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Working Documents

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DOCUMENT 1-908/83

Report

drawn up on behalf of the Committee on Agriculture

on special Community measures to revive agriculture
and forestry in the mountain and dolomite area of
the Region of Veneto, through the recovery of land
subject to hydrogeological degeneration

Rapporteur: Mr A. COLLESELLI

PE 86.113/fin.

At its sitting of 16 May 1983, the European Parliament referred the motion for a resolution tabled by Mr Colleselli and others, pursuant to Rule 47 of the Rules of Procedure, on special Community measures to revive agriculture and forestry in the mountain and dolomite area of the Region of Veneto through the recovery of land subject to hydrogeological degeneration (Doc. 1-177/83) to the Committee on Agriculture, as the committee responsible, and to the Committee on Regional Policy and Regional Planning and the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection for opinions.

The Committee on Agriculture decided to draw up a report at its meeting of 27 May 1983 and, at that of 15 June, appointed Mr Colleselli rapporteur.

The committee considered the draft report at its meeting of 17 and 18 October 1983 and adopted the motion for a resolution as a whole by 16 votes to 3, with 3 abstentions.

The following took part in the vote: Mr Curry, chairman, Mr Früh, vice-chairman, Mr Colleselli, vice-chairman and rapporteur, Mr Delatte, vice-chairman, Mr Barbagli (deputizing for Mr Diana), Mr Bocklet, Mrs Castle, Mr Clinton, Mr Dalsass, Mr d'Ormesson, Mr Gatto, Mr Gautier, Mr Helms, Mr Hord, Mr Jürgens, Mr Kaloyannis, Mr Ligios, Mrs Martin, Mr Provan, Mr Simmonds, Mr Vgenopoulos and Mr Woltjer.

This report was tabled on 19 October 1983.

At its meeting of 26 and 27 May 1983, the Committee on Regional Policy and Regional Planning decided not to deliver an opinion.

At its meeting of 17 and 18 October 1983, the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection decided not to deliver an opinion.

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The Committee on Agriculture hereby submits to the European Parliament the following motion for a resolution, together with explanatory statement:

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

on special Community measures to revive agriculture and forestry in the mountain and dolomite area of the Region of Veneto, through the recovery of land subject to hydrogeological degeneration

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the motion for a resolution tabled by Mr COLLESELLI, Mr RUMOR, Mr DALSASS, Mr LIGIOS, Mr FRUH, Mr D'ORMESSON, Mr STELLA, Mr GUIMMARRA, Mr COSTANZO, Mr DIANA, Mr BARBAGLI and Mr GHÉRGO on special Community measures to revive agriculture and forestry in the mountain and dolomite area of the Region of Veneto, through the recovery of land subject to hydrogeological degeneration (Doc. 1-177/83),

- having regard to the report of the Committee on Agriculture (Doc. 1-908/83),

- A. whereas the mountain and dolomite area of the Region of Veneto is subject to serious hydrogeological degradation, combined with the recurrent threat of landslides and floods,
- B. whereas this situation has jeopardized or drastically reduced the region's agricultural and forestry activities, in particular stock-rearing,
- C. whereas all other economic activities, the craft trades, small industry and tourism have also been severely affected by the deterioration of road infrastructures in particular and the unstable situation and general danger,
- D. whereas this has led to a mass exodus of the local inhabitants which has exacerbated the problems of decline and environmental imbalance,

- E. whereas this situation is accentuating the differences in income, social welfare provisions, production and marketing structures, infra-structures and services between the region concerned and the other regions of the Community,
- F. having regard to the unanimous commitment of the Community bodies to work together to assist the less-favoured regions by means of suitable financial measures,
- G. whereas the Region of Veneto is not eligible for some of the most important Community financial instruments,
1. Calls on the Commission to launch, together with the region concerned, a special measure to revive agricultural and non-agricultural activities in the dolomite area of the Region of Veneto with a view to promoting employment and checking the exodus of the rural populations;
 2. Considers that this measure should hinge on existing soil protection and afforestation schemes and schemes for improving existing woodland and roads;
 3. Is of the opinion that this measure should, in terms of Community financing, entail three elements :
 - coordination of the financial instruments already available;
 - the possibility of an ad hoc budget endowment by means of a new heading to be inserted in the next budget;
 - extending to the Region of Veneto the application of Community regulations and measures for which it is not currently eligible;

4. Calls attention to the urgent need for a review of the Regional Fund to include regional aid measures of the type referred to above which constitute an essential precondition for any productive investment;
5. Insists that the review of Directive 75/268 concerning agriculture in mountain and certain less-favoured regions must also take account of the particular situation of regions threatened by serious natural phenomena, such as hydrogeological degeneration, by increasing the financial endowment and adopting suitable measures;
6. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

1. - Hydrogeological and land degeneration

The internationally renowned mountain landscape of Veneto, and the dolomite area in particular, is of great aesthetic and environmental interest, but is also the scene of a constant struggle against a long process of hydrogeological degeneration.

Suffice it to mention the serious damage, in many cases irreparable, and the loss of human life suffered as a result of the floods in 1965/66 that in many areas created near-disaster conditions.

The area has always been under imminent threat of floods and landslides whenever there is heavy rainfall.

The serious damage caused some months ago in Valtellina and Val Venosta (Bolzano) provides once again clear and alarming proof of this.

To be precise, although the whole region is subject to degeneration, the areas most at risk are:

in the province of Belluno: the Val Fiorentina basin, the middle and upper basin of the Cordevole, the Alpago and the Val Zoldana, the Comelico;

in the province of Vicenza: the Val d'Astico - Posina, the Valle dell'Agno, Chiampo;

in the province of Verona: the Val d'Illasi and the mountain areas of the Seven Parishes.

Although requests for aid on behalf of these regions and the infrastructures destroyed in them have been made to the European Community, a systematic, efficient and rational plan needs to be drawn up for them.

2. - Agricultural and forestry activities, crafts, tourism and 'physical' instability of the region

The 'physical' instability of the region has jeopardized or drastically reduced the economic and forestry activities that flourished fairly extensively in the past - being a mainstay of the local economy - with the result that very few of these activities remain today: for example, in the case of stock-rearing in particular, there has been a drastic reduction in the use of summer mountain pastures.

Alpine summer pastures have been reduced to one-fifth of their pre-war level. Soil degeneration has led to a mass exodus of the local inhabitants (who already had a long tradition of emigration) thereby depriving the mountains of the protection needed and exacerbating the problems of degradation.

The depopulation of mountain areas would have further serious consequences on the rest of the region, resulting in over-population of urban centres and causing an imbalance of infrastructures and services, psychological and cultural problems and social and individual stress.

3. - Hydrogeological protection and protection of mountain regions

The protection of mountain regions necessarily includes hydrogeological protection which is carried out by stemming the causes of degeneration at source, thereby restricting the level of damage.

All the local resources of the mountain region (agriculture, forestry, mineral, hydroelectric etc.), however limited overall, should be used since the nation is poor in terms of raw materials and resources.

It goes without saying that the mountain region should also be considered as a holiday and leisure resort for the inhabitants of urban centres. However, it can be used as a tourist resort only if protected and controlled, while preserving a balance with agriculture, through the provision of funds needed to attract and develop summer and winter recreational activities and by drawing up plans for the region and its resources (water, forests, pasturage, towns, culture, folklore etc.) that attract the interest and attention of tourists.

Mountain regions have always acted as a refuge for and been a mixture of different cultures that have died out elsewhere; this characteristic of cultural diversity makes it possible at any moment to revive on a broader scale spiritual values and resources essential to the survival of a civilization.

4. - Desire to keep own identity - European vocation

The express desire of the people of mountain regions to keep their own identity calls for a Community policy on behalf of mountain regions. In the European context, the region referred to is in a prominent position between the north and south with internationally important trade and tourist links (see recital D of the motion for a resolution (Doc. 1-177/83)).

In view of the obvious imbalance between the regions concerned and other Community regions, the Commission should take appropriate measures as it has given a commitment to support the development of certain mountain and less-favoured regions.

The Region of Veneto has already defined the problems of its mountain areas in the proposal, adopted by the Regional Council, for a 'mountain project' that deals with the question of regional imbalances and hydrogeological protection. However, the technical and financial measures proposed are by no means sufficient.

Appropriate financial measures should be taken by the Community on the basis of a suitable action plan financed by existing Community funds earmarked for this purpose (see paragraphs 1,2,3,4 of the motion for a resolution (Doc. 1-177/83)).

To this end, note should be taken of the measures proposed and adopted in the report by Mr James PROVAN¹ on the state of agriculture in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and other severely disadvantaged regions of the Community.

These measures concern, in particular, specific programmes to tackle the special problems of the severely disadvantaged regions, measures to improve agricultural incomes, the improvement of transport infrastructures and marketing structures and, above all, environmental measures to protect regions of particular ecological importance.

¹ Doc. 1-1177/82; OJ No. C 96 of 11.4.1983, p. 35

Attention must also be drawn here to the activity of the European Parliament's Committee on Regional Policy and Regional Planning. Although the committee did not draw up an opinion on the particular subject covered in this report, its chairman, Mr De Pasquale, wrote a letter to the rapporteur in which he pointed out all that his committee had done in this field. 'With regard to the general problem of the most suitable form for Community action in support of individual regions and areas handicapped by serious structural problems of a social, economic and environmental nature, the Committee on Regional Policy has, particularly in the most recent period, repeatedly expressed its support for integrated development operations and specific Community regional development measures.

In particular, I feel that I should draw your attention to the report by Mr Von der Vring on integrated development operations (Doc. 1-104/83), and the corresponding resolution adopted by the plenary assembly on 20 May 1983, and to the report by Mr Pöttering on the second series of specific Community regional development measures (Doc. 1-269/83) and the corresponding resolution adopted by the plenary assembly on 10 June 1983.'

'In addition to such views ... one should also bear in mind the report by Mr Faure on the contribution of rural development to the re-establishment of regional balances in the Community (Doc. 1-646/81), and the corresponding resolution adopted by the plenary assembly on 16 February 1982.'

'Moreover, I wish to inform you that, since I fully endorse the social and economic reasoning behind your motion for a resolution, I have taken the strictly personal initiative to recommend to Mr Kazazis that he should take it into account, along with other factors, in the report on the integrated Mediterranean programmes which he is drawing up on behalf of the Committee on Regional Policy. In this context, I am quite aware that, under the Commission proposals as they stand, the Region of Veneto is excluded from such programmes: it would nevertheless be perfectly feasible to request that all or some of the Community measures be extended to regions such as Veneto, which suffer from the problems described in your report.'

This all serves to demonstrate the measure of support in other Parliamentary bodies for the measures proposed in this report.

5. - A specific programme

The stability of the ecosystem in mountain regions, as regards the close interdependence between human, environmental and economic values, depends above all on the potential for human activity and creativity that forms an essential part of it.

The appropriate Directorate-General at the Commission and the technical services are in possession of a wealth of descriptive documentation on the situation referred to, together with concrete proposals for soil protection measures in the regions under consideration (dykes, rock-fill dams, diversion structures, terracing, protective walls, flexible defences, drainage, expansion pockets, avalanche control installations, protection of woods and pastures for agricultural purposes, service roads etc.) at an estimated cost of 70,000 million Lire or approximately 5.3 million ECU.

All this material - which is of a very high technical standard and reflects an original and serious approach - explaining and documenting the ideas for environmental protection, is the result of many years of study and enquiries carried out by the local authorities in the mountain municipalities of the Veneto Region. This plan was adopted by the different democratically elected assemblies of the municipalities of these mountain regions working in a spirit of innovation and enterprise that cannot be ignored if further physical degeneration of the mountain regions and their gradual depopulation are to be avoided, and their important progressive and cultural roles maintained.

6. - Conclusion - Community aid

It is clear from the above that the Region of Veneto needs Community financial aid in support of its plan to combat hydrogeological degeneration. This plan constitutes an essential precondition for the protection and development not only of agriculture and forestry in the areas in question but also of other economic activities - such as tourism, industry, crafts, transport - that are constantly subject to the serious threat of environmental degradation.

The European Community should adopt a special measure similar to that recently adopted in another sector for the City of Belfast. Such a measure should include three main aspects:

- the coordination of existing possibilities for Community aid through the financial instruments available;
- if necessary, an ad hoc budget endowment by introducing a new budget heading in the forthcoming budget for 1984;
- finally, extending to the Region of Veneto the application of certain Community regulations or measures for which it is not eligible at present so that it can have access to these instruments to enable the necessary action to be taken.

As regards the first point, the financial instruments already available include the budget appropriation - whose endowment will, however, have to be increased - covering the protection of the natural environment in certain sensitive regions of Community interest in the context of the Third Community Action Programme on the environment¹; the latter includes provision for measures to prevent natural damage through better land utilization.

Consideration should also be given to the possibility of aid from the EIB (European Investment Bank) and the NCI (New Community Instrument) in the form of subsidized loans which, while not being directly tied to productive investments, provide the guarantees and essential preconditions for the success of any economic measures already implemented or to be implemented in the future.

As regards the second point, i.e. an ad hoc appropriation in the 1984 budget, Parliament will have to propose the inclusion at a suitable heading in the budget when it holds its debate on the 1984 budget.

Finally, as regards the third element of Community aid, the Region of Veneto should be able to benefit, for the purposes of this specification, from other Community financial instruments for which it is ineligible at present.

This obviously implies first and foremost the Regional Fund of the ERDF; by derogation from the current provisions, the region should be made eligible for aid from this fund under the quota section; alternatively,

¹ OJ C 46 of 17.2.1983

if non-quota section is extended to other sectors (iron and steel, textiles, etc.), provision could be made for a new sector (for example: prevention of natural disasters in particularly sensitive regions) covering the special aid necessary in this particular case.

As regards the EAGGF Guidance Section, the Region of Veneto is not eligible under regulation 269/79¹ establishing a common measure for forestry in certain Mediterranean regions in the Community. In view of the need to ensure soil protection by means of a rational reforestation programme and management of existing forests, it is essential that when this regulation comes up for review and renewal it be amended to remedy this omission.

The same argument also holds true for the integrated Mediterranean programmes currently under consideration by the European Community. The different measures provided for within these programmes, such as the special measures on behalf of the inland hill and mountain regions, or the development of agricultural and non-agricultural activities, do not apply to the Region of Veneto. The scope of these measures should be extended and, in addition, they should include special aid to prevent environmental degeneration in the region in question.

It is extremely important to emphasize that, under Article 18 of the Commission's new proposals in the field of agricultural structural policy (COM(83) 559 final, 10 October 1983), it is possible to institute special measures to correct particularly serious problems arising from structural or infrastructural deficiencies. Included among the fields of application for Community actions of this type are soil protection, flood control, afforestation, the creation of road infrastructures etc..

The Council, acting on a proposal from the Commission may adopt such measures, to be applied in disadvantaged regions in order to promote agriculture there and pave the way for possible future actions in non-agricultural sectors or in the field of environmental protection.

It is to be hoped that the Council will adopt the Commission's proposals as soon as possible. They could form the perfect basis for the action needed to solve the problems of the region referred to in this report.

¹ OJ L 38 of 14.2.1979

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION (1-177/83)

tabled by Mr COLLESELLI, Mr RUMOUR, Mr DALSASS,
Mr LIGIOS, Mr FRUH, Mr D'ORMESSON, Mr STELLA,
Mr GIUMMARRA, Mr COSTANZO, Mr DIANA, Mr BARBAGLI
and Mr GHERGO

pursuant to Rule 47 of the Rules of Procedure

on special Community measures to revive
agriculture and forestry in the mountain and
dolomite area of the Region of Veneto, through
the recovery of land subject to hydrogeological
degeneration.

The European Parliament,

- A. whereas the Commission is committed to using special funds to maintain the development of a number of disadvantaged mountain areas with a view to preventing a mass exodus of the local inhabitants, without whom it would be impossible to preserve the identity and the integrity of the environment and the region,
- B. whereas in recent years the mountain zones and in particular the dolomite zones of the Region of Veneto have been subject to irreversible degradation and consequent hydrogeological degeneration, owing to the exceptionally high rainfall and floods of 1965 and 1966, combined with the geomorphological features and the poor geomechanical properties of the area, with its attendant high susceptibility to erosion and landslips, which at times have had catastrophic consequences,

- C. whereas this situation has caused enormous damage to the area and to the mountain communities, whose agricultural, craft and economic activities have been drastically reduced,
- D. whereas, moreover, these disturbances have created special difficulties for the development of tourism in the area, by making even more precarious the already substandard and inadequate road network linking it with the rest of Veneto and with central Europe, to which it would naturally gravitate because of its geographical position and its vital trade and tourist interests,
- E. whereas this situation is accentuating the differences in income, social welfare provisions, production and marketing structures, infrastructures and services between the region concerned and the other regions of the Community,
- F. whereas forestry production is of key importance to the region both in economic and employment terms and as an essential means of land protection,
- G. whereas the only Community provisions from which the dolomite area of the Region of Veneto might benefit are those which concern rural infrastructures and mountain and hill farming in certain less favoured areas, and whereas those provisions cannot be effective unless they are coordinated with existing tourist activities and integrated into a more extensive programme of conservation and county-planning measures for the region and measures to strengthen agriculture and the economic activities related to and dependent on it,
1. Considers that the general situation in the dolomite zone of the Region of Veneto has deteriorated to such an extent that an emergency programme of reconstruction backed by adequate financial aid from the Community based on a suitable plan of action is essential;