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P8_TA(2016)0213

Cohesion policy in mountainous regions of the EU**European Parliament resolution of 10 May 2016 on cohesion policy in mountainous regions of the EU (2015/2279(INI))**

(2018/C 076/02)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
- having regard to Title III of the Third Part of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union concerning, in particular, agriculture,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 ⁽¹⁾ (hereinafter ‘the CPR’),
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1301/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the European Regional Development Fund and on specific provisions concerning the Investment for growth and jobs goal and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006 ⁽²⁾,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the European Social Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006 ⁽³⁾,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 ⁽⁴⁾,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1307/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 establishing rules for direct payments to farmers under support schemes within the framework of the common agricultural policy and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 637/2008 and Council Regulation (EC) No 73/2009 ⁽⁵⁾,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 establishing a common organisation of the markets in agricultural products and repealing Council Regulations (EEC) No 922/72, (EEC) No 234/79, (EC) No 1037/2001 and (EC) No 1234/2007 ⁽⁶⁾,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1144/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 on information provision and promotion measures concerning agricultural products implemented in the internal market and in third countries and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 3/2008 ⁽⁷⁾,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on specific provisions for the support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European territorial cooperation goal ⁽⁸⁾,

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 320.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 289.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 470.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 487.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 608.

⁽⁶⁾ OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 671.

⁽⁷⁾ OJ L 317, 4.11.2014, p. 56.

⁽⁸⁾ OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 259.

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- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 amending Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC) as regards the clarification, simplification and improvement of the establishment and functioning of such groupings ⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 2015/1017 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 June 2015 on the European Fund for Strategic Investments, the European Investment Advisory Hub and the European Investment Project Portal and amending Regulations (EU) No 1291/2013 and (EU) No 1316/2013 — the European Fund for Strategic Investments ⁽²⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 28 April 2015 on 'A new EU Forest Strategy: for forests and the forest-based sector' ⁽³⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 22 September 2010 on the European strategy for the economic and social development of mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated areas ⁽⁴⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 11 December 2013 on maintaining milk production in mountain areas, disadvantaged areas and outermost regions after the expiry of the milk quota ⁽⁵⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 23 May 2013 on a macro-regional strategy for the Alps ⁽⁶⁾,
- having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning a European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region (COM(2015)0366) and the accompanying action plan,
- having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions of 3 December 2014 entitled 'An Alpine macro-regional strategy for the European Union' ⁽⁷⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 17 February 2011 on the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region ⁽⁸⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 21 January 2010 on a European Strategy for the Danube Region ⁽⁹⁾,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 13 April 2011 on the EU Strategy for the Danube Region,
- having regard to the report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (COM(2013)0181),
- having regard to the Commission communication entitled 'European Union Strategy for Danube Region' (COM(2010)0715) and the indicative action plan accompanying that strategy (SEC(2010)1489),
- having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee of 16 June 2011 on the 'Communication from the Commission — European Union Strategy for the Danube Region' ⁽¹⁰⁾,

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 303.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 169, 1.7.2015, p. 1.

⁽³⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2015)0109.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 50 E, 21.2.2012, p. 55.

⁽⁵⁾ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2013)0577.

⁽⁶⁾ OJ C 55, 12.2.2016, p. 117.

⁽⁷⁾ OJ C 19, 21.1.2015, p. 32.

⁽⁸⁾ OJ C 188 E, 28.6.2012, p. 30.

⁽⁹⁾ OJ C 305 E, 11.11.2010, p. 14.

⁽¹⁰⁾ OJ C 248, 25.8.2011, p. 81.

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- having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions of 31 March 2011 on ‘The Danube Region Strategy’ ⁽¹⁾,
 - having regard to the report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning the added value of macro-regional strategies (COM(2013)0468) and the relevant Council conclusions of 22 October 2013,
 - having regard to the Sixth Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion (COM(2014)0473),
 - having regard to the Alpine Convention, including the Protocols to the Alpine Convention,
 - having regard to the study drafted by Euromontana of 28 February 2013 entitled ‘Toward Mountains 2020: Step 1 — capitalising on Euromontana work to inspire programming’,
 - having regard to the study by its Directorate-General for Internal Policies (Policy Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies, Regional Development) of February 2016 entitled ‘Research for REGI Committee — Cohesion in mountainous regions of the EU’,
 - having regard to the Women-Alpnet project within the Interreg Alpine space programme 2001-2006: A Network of Local Institutions and Resource Centres for Women: Promoting Women’s Participation in the Alpine Space Sustainable Development,
 - having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development and the opinion of the Committee on Agricultural and Rural Development (A8-0074/2016),
- A. whereas mountainous regions represent a significant amount of EU territory (around 30 %), and whereas the entirety of the EU depends on their ecosystem services;
- B. whereas there is no explicit definition of mountainous regions in EU regional policy, and whereas the definition used in the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) is not suitable for cohesion policy and cannot as it stands be used for effective management of this policy;
- C. whereas these regions are structurally disadvantaged, owing to their extreme conditions and remoteness, to the extent that many mountainous regions face depopulation and ageing populations, which can upset the natural cycle of generations, leading to a lowering of social standards and the quality of life; whereas this often leads to a rise in unemployment, social exclusion and urban migration;
- D. whereas mountainous regions offer a number of opportunities for achieving EU targets — concerning employment, cohesion and safeguarding the environment — through the sustainable use of their natural resources;
- E. whereas considerable differences exist between mountainous regions, and therefore coordination of policies and sectors is required, both between different mountainous regions (horizontally) and within individual mountainous regions (vertically);
- F. whereas support for mountainous regions from different EU instruments such as the EAFRD and European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds) should be complementary, with a view to creating synergies which will make it possible to achieve better and more inclusive development;
- G. whereas mountainous regions play an important role for the economic, social and sustainable development of Member States and provide numerous ecosystem services; whereas gender equality has a significant impact on economic, social and territorial cohesion in Europe; whereas mountainous cross-border cooperation represents a sustainable way to foster the economic and social development of these regions;

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 166, 7.6.2011, p. 23.

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- H. whereas, owing to their specificities, especially the abundance and variety of renewables and their dependence on resource and energy efficiency, mountainous regions can contribute to the development of new technologies and innovation in general;
- I. whereas mountain areas make a positive contribution to sustainable development, the fight against climate change, the preservation and protection of regional ecosystems and biodiversity; whereas large parts of mountain areas are protected within the Natura 2000 ecological network and under other types of nature conservation arrangements, a fact which on the one hand limits economic activity, but also helps to bolster more sustainable forms of farming and to link farming more closely with other economic activities; whereas farming and land management in mountain areas is very important for the hydrogeological stability of those areas;
- J. whereas mountainous regions face serious challenges — as regards social and economic development, climate change, transport and demographic issues — that must be addressed through the establishment of adequate connections with urban and lowland areas, and by guaranteeing access to digital services;
- K. whereas mountain areas with preserved ecosystems, and their services, can provide a basis for many economic activities, with the emphasis on farming, forestry, tourism and energy, taking into account the cultural and natural heritage of these areas and the diversification of farms; whereas these can be fostered by coordinated actions and/or cross-border cooperation and whereas mountain areas preserve unique conditions and traditional know-how and offer great potential for conversion to quality agricultural systems;
- L. whereas glaciers are characteristic of European mountains and play a vital role in both the ecosystems and water systems of mountains, whereas their retreat in terms of mass and length since the mid-19th century has attained alarming levels, and whereas many glaciers in Europe have already disappeared or are in danger of disappearing by 2050;
- M. whereas the additional costs associated with climatic and topographical conditions, remoteness from economic centres and isolation hinder the economic, social and cultural development of mountain areas; whereas the lack of sufficient infrastructure, including broadband coverage, and investment in mountain areas contributes to the widening gap between these and other regions; whereas also efforts to maintain agricultural economic production in EU mountain areas must be backed up by physical and digital accessibility and infrastructure, as well as by access to public services and services of general interest, such as education, social services, healthcare, transport and postal services, for the inhabitants of such regions;
- N. whereas there are different types of mountainous regions in Europe which are linked by the fact that they share fundamental challenges, such as poor accessibility, few employment opportunities, an ageing population, a lack of connectivity, the impact of climate change and the intensification of human productive activity; whereas active steps must be taken to address these aspects;
- O. whereas in the context of volatile markets and prices, rising production costs, increased competition, the end of milk quotas and environmental challenges, it is essential to secure food production and the multifunctional role of agriculture in order to maintain added value in mountain areas, boost sustainable employment and enable access to other sources of income;
- P. whereas mountainous regions that are part of EU external borders encounter additional difficulties and are affected to a greater extent by the negative trends common to all mountainous regions;

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- Q. whereas in Europe there are mountain ridges that extend across several Member States and also into non-Member States such as the Carpathian mountain range, which, after the last EU enlargement, became the eastern border of the EU and is today an extremely important geopolitical area where strategic political interests of great importance with regard to Union stability meet;
- R. whereas many mountainous regions lack basic infrastructure, public services and continuous access to services of general interest, especially in areas of seasonal activity;
- S. whereas mountain agriculture is important for the identity and culture of mountainous regions and continues to contribute to employment and to specific sectors of the economy in those regions, such as forest resources and tourism, bearing in mind that further diversification of their economies and employment is ongoing and that they play an integral role in the circular economy;
- T. whereas some of the Outermost Regions are also mountain regions of volcanic origin (active or dormant volcanoes, volcanic massifs or chains of volcanoes, and volcanic islands) with parts both submerged and above water, and whereas they encounter difficulties caused by the topology of their territory;
- U. whereas women living in mountainous regions, especially in disadvantaged regions, often face problems concerning their access to higher levels of education and decent job opportunities;
- V. whereas a response must be found to the various challenges posed by depopulation, the impact of climate change, lack of farmland availability, abandonment of farmland and the associated growth of scrub and trees, and the need to preserve mountain grassland;
- W. whereas animal breeding (dairy and extensive meat production) play a significant role in mountain areas of many EU countries; whereas challenging market conditions and serious cost disadvantages have a high impact on small-run farms in those areas;
- X. whereas Article 174(3) TFEU expressly mentions that specific attention should be paid to mountainous regions, among others; whereas a number of EU policies, programmes and strategies exist that have an indirect effect on mountainous regions;

Coordinated approach and general considerations

1. Calls on the Commission to start the process of creating a working definition for functional mountainous regions in the context of Cohesion Policy, complementing the definition of mountainous areas as used in the context of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, with the aim of improving coordination of the policies and measures concerned; considers that such a definition must be wide and inclusive, taking into account different factors such as altitude, accessibility and slope; calls on the Commission to provide for a comprehensive definition also covering volcanic regions in islands and outermost regions, as well as areas that, while not mountainous, are largely integrated with mountain areas; points out, in this context, the idea reflected in the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) of including non-mountainous areas in the strategy as a good initiative;
2. Considers that EU policies should have a specific approach to mountainous regions, as they have clear structural disadvantages; these regions need additional support to overcome the challenges of climate change, to be able to provide year-long rather than only seasonal employment, economic development, prevention and management of natural disasters and protection of the environment, and to help reach the EU renewable energy targets; considers, as a result, that mountainous regions should be mainstreamed in all aspects of EU policies, including Cohesion Policy, by introducing a territorial impact assessment;
3. Recognises that the EU has no specific policy for mountainous regions, and points out that those already existing policies, programmes and strategies that do have an indirect effect on such areas provide grounds for an 'Agenda for EU Mountainous Regions', which should represent the basis for an EU strategy aimed at achieving the long-term development of mountainous regions and the areas dependent on them;

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4. Calls on the Commission to work on an 'Agenda for EU Mountainous Regions', which should be a framework that contributes to transnational, cross-border and interregional policies; believes that the future agenda should identify the priorities for the development of these regions, so that sectoral policies may be adjusted in a better way and opportunities to finance them steered through EU funds, and so that long-term sustainable policies for inclusion may be achieved;
5. Calls on the Commission, in the context of this programme, to establish a specific, in-depth programme to protect those European glaciers which are predicted to disappear by 2050;
6. Calls for synergies to be increased by means of the coordination of EU policies, strategies and programmes that have an indirect effect upon mountainous regions, such as Horizon 2020, COSME, LIFE, Natura 2000, the EU Broadband Strategy, the EU Climate Adaptation Strategy, the EU Environment Action Programme, the Connecting Europe Facility, European Territorial Cooperation, ESI Funds and the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), as well as macroregional strategy initiatives; calls on the Commission to consider the specific application and operation of these programmes in mountainous regions;
7. Underlines the importance of achieving synergies across policies, instruments and sectors, which needs an integrated approach to be applied; highlights the valuable experience gained in the implementation of the Alpine Convention, which reconciles economic, social and environmental interests;
8. Points to the scarcity of useable land in mountainous regions, which is a potential cause of conflicts resulting from diverging or overlapping interests on land classification and use; calls on the Member States, therefore, to develop and apply spatial planning tools that facilitate coordination and public participation in territorial development; considers the Protocol on spatial planning and sustainable development to the Alpine Convention to be an important example to further capitalise on;
9. Calls on nature parks belonging to Member States which share a border with one or more other States to devise joint approaches to the management, development and protection of those nature parks;
10. Notes that the recent reforms of the common agricultural policy (CAP) and of regional policy allow the management of European cohesion funding to be undertaken at regional level;
11. Calls for the managing authorities to consider increasing allocations of ESI Funds at national level to support undeveloped mountainous areas, using a multi-sectoral policy approach, where possible; calls on the Member States to encourage investment in mountain areas by favouring operational programme funding for such areas;
12. Stresses that the territorial dimension of the Cohesion Policy must be prioritised, through targeted initiatives for territorial development and additional support for territorial cooperation at European level;
13. Stresses that Member States and regions have the possibility under the Rural Development Regulation to create thematic sub-programmes focused on the needs of mountain areas, which are eligible for higher support rates for public funding; encourages them to make use of such opportunities; notes that to date none of the competent authorities have chosen to do so; considers nonetheless that this does not necessarily mean that no specific aid has been envisaged for these regions;
14. Encourages the Member States to make use of tools such as the Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) and the Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) instruments in support of the development of mountainous areas, with a view to supporting their specific development potential and objectives; encourages the support of local action groups (LAGs) for community-led local development, in order to foster transnational networks and cooperative working methods;
15. Underlines the potential and importance of existing and future development of macro-regional strategies for the sustainable development of the EU's mountainous regions with a strong cross-border cooperation dimension, where applicable; calls for experience in the implementation of other EU macro-regional strategies to be taken into account;

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16. Welcomes the current initiatives for the Carpathian Mountains in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and the progress made on the EU macro-regional strategy for the Alps; notes that the latter is a good example of an integrated approach to territorial development, taking into account mountainous areas and regions integrated with them;

17. Believes that the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) instrument offers an excellent opportunity to share best practices and knowledge among mountainous regions, which in many cases are located on national borders, and calls for a specific mountain dimension in the future ETC; welcomes initiatives, such as 'Policies against depopulation in mountainous areas' (PADIMA), that are aimed at addressing the specific problems faced by mountainous regions; stresses the importance of INTERREG programmes and of other cooperation initiatives, such as European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) and European Economic Interest Groupings (EEIG), in developing shared areas and mountain ranges in a joint, coordinated manner in regions that contain cross-border mountainous areas;

18. Calls on the Commission to present a communication containing an 'Agenda for EU Mountainous Regions' and, subsequent to this, a White Paper on the development of mountainous regions, based on best practices and involving local, regional and national authorities, and other relevant actors, including economic and social partners and representatives of civil society;

19. Insists that the Commission and other stakeholders undertake a thorough and regular assessment of the condition of mountainous regions in the EU, and analyse data, such as the results of the implementation of Cohesion Policy operational programmes and indicators on changes in the quality of life and the demography, in order to focus EU funding and policy implementation in a correct way;

20. Underlines the need to be able to rely on trustworthy statistical disaggregate data on which to base policy initiatives;

21. Calls for cooperation with European non-Member States, and with regional and local government, for the implementation of a policy for mountainous regions;

22. Calls on the Commission to encourage the use of financial instruments in mountainous regions in order to reach concrete results;

23. Welcomes the ongoing debate on simplification of the Cohesion Policy; hopes that a lighter framework, and the availability of instruments that are easier for stakeholders and recipients to use, will contribute to the development of EU mountainous regions; calls for specific attention to be paid to simplification and to efforts to facilitate investments in mountain regions;

24. Calls on the Commission to propose a European Year of Islands and Mountains;

Jobs and economic growth in mountainous regions

25. Notes that SMEs in mountainous regions are faced with serious difficulties owing to lack of accessibility, infrastructure, connectivity and human resources; calls on the Commission to pay specific attention to the development of SMEs in mountainous regions, particularly areas affected by natural and climate-aggravated disasters, urges the Member States accordingly to give priority to investment in infrastructure and services in mountain areas; calls for synergies between ESI Funds resources and the other EU-subsidised programmes and initiatives to form a holistic and effective policy approach in order to maximise support for SMEs and entrepreneurship; underlines that integrated place-based strategies on mountainous regions should be developed with a view to identifying specific development opportunities and should include measures to increase the connectivity of local SMEs and both intra- and inter-sectoral relations and coordination;

26. Stresses the importance of developing multiple agricultural production in connection with tourism development and environmental protection activities and of structuring food chains in mountain areas, either within associations of producer organisations, which increases farmers' negotiating strength, or by setting up local markets and short supply chains; underlines the need to guarantee access to large markets, and to introduce product quality, promotion and protection measures, thereby improving the marketing of agricultural products and including them within the general

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tourism products of a given geographical area; moreover, as mountain areas have strong potential for producing high-quality food products, calls on the Commission and the Member States to start the debate about introducing special labelling for mountain food products at EU level;

27. Recognises in this context the need for support from the EAFRD for agricultural production in mountain areas and for efforts to create added value through synergies with other EU Funds and initiatives, as well as with private financial instruments, in order to create a positive impact in mountainous regions;

28. Welcomes the progress made on the EU Forest Strategy; supports the sustainable development of forests at Union level, especially as regards the contribution of forests to safeguarding the environment and biodiversity and achieving renewable energy targets; notes that the economic dimension of forestry could be emphasised within the strategy;

29. Considers that forestry can offer jobs and economic development for mountainous regions and that forest resources should therefore be guaranteed over time, by exploiting them sustainably; points out that forests are of vital importance for the ecosystem and that in the mountains they play an important role in preventing avalanches, landslides and flooding; calls for the support of SMEs, in particular those established in mountain areas, which are involved in the forestry sector and fully respect the principle of environmental sustainability; stresses the particular economic and social role of forestry in mountain areas and the importance of investment for efficient use of forestry resources in those regions; recalls the significant role that forests play in providing primary and secondary materials used in the pharmaceutical, cosmetic and food industries, thus contributing to job creation; calls, in this connection, for Cohesion Policy to focus more on sustainable forest management;

30. Calls for additional incentives to preserve small processing enterprises and small and medium-sized mountain farms in mountainous areas, which are an important source of employment and produce products with specific quality characteristics, but on average have higher costs and lower profitability than intensive crops or livestock farms; calls on the Commission to promote pilot projects with a view to recovering traditional economic activities, including farming and handicrafts, in mountain areas that are subject to depopulation; calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote streamlined administrative procedures for applying for and administering funds in order to give small communities better access to funding so as to foster long-term development, accessibility of markets and the setting-up of producer organisations in mountain areas;

31. Calls on the beneficiaries of ESI Funds in mountainous regions to assess the potential and need for establishing local technological and sustainable industrial parks, and after appropriate feasibility studies and cost-benefit analysis to consider constructing such parks using EU and national means;

32. Underlines the need for smart specialisation strategies, where applicable, in boosting the potential offered by mountainous regions;

33. Highlights the important role that social enterprise, and alternative business models such as cooperatives and mutuals, can play in the inclusive and sustainable development of mountainous regions, including overcoming exclusion of marginalised groups and overcoming gender inequalities;

34. Supports the use of ESI Funds for economic sectors that do not pollute and are future-oriented, such as sustainable tourism, cultural heritage, sustainable forestry, high-speed internet development, crafts, and renewable energy; points to the importance of developing new innovative tourism models and promoting successful existing models;

Socio-economic dimension of the mountainous regions

35. Notes that supporting the shift towards a low-carbon, climate-resilient, resource-efficient and environmentally sustainable economy could be emphasised within the Cohesion Policy;

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36. Considers that increasing the qualifications of the workforce and creating new jobs in the green economy should be part of the investment priorities of the ESI Funds, and stresses that EU policies should support training in areas such as mountain agriculture, sustainable tourism, craft industries, sustainable forestry and renewable energy technologies;

37. Welcomes initiatives to attract young people into the agricultural sector, and calls on the Commission to develop similar programmes for mountain areas; urges that measures be taken to encourage young entrepreneurs to branch out in areas relating to cultural heritage and not limited to seasonal activity alone; highlights the role of scientific institutes and other educational establishments dealing with mountain agriculture; encourages participation by young farmers in exchange schemes and e-learning platforms;

38. Emphasises the importance of education for women and girls and of increasing the inclusion of women in areas such as science, technology, engineering, maths and entrepreneurship, including green-economy sectors; considers that particular attention should be devoted to support and encouragement for women farmers and women engaging as self-employed persons in direct marketing, tourism and craft trades and projects; highlights the importance of the active presence and role of women in mountain areas, particularly in fostering innovation and cooperation processes and in preserving the proper functioning of those areas; calls on the Commission and Member States, therefore, to use existing resources and procedures for micro-financing and micro-credit initiatives for women, and for career opportunities for women, under the European Social Fund and transnational projects;

39. Stresses that the importance of mountain areas and effective measures in the EU have been integrated in the most recent reform of the CAP; believes that the CAP should aim to compensate the natural and economic disadvantages that farmers face but should also give them the means to capitalise on their assets;

40. Stresses the importance of aid under the first pillar of the CAP in maintaining agricultural production and income for farmers in mountain areas; recalls that Member States have the option of establishing specific direct aid and coupled payments to help attain these objectives; recalls that in many Member States some decoupled aid under the first pillar is far less generous than in prime farming areas, because of inadequate internal convergence, which further limits the competitiveness of farms;

41. Considers that measures under the second pillar of the CAP must ensure the sustainability, competitiveness and diversification of agricultural production and processing industries in mountain areas; also considers that such measures could contribute to a 'rural renaissance' by supporting the emergence of multifunctional farm development projects that generate added value and innovation and by favouring agricultural investments (in buildings, specific equipment, modernisation, etc.) and the preservation of native breeds;

42. Considers that a sector-specific approach for the dairy sector should aim at ensuring sustainable milk production in mountain areas, and calls on the Commission, Member States and regional authorities to provide, notably through the second pillar of the CAP, accompanying compensatory measures for disadvantaged dairy production with a view to maintaining and strengthening farming and the effective functioning of farms, in particular small-scale farms, in those regions;

43. Highlights the potential of dual education in mountainous regions; points to the encouraging results achieved by some Member States; welcomes existing projects for dual education across the Union;

44. Considers that suitable physical and ICT infrastructures create opportunities for economic, educational, social and cultural activities and reduce the effects of peripherality and isolation; calls on the Commission to come up with specific recommendations for overcoming the shortage of skilled labour in the tourism industry, specifically addressing the challenges of unattractive jobs and insufficient remuneration, as well as for stimulating possibilities for professional career development; urges the Commission and the Member States to allocate investments via the ESI Funds in infrastructure in mountain areas aimed at making them more attractive for economic activities;

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45. Supports innovative solutions, including IT-based ones, for access to basic quality education, as well as formal and informal education and lifelong learning opportunities, in remote mountainous areas, for example through cooperation among mountainous regions, cities and universities; underlines the need for high-quality tertiary education, and points to the potential of distance education systems which offer access to teaching and learning from remote areas; with a view to overcoming negative demographic trends in these regions, highlights the fact that both equal access to education and childcare facilities and further training and requalification for older people to facilitate active integration into the labour market are important concerns to be addressed;

46. Calls for the development and improvement of healthcare facilities and services in mountainous regions, inter alia through cross-border cooperation initiatives, including the development of cross-border healthcare establishments, where needed; advocates the development of volunteering for the provision of public services, taking into account best practices in certain Member States;

47. Recalls the principle of universal access to public services to be guaranteed in all territories of the EU, while stressing the need for Member States and regions to encourage alternative and innovative solutions for mountainous areas, including tailor-made solutions adapted to local and regional needs if necessary;

48. Stresses the importance of the Youth Employment Initiative and of a more effective implementation of the Youth Guarantee as a good opportunity to stop the outflow of young people from mountainous regions in response to the demographic crisis and the problem of an ageing population; calls for youth employment initiatives specifically oriented to meet the needs of underdeveloped mountainous regions;

49. Highlights the fact that gender inequalities persist in mountainous regions, particularly in the case of marginalised communities and vulnerable groups; calls on the Commission to take gender mainstreaming actions at horizontal and vertical level for all policy areas and, especially, to fund connectivity policy in these regions; calls for a comparative analysis of the particularities of the condition of women in mountainous regions, in particular in disadvantaged mountain areas;

50. Encourages and calls for support, including through the use of ESI Funds, for initiatives to improve the social and cultural cohesion of, and inclusion in, mountainous communities, and to overcome physical isolation and lack of cultural diversity, in particular through access to, and direct participation in, arts and cultural life;

51. Stresses the importance of integrated territorial initiatives with a view to integrating migrants, in connection with processes relating to demographic and socio-economic renewal and recovery in mountain areas, including those undergoing depopulation; calls on the Commission to facilitate and promote the dissemination of such initiatives;

Environmental protection and combating climate change in mountainous regions

52. Recalls the richness, in amount and variety, of renewables in mountainous areas; believes that these areas should take the lead in achieving EU renewable energy targets; calls on the Commission to focus on policies that encourage and facilitate the use of renewables in mountainous regions;

53. Emphasises the need to protect at European level the emblematic high-mountain species able to live on cross-border mountain ranges, such as chamois, ibex, large raptors, bears, wolves and lynx; calls on the Commission and the Member States to establish a plan for the protection and reintroduction of emblematic high-mountain species;

54. Emphasises also the potential of the volcanic mountainous regions and volcanoes, especially as regards the contribution of volcanology, to achieving the renewable energy targets, and the contribution of these areas to the prevention and management of natural disasters, such as volcanic eruptions;

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55. Calls on the Member States and the Commission to identify all the high mountain resorts where a car ban would have a positive impact on the local fight against the melting of glaciers;

56. Insists that reaching EU renewable energy targets and renewable energy exploitation must take into account the balance of nature and environmental protection, including in mountain areas; recalls that, in some cases, hydropower and biomass extraction may affect ecosystems, and that wind and solar energy plants could harm the landscape, while being a source of local development;

57. Notes that mountainous regions, including volcanic ones and their ecosystems, are especially vulnerable to climate change and hydrogeological risks, with particularly important consequences in such regions, including as a result of increasing numbers of natural hazards, which can have an environmental impact on surrounding areas too and negative repercussions on economic development and tourism; believes, in this regard, that safeguarding the environment, combating climate change and taking appropriate climate change adjustments measures must be at the heart of a future 'Agenda for EU Mountainous Regions', including an action plan on climate change; stresses also the need to develop a network of analysis and exchange of good practice in these areas;

58. Stresses the importance of preserving and protecting the unique habitat of mountainous regions and of developing it in a sustainable way, including by restoring biodiversity and soil, promoting natural heritage and ecosystem services, and providing green infrastructure, thus also offering job opportunities in those sectors; recalls the key importance of farming and sustainable land and forest management in mountain areas with a view to maintaining biodiversity and guarding against environmental and landscape impacts;

59. Stresses that mountainous regions are an important source of water resources that must be safeguarded and managed in a sustainable way; notes the reliance of certain urban areas on ecosystem services from the mountainous regions and that these regions often do not receive a just return; invites local authorities to consider partnerships in the form of cooperation projects to collect and protect water supplies for urban communities in the vicinity of mountain areas; supports financing for water storage measures in order to ensure that agricultural areas are sustainably and efficiently irrigated and that there is a minimum flow level for rivers;

60. Supports the development of sustainable tourism as a positive opportunity to provide jobs and promote the sustainable development of these areas; underlines the need for the development of broadband internet as a basis for sustainable tourism;

61. Highlights the need for active synergistic cooperation between farming and other economic activities on Natura 2000 sites and in other protected areas (national parks, countryside parks, etc.) lying in mountain regions;

Accessibility and connectivity in mountainous regions

62. Considers that the internet and, specifically, next-generation access (NGA) technologies play a crucial part in overcoming the challenges faced by mountainous regions; recalls that the internet is linked to services of general interest (SGIs) and that lack of access to such services can lead to depopulation;

63. Calls on the Member States to create incentives for more active development of public-private partnerships in mountainous regions, in transport, communication and energy infrastructure, as the lack of economies of scale makes the provision of these services commercially unattractive; stresses that only better transport and other infrastructure of sufficient quality can create economic growth and new jobs in mountain areas;

64. Notes that tourism is influenced to a large extent by the presence of infrastructure and access to services of general interest; calls on the Commission to consider the possibilities for creating infrastructure in support of tourism in mountainous regions;

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65. Notes that new information and communication technologies offer a wide range of opportunities for employment, social inclusion and empowerment in the emerging digital economy; considers therefore that specific support from ESI Funds is needed for the promotion of such opportunities; calls on the Member States to promote teleworking, e-commerce and the use of digital marketing channels in these areas to improve companies' cost management; considers that easier access to new information technologies could lead to the development of distance education programmes in areas with a shortage of teachers, as well as e-health services, which might help prevent the depopulation of mountain areas; calls for examples of good practice to be proposed and shared, and thus contribute to the economic diversification of mountain regions;

66. Welcomes the EU Satellite Voucher Scheme, by which satellite connections provide a useful alternative for areas with insufficient infrastructure or where there is a lack of interest from investors;

67. Calls on the Commission, when developing policies for broadband access, to take into account the lack of infrastructure and interest on the part of investors owing to the sparse population and remoteness of mountainous regions; calls on the Commission to develop specific policies for overcoming the digital divide in these regions, including through the necessary public investments;

68. Recalls that the social and economic development of mountainous regions, which in some Member States are also remote regions, depends on transport links between them and the other regions in a given Member State or trans-border regions; calls on the national authorities, in cooperation with the Commission, to facilitate the implementation of projects for transport connectivity of mountainous regions with main national and trans-European roads and transport corridors, especially the TEN-T transport infrastructure, using different EU funds and financial instruments, including EIB investments;

69. Calls on the mountainous regions of Europe to invest through the ERDF in the development of more efficient and better interconnected railway and tram networks;

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70. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the Committee of the Regions, and to the governments and national and regional parliaments of the Member States.
