

Resolution on rural revival policies in the balance between town and country (73/3)
(Adopted by the Ministers' Deputies on 19 January 1973 at the 217th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)

The Committee of Ministers,

1. Noting, like the European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning (final resolution of the first conference, Bonn, 9-11 September 1970), that the differences between industrialised urban areas and peripheral rural areas have not been lessened by economic and social expansion in Europe;

2. Having given its attention to Resolution 63 of the European Conference of Local Authorities on problems caused by rural depopulation and rural revival in the balance between town and country, which notes that the gap between the wealthy and the poor areas has in some cases increased and that it is in the mainly agricultural and rural areas that the relative decline has been strongest;

3. Noting that there are serious disadvantages in many respects in allowing country areas to become depopulated:

- in rural areas abandoned because of under-employment of local human and economic resources;
- in rural areas where the local population fails to maintain an adequate level of exploitation and maintenance of sites; because of the destruction of the balance between man and nature;
- in certain particularly deprived areas, because depopulation has reached the scale where all chances of future development of the area would be compromised;
- in areas of urban and industrial concentration; because of the growing concentration and the consequent increase in financial and social costs;

4. Considering that, while the decrease in the number of agricultural workers may seem an inevitable consequence of the evolution of neo-industrial society, the depopulation of the countryside is a phenomenon which can, and must, be controlled;

5. Noting also that the machinery for equalising and redistributing national wealth is not strong enough to halt the present economic flow towards the cities, to the detriment of rural areas;

6. Noting moreover that many signs indicate that the exodus from the country to the town is not caused merely by economic considerations but is also motivated by social reasons,

A. Recommends member governments of the Council of Europe, in so far as they consider it appropriate to the particular circumstances and problems in each country and in each region:

1. To implement an overall policy of balanced development for both urban and rural areas with a view to reducing the differences in the prosperity of the various areas,

promoting a better distribution of activities and protecting the quality of the environment. This policy might comprise:

- (i) greater efforts to improve regional planning, including physical, economic and social planning;
- (ii) taking certain steps financially to influence the siting of activities and in particular to increase the economic and budgetary transfers permitted to rural populations with a view to levelling out local and regional resources in urban and rural areas;
- (iii) establishing the prior conditions essential for promoting measures designed to increase the power of attraction of rural regions which must continue to be the living space of a sufficiently large population;
- (iv) co-ordinating the extension of communications and transport networks and the development of large, medium-sized and small urban centres in such a way as to make it easier for rural populations to benefit from the services and facilities in these centres;
- (v) integrating measures of rural revival in an overall policy of regional expansion;

2. To promote the establishment of efficient, decentralised, regional structures with a view to:

- (i) associating the population and their representatives with policies for rural revival, thus encouraging the spirit of local initiative and a feeling for the importance of regional authorities;
- (ii) creating the regional framework best suited for drawing up general regional planning projects;
- (iii) enabling local and regional authorities to play a major role in applying and a decisive role in implementing development programmes;

3. To implement local government reforms designed to strengthen local authorities' structures in order to fit them for their irreplaceable role as leaders of local efforts to stimulate rural revival. Such reforms should be designed to:

- (i) make the local authorities and groups of local authorities a privileged framework for participation by the population in revival schemes;
- (ii) promote the establishment, at local authorities' level, of local rural development plans which take the population's preferences into account and are calculated to lead to concerted action by all concerned;
- (iii) improve the resources of local authorities in rural regions and their credit facilities;
- (iv) encourage, with the help of central and regional authorities, an intensive effort to modernise local authorities with a view to ensuring that the new rural units are endowed with the material and administrative means necessary for their action, and in particular with competent employees specially trained for the work they will be required to do;

4. To promote a series of specific measures for rural revival:

(i) transformation of the agricultural structure by:

- stepping up the productive forces suited to the countryside;
- drawing up model plans to develop or alter the size of farms and the structure of production in accordance with the actual and virtual resources of each region;
- promoting the modernisation of agriculture through aid to investment for the maintenance and replacement of equipment and machinery;
- introducing a policy to ensure that farmers' earnings and the social services available to them correspond as nearly as possible to the economic and social conditions of the majority of town dwellers;
- rationalising the processing of agricultural products and standardising trade in agricultural products;
- introducing a policy designed to bring local industries and the economic prospects of crops into line with the requirements of soil protection and the restoration of forests and pasture land;
- helping family farms through adequate technical training;

(ii) an appropriate policy for the decentralisation of industry in rural areas, including:

- aid for the development of well-placed regional growth centres to serve as employment, social service, economic and cultural centres for the local population in the surrounding area;
- the finalisation of regional action programmes in order to co-ordinate industrialisation projects on the basis of the structural problems of each region and to permit the undertakings concerned to gain a general idea of the various possible types of backing;
- the establishment of well-placed industries suited to the local framework and selected with a view to bringing about the desired effects of training and development on employment and trade;
- direct financial support for the establishment and expansion of industries in the form of direct investment subsidies, special State loans, State guarantees for private loans, low interest rates and tax concessions;
- the provision of well-equipped industrial sites, it being understood that large industrial zones should be subordinated to planning carried out at regional level;

(iii) development of the structure of services in rural areas with a view to improving the quality and standard of public services such as education, health services and socio-cultural facilities so as to:

- cut down any serious inequalities in facilities between urban and rural areas, in particular educational facilities in centres that could make them available to the population of neighbouring rural areas;
- improve the long-term economic prospects of rural areas by means of plans for developing services, co-ordinated with other plans designed to achieve the same aims of regional expansion;

(iv) promotion of a coherent vocational training policy in rural areas comprising in particular;

- facilities for vocational training, further training and retraining of agricultural workers and young people, together with employment opportunities for persons with such training;
- training that corresponds to local and regional employment requirements, as otherwise the further training may prove to stimulate emigration towards urban areas with greater employment opportunities;
- individual assistance provided by the public authorities in the form of allowances, loans and the repayment of school fees and travelling expenses;
- provision by local and regional authorities of intensive information for the farming population on vocational training for young people and further training or retraining for farm workers;

(v) the development of tourism and recreation areas with a view to creating new types of employment outside agriculture and encouraging economic exchanges of benefit to local communities and the inhabitants of rural areas, including:

- the establishment of a balance between the various interests in question in the use of available space: agriculture, forestry, fishing, transport, leisure occupations, tourism, science, architecture and archaeology;
- the preparation, in close association with the local authorities concerned, of plans for providing the various facilities, including investment programmes and public works which would help in furnishing reception facilities and making provision for forestry or nature reserves to be protected and safeguarded for future generations (nature parks);
- direct financial support by public authorities for local initiatives to enable the population of the area to take an active part in providing tourist facilities.