while the two processes remain associated in developing and underdeveloped countries.
14. The Commission took note that in the EU the viability of rural areas is associated with the repopulation of rural areas, driven by the service and manufacturing sector and not only agriculture. Abandonment, depopulation and ageing represent only one aspect, the most traditional one of the evolution of rural areas.

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15. Member countries highlighted that one of the EU rural development policy main objectives is to improve the competitiveness of farm and forest enterprises through support for restructuring and innovation.
16. The Commission requested that the specific problems of developing countries should be studied in a more particular manner, particularly factors such as the sizeable peasant populations engaged in subsistence agriculture and temporary migration.
17. The Commission suggested that revitalization policies should be differentiated according to the socio-economic conditions of rural areas.
18. The Commission also suggested to differentiate the diagnosis on the basis of the degree of the development as well as based on different behaviour related to land abandonment and depopulation in relation to the character of the rural economy and environment rather than referring it only to agriculture.
19. The Commission requested to consider differentiation policies addressing the environment, landscape and biodiversity on the basis of intensive or extensive land management patterns and levels of modernization, as well as, the organization of coherent and complementary agriculture and rural development policies as a package rather than opting for a generalized menu of broad orientations for all rural areas.
20. The Commission took note of Ireland's remark that the FAO statistics in paragraph 8 of the document did not reflect the national statistics of Ireland and that footnote 8 of the same document did not reflect the official position of Ireland.
21. The Commission endorsed the recommendations and requested forwarding them to the 25th Regional Conference for Europe for their endorsement.

## II. List of Recommendations

The Commission endorsed the following recommendations from document ECA/34/06/2 (page 14):

- a) In order to find the right *policies for revitalization*, a systematic approach has to be followed and different options for revitalization of rural areas defined. Revitalization policies have to be tailored according to the situation and needs in the rural areas.
- b) The following set of *generalized policy recommendations* can be given, however, the situations described should be seen as a continuum and not as mutually exclusive

Revitalization for nature – preservation of biodiversity:

- c) First priority should be given to policies that compensate the production of a *public good* and as second priority, policies that foster *diversification* in order to benefit from the nature potential through rural tourism, organic farming, collection of non-wood products, etc.

Revitalization for recreation – preservation of quality of life and biodiversity:

- d) *Market based incentives* have highest priority in these areas. As second priority, the production of some *public goods and services* has to be compensated in order to make the revitalization sustainable

Revitalization for economic development – develop rural areas for economic reasons and create synergies with other sectors

- e) In these areas, price mechanism should play the major role; combined with diversification these policies should enable the rural economy to become the engine

of a sustainable revitalization of the area. There are only a few public goods functions that would have to be compensated.

- f) This set of recommendations has to be seen as part of a general policy framework. Such a general policy framework should be integrated both vertically (international, national and regional) and horizontally (intra and inter-sectoral) and encompass, *inter alia*, an enabling macro-economic environment, an institutional framework and policies, decentralization and participation, agricultural, forestry and environmental policies, and rural development policies, with particular attention to improving social and cultural amenities, services and infrastructure, in order to stimulate social and cultural revitalization, and primarily to engage young people in the revitalization process.
- g) FAO could assist Member States to develop strategies for rural development and to determine the right combination of the above-mentioned policies and measures for revitalization. This could take the form of recommendations, but also through technical assistance programmes on a pilot basis in a regional or country context.
- h) However, there are still many unanswered questions and more research is necessary. Therefore, one of the first steps could be to organize a “*Pan-European Conference on Revitalization of Abandoned Land and Depopulated Areas*” in close collaboration with other international and European organizations and actors in this area (e.g. the EC, The World Conservation Union (IUCN), World Trade Organization (WTO), World Wildlife Fund (WWF), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Council of Europe, etc.)<sup>1</sup>. This would include awareness raising at institutional and political levels in Member States. The conference would discuss concrete situations of countries and geographical areas concerned. It would also identify agricultural and rural development policies and programmes for abandoned and depopulated regions that are WTO compatible and efficient in terms of revitalization. Furthermore, a *research programme* on the efficiency of programmes and measures and the economic impact of land abandonment and depopulation and the cost-benefit of revitalization policies, could prepare the ground for discussion and stimulate international debate on this issue.

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<sup>1</sup> Considering the budgetary constraints faced by FAO, the organization of such a Conference could only be possible on condition that extra-budgetary funds are made available.

