

Tuesday 24 March 2009

Exchange of best practices

25. Calls on the Commission to organise and coordinate the exchange of best practices through a network of regions, and to create a public website containing key information about the projects in all Community languages for this purpose;

26. Recommends that the Commission set up within the current administrative framework a specific office in the Directorate-General for Regional Policy to organise, in cooperation with this network of regions, the evaluation, collection and exchange of best practices and to act as a permanent contact point for both the supply and the demand side, with the aim of establishing a long-term, continuous, reliable and successful exchange of best practices in the field of cohesion policy; calls on the Commission to disseminate this good-practice culture to all its departments;

27. Proposes within this framework that the evaluation mechanisms should study and take into account tried and trusted methodologies which have already been implemented; believes that particular emphasis should be given to cooperation with a network of regional authorities and specialised agencies which are the key source for the primary material of best practices for evaluation;

28. Points out that, while the European Union provides funding and good practices, it is for national, regional and local office holders to capitalise on them; welcomes in this connection the establishment of an Erasmus programme for local and regional elected representatives;

29. Recommends that the Commission use the available tools of the Committee of the Regions, in particular the Lisbon Monitoring Platform and the Subsidiarity Monitoring Network in order to exchange best practices between regions and Member States with a view to identifying and jointly determining the objectives, subsequently planning actions and, finally, undertaking a comparative evaluation of the results of cohesion policy;

*

* *

30. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

Complementarities and coordination of cohesion policy with rural development measures

P6_TA(2009)0157

European Parliament resolution of 24 March 2009 on complementarities and coordination of cohesion policy with rural development measures (2008/2100(INI))

(2010/C 117 E/08)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to Articles 158 and 159 of the EC Treaty,

— having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund ⁽¹⁾, with particular reference to Article 9 thereof,

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 210, 31.7.2006, p. 25.

Tuesday 24 March 2009

- having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 of 20 September 2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) ⁽¹⁾,
 - having regard to Council Decision 2006/702/EC of 6 October 2006 on Community strategic guidelines on cohesion ⁽²⁾,
 - having regard to Council Decision 2006/144/EC of 20 February 2006 on Community strategic guidelines for rural development (programming period 2007 to 2013) ⁽³⁾,
 - having regard to the EU Territorial Agenda and the First Action Programme for the Implementation of the Territorial Agenda,
 - having regard to the Commission Green Paper of 6 October 2008 on Territorial Cohesion-Turning territorial diversity into strength (COM(2008)0616),
 - having regard to the report by the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON) entitled 'Territorial futures: Spatial scenarios for Europe',
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development and the opinion of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (A6-0042/2009),
- A. whereas what constitutes a rural area has been defined by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, its definition incorporating characteristics such as low population density and lack of access to services, and whereas this definition is used by the Commission in order to identify and outline development objectives for these areas,
- B. whereas rural areas differ greatly from Member State to Member State and whereas, while rural areas in some regions and Member States have experienced demographic and economic growth, the inhabitants of many of these areas are migrating to urban areas or are seeking to retrain, thus creating immense challenges for rural areas,
- C. whereas rural areas account for up to 80 % of EU territory,
- D. whereas the needs of intermediate rural areas, which are characterised by an economic structure similar to that of the urban areas adjacent to them, differ from those of areas that are predominantly rural, peripheral or isolated,
- E. whereas one of the Union's aims is to promote economic and social progress and a high level of employment and to achieve balanced and sustainable development,
- F. whereas the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the EU can be enhanced through economic development, promotion of employment opportunities in rural and urban areas, and ensuring equal access to public services,
- G. whereas the reform of structural policy for the period 2007-2013 brought with it changes to the structure of the Funds and the basis for the allocation of assistance under this policy, and the establishment of a new European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) linked to the common agricultural policy (CAP) and disconnected from cohesion policy,
- H. whereas the LEADER programmes have in the past already shown how rural development can be successfully promoted through regional policy instruments,

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 277, 21.10.2005, p. 1.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 291, 21.10.2006, p. 11.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 55, 25.2.2006, p. 20.

Tuesday 24 March 2009

- I. whereas it is of key importance to the EAFRD's success to ensure mutual complementarity between activities co-financed under the EAFRD and those co-financed under the structural funds, and thus for the assistance under the various funds, in particular the European Fund for Regional Development (ERDF), the Cohesion Fund and the European Social Fund (ESF), to be suitably coordinated and for the complementarity of those funds to be ensured,
- J. whereas the establishment of the EAFRD, the separation of rural development funding from the scope of cohesion policy and a broader regional development perspective must not result in some objectives (for example, environmental protection, transport and education) being either duplicated or omitted altogether,
- K. whereas the permanent transfer of funds between the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and the EAFRD leads to planning insecurity for both farmers and rural development project promoters,
- L. whereas, in view of budgetary constraints, there is a risk that funding available under the ERDF will be used to a large extent to boost economic competitiveness in larger urban centres or the most dynamic regions, while EAFRD financing will be focused on improving the competitiveness of agriculture, which continues to be the motor of rural areas, and will also be targeted at support for non-agricultural activities and the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in rural areas, with the result that there is a need for closer coordination to ensure that no areas are left without coverage,
- M. whereas SMEs, especially microbusinesses and craft undertakings, have a key role to play in preserving social and economic activity in the countryside and ensuring its stability,
- N. whereas rural development policy objectives need not be contrary to the Lisbon goals provided that this development is based on the application of the relative competitiveness mechanism (better cost-effectiveness), in particular in local food processing and in relation to the development of SMEs and of infrastructure and services, such as tourism, education and environmental protection,
- O. whereas the natural relationship between and complementarity of agricultural policy and rural development policy should be recognised,
 - 1. Takes the view that the criteria traditionally used to distinguish rural areas from urban areas (lower population density and level of urbanisation), may not always be sufficient to provide the 'full picture'; considers, therefore, that the possibility of adding additional criteria should be explored and calls on the Commission to produce an analysis and concrete proposals in this field;
 - 2. Considers that, in view of the major differences between rural areas in the various Member States and because such areas account for up to 80 % of EU territory, it is necessary to adopt and implement a suitably targeted and integrated approach for the sustainable development of such areas, aiming at levelling the existing inequalities and promoting economic dynamism of urban and rural areas; underlines the need to allocate adequate funding to the corresponding actions;
 - 3. Recalls in this respect that all regions throughout the Union as a whole, including rural and remote areas, should in principle benefit from the same development opportunities, to avoid any further territorial exclusion of the most disadvantaged areas;
 - 4. Stresses that in a large number of rural areas development possibilities, especially for young people and women, are reduced by difficulties in accessing public services, lack of jobs and the age pyramid;
 - 5. Points out that, in certain areas, there are no alternatives to certain forms of agricultural production which must in many cases be sustained at all costs for environmental and regional policy reasons, particularly in remote and upland farming areas affected by desertification;

Tuesday 24 March 2009

6. Recalls that the Gothenburg European Council of 15 and 16 June 2001 expanded the Lisbon objectives to include the concepts of sustainability and cohesion and that rural development policy is geared towards sustainable farming, preserving non-agricultural rural activities, maximising the potential of local development, environmental protection, balanced regional planning and the development of SMEs;
7. Believes that proper implementation of rural development policy, in view of the long-term sustainable development of rural areas, requires due account to be taken of each area's natural resources and specific features, including the protection, enhancement and management of the rural heritage, and of the development of links and interactions with urban areas;
8. Also stresses the importance of assessing areas of alternative economic activity and the opportunities arising from those areas for diversification of the population's occupational activities;
9. Believes that the future issues facing the countryside call for a balanced development policy encompassing all social and economic agents, including small businesses and micro-businesses in the production and service sectors, given their role in integrated local development;
10. Considers that, in the case of the new Member States, rural development policy must target improving the efficiency of agriculture and reducing the economic development gap between country and city, inter alia by supporting non-farming activities, an objective which can also be attained by using the Structural Funds;
11. Welcomes the ambitions set out at the Second European Conference on Rural Development in Salzburg in 2003 but regrets the fact that the funding granted under the second pillar of the CAP by the latest financial perspectives has been significantly reduced, risking inefficiency and creating a division between the farmer and the rural dweller;
12. Points out that there is a need to develop a coherent, long-term rural development strategy in order to facilitate the most effective and efficient use of all available funding;
13. Calls on Member States and regional authorities to formulate, in cooperation with the Commission and in partnership with all competent authorities and bodies representing civil society, a transparent, long-term, sustainable rural development strategy at national and regional level, in order to be able clearly to identify rural development priorities and objectives and ensure the adaptation, coordination and complementarity of the aid originating in the various sources of funding available;
14. Calls on the Commission, the Member States and the regional authorities to ensure the direct participation of the organisations representing SMEs, microbusinesses and craft undertakings, in order to identify those priorities with a view to responding in the best way possible to those enterprises' needs and expectations;
15. Recognises that rural development policy plays a hugely important role in targeting and addressing specific problems in rural areas and believes that the establishment of the EAFRD for the second pillar of the CAP represents an attempt to have a flexible, strategic, thematic and integrated approach to respond to the diversity of situations and the scale of the challenges facing the EU's rural areas, and to simplify financing procedures and ensure that funds are focused on these areas;
16. Recalls that the Member States have been called upon to prepare, for the current programming period, two strategic documents: a National Strategy Plan for rural development (EAFRD) and a National Strategic Reference Framework for regional policy (Structural Funds); recalls that the Member States have been asked to mobilise synergies and set up operational coordination mechanisms between the various funds; regrets, however, that in this process the emphasis was mainly placed on ensuring the demarcation of the various funds and programmes, rather than creating synergies from them;

Tuesday 24 March 2009

17. Considers that the efficiency of rural development policy can only be achieved if the measures implemented under EARDF and regional development policy are coordinated and complementary, so as to avoid double financing and gaps; notes with concern the insufficient coordination between those actions during the current programming period in the individual Member States; calls therefore on the Commission to propose reforms aimed at ensuring better coordination in the planning and implementation of measures co-financed under the cohesion policy and CAP; recognises that the post-2013 reform of the CAP and the EU Structural Funds will provide an opportunity to re-assess the relationship between rural development on one hand and agricultural policy and cohesion policy on the other;
18. Recognises that the primary role of rural development policy is to continue to maintain the population of the countryside and ensure a decent standard of living for this rural population;
19. Considers that the approach of separating rural development from cohesion policy with the creation of EAFRD needs to be monitored very closely in order to evaluate its true impact on the development of rural areas; notes that the new system was put in place in 2007 and that it is, therefore, too early for any conclusions to be reached with regard to the future of this Community policy;
20. Stresses that one of the priorities of rural development policy is to propose measures which do not result in the rural population having to abandon agriculture and which also help, inter alia, to promote competitive holdings, the production of organic products, and traditional high-quality foods and drinks, for example;
21. Notes with interest that Axis 3 and Axis 4 (LEADER) of the second pillar of CAP (rural development policy), which represent 15 % of total EAFRD expenditure, concern non-agricultural activities that mainly focus on the diversification of rural economies; believes that, given the nature of the interventions financed under these Axes, which resemble some actions financed by the Structural Funds, there is a risk of policy overlap;
22. Stresses, however, the need to take account of the prospects primarily of the population employed in agriculture, who should remain the main focus of support measures under rural development policy;
23. Stresses the importance of support for young farmers to keep them on their land, even if they are not engaged solely in agricultural production, providing them with incentives for development and other activities too, such as rural tourism and of strengthening SMEs in the countryside;
24. Considers that the main objectives of rural development policy can only be achieved if this policy receives adequate funding that is used in line with the priorities set out for rural areas, and that funds raised through modulation should always be distributed back to active farming communities;
25. Takes the view that the coordination of structural policy and rural development measures allows projects with greater European added value to be undertaken; sees in that an opportunity for long-term enhancement of rural areas, for example through infrastructural or environmental protection measures;
26. Calls on the Commission to supply detailed figures and forecasts for the take-up of EAFRD and structural funding in rural areas and to look into the synergies that can be created by the EAFRD and the Structural Funds in terms of the funding available in rural areas;
27. Calls on the Commission to assess whether regional policy programmes can contribute to offering farmers a reliable income, for example through carrying out environmental protection, nature conservation and landscape management activities;
28. Stresses that sustainable development, per-capita income levels, accessibility, access to public goods and services and rural depopulation are among the biggest challenges for cohesion policy and can be most effectively improved through among other measures, support for economic activities in rural communities;

Tuesday 24 March 2009

29. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to take systematic account of the countryside in EU policies and to provide appropriate support for projects to develop human capital, in particular through the provision of training opportunities for agricultural and non agricultural entrepreneurs in rural areas, with a particular focus on young women, with the aim of promoting employment and job creation;
30. Emphasises that development in rural areas requires greater attention and support for the preservation of the natural and farmed landscape, ecotourism, the production and use of renewable energy and local initiatives such as local food-quality procurement schemes and local farmers' markets;
31. Draws attention to the role played by SMEs in rural development and the contribution they make to convergence at regional and local levels; calls on the Commission, the Member States and regional and local authorities to lay the emphasis on strengthening competitiveness by also assisting other productive sectors and to foster entrepreneurship in rural areas, in particular by removing administrative, legal and planning barriers, providing adequate IT infrastructure and increasing the incentives to launch new entrepreneurial activities and also to offer more support to non-agricultural activities while promoting economic diversification in these areas;
32. Once again draws the attention of the Council, the Commission, Member States and local authorities to the enormous challenge posed by the predicted disappearance of several millions of rural small businesses, which will have a major impact on employment and, therefore, on stability in the countryside; calls for all necessary measures to be taken at all levels, in close cooperation with economic and social partners;
33. Notes that the difficulties in implementing rural development policy stem from the fact that sectoral policies and territorial cohesion policy cut across each other, as do the economic and social aspects of both types of policy, and from the wide variety of responsibility allocation and policy coordination systems used in the Member States, in this connection, stresses once again the necessity to create synergies between the EAFRD and the Structural and Cohesion Funds and calls on the Commission to assist national, regional and local authorities in properly understanding the possibilities offered by these financial instruments; calls on Member States to ensure dialogue between managing authorities so as to create synergies between the interventions of the different funds and enhance their effectiveness;
34. Takes the view that, prior to rural funding reform, the Commission should conduct a detailed assessment of all sectoral policies having an impact on rural areas, and notably CAP and regional policy, in the context of cohesion policy and that a set of best practices should be drawn up for rural development policy as a whole;
35. Calls on the Council to convene a joint informal meeting of the Ministers responsible for agriculture and regional policy to discuss the best means of coordinating cohesion policy and rural development measures, and to invite to this meeting the consultative bodies of the EU (Committee of the Regions and European Economic and Social Committee), as well as representatives of regional and local authorities;
36. Requests that the Commission create a high-level working group by 2011 as part of the CAP Health Check which would bring forward proposals to secure the future of the rural economy and all who live in rural areas after 2013;
37. Calls on the Commission to introduce or strengthen genuine governance or partnership arrangements at all levels, with the direct involvement of all players, including SMEs and microbusinesses, as well as the economic and social partners, with a view to defining the priorities for action best adapted to rural areas' development needs;
38. Notes that the process of rural development must be reconciled with the interests of suburban areas and must be closely coordinated with the promotion of urban development, and emphasises that the synergies between rural and urban development policies are neither sufficient nor effective;

Tuesday 24 March 2009

39. Recognises the potential of the rural community to make a positive contribution to the environment through their engagement in environmentally friendly activities and the development of alternative energy sources such as biofuels, especially considering the four new challenges outlined in the rural development policy of the Health Check, such as biodiversity and renewable energies;

40. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

Combating female genital mutilation in the EU

P6_TA(2009)0161

European Parliament resolution of 24 March 2009 on combating female genital mutilation in the EU (2008/2071(INI))

(2010/C 117 E/09)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 2, 3, and 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948,
- having regard to Articles 2, 3, and 26 of the 1966 UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,
- having regard in particular to Article 5(a) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979,
- having regard to Article 2(1), Article 19(1), Article 24(3), and Articles 34 and 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted on 20 November 1989 by the UN General Assembly,
- having regard to the 1989 UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment,
- having regard to the 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child,
- having regard to Article 1, Article 2(f), Article 5, Article 10(c), and Articles 12 and 16 of General Recommendation No 19 of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, adopted in 1992,
- having regard to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, adopted by the June 1993 World Conference on Human Rights,
- having regard to the December 1993 UN General Assembly Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the first international human rights instrument relating solely to violence against women,
- having regard to the Declaration and the Programme of Action of the UN International Conference on Population and Development, adopted in Cairo on 13 September 1994,