



COHESION POLICY IN MOUNTAIN AREAS:

How to increase the contribution from mountains and benefits for mountain territories?

Brussels - 7 June 2017

On 7th June 2017, more than 100 mountain actors from all over Europe met in Brussels to participate in a conference on “**Cohesion Policy in mountain areas: How to increase the contributions from mountains and benefits for mountain territories**” co-organised by the **European Commission (DG Regio)** and **Euromontana**.

This conference reflected on how to better develop a place-based and territorial integrated approach for the future Cohesion Policy and how this policy should address mountain specificities.

OPENING

Jean-Pierre Halkin, Head of Unit Macro-regions from DG REGIO; Iliana Iotova, Vice-President of the Republic of Bulgaria; Mercedes Bresso, MEP and President of the RUMRA intergroup; Juanan Gutierrez, President of Euromontana opened the conference and explained the importance of discussing Cohesion policy at this time, early in the process of negotiating the future Cohesion Policy post 2020 and the key contributions of mountain areas in this policy.



Jean-Pierre Halkin, Head of Unit Macro-regions, Transnational / Interregional cooperation in DG Regio, and co-organiser of the event, opened the conference by recalling the importance of the regions as recognized in the [White Paper on the Future of Europe](#). Regions have a key role to play to face today's challenges. More specifically regarding the Cohesion Policy, mountain regions, which are often border areas, have an important role. The conference on **Cohesion Policy in Mountain Areas** was therefore at the right timing, just before the Cohesion Forum at the end of June, in order to feed into the more general reflection of the **future Cohesion policy and the reflection Paper that will be published in September 2017**.

Iliana Iotova, Vice-President of the Republic of Bulgaria, explained that **Cohesion Policy can do more than it currently does for the mountains development**. Referring to the resolution of the European Parliament on [Cohesion policy in European mountainous regions of the EU](#), passed with a large majority in May 2016, she strongly supported the idea of having “**an agenda for mountainous regions**” that could be “**at the heart of an EU strategy on the development of mountainous regions**” and that could be the first crucial step to



implement article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU). In addition, she suggested that mountain areas should have **“the allocation of specific funds under Cohesion policy”** in order **“to lead the Union into paying more specific attention to mountain regions and taking note of their potential”**. She also stressed the need for Member States to **“afford mountain regions specific attention”**. She encouraged existing financial instruments, such as Life or Natura 2000 to be re-examined to better integrate a mountain dimension that **“would allow more focused and better targeted funding”**. Finally, she gave an assurance of her support for the future: **when Bulgaria has the Presidency of the Council in 2018, she will push for mountain areas to be one of the priorities.** ([Speech available here](#))



Mercedes Bresso, Member of the European Parliament (MEP) and Chair of the RUMRA (Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas) Intergroup of the European Parliament reminded the participants that this year is a key moment to prepare the future Cohesion policy. After the adoption of the [Iotova report on Cohesion Policy in mountainous regions of the EU](#) and the [Bresso report on the EUSALP strategy](#) last year, the European Parliament is adopting in June a report on the whole Cohesion Policy. Thus, the European Parliament has now defined its recommendations for the future Cohesion Policy and everything is on

the table to start discussing with the other EU institutions.

Mercedes Bresso is convinced that the success of mountain areas goes hand in hand with **more cooperation between rural and urban areas**. This is the reason why the RUMRA intergroup has organised a [breakfast on the 1st June 2017](#) to discuss how to better support territorial cohesion and facilitate links between urban and rural areas. She also recalled the support of the RUMRA intergroup for **a dedicated agenda for rural, mountainous and remote areas to better support territorial cohesion**. She concluded by stressing the potential of mountain areas, especially as some mountain areas have successfully overcome their depopulation challenges and can be innovative: *“Mountain areas can bring political added value to Europe by giving economic added value to our territories”*.



Juanan Gutierrez, President of Euromontana, thanked DG Regio who co-organise the conference and wished that the good discussion and cooperation atmosphere during the preparation of this event will continue in the future. He explained **why mountains areas matter in the Cohesion policy** and presented their importance in Europe. In particular, he showed that mountains cover nearly 30% of European territories, and they are the continent’s ecological backbone containing a huge reservoir of natural resources. **One out of every six European inhabitants lives in a mountain area**. Mountain areas provide places for recreation and

inspiration and are places of residence, of production, including of quality food products, of life and are quality places to live. They can **actively contribute to the achievement of the EU 2020 targets and the Sustainable Development Goals**. To fully exploit this potential, **active, ambitious and targeted policies are needed**, including in the Cohesion Policy. To better address mountain needs, in addition to a specific agenda for mountain areas and targeting some funds for these areas, as supported by Ms Iotova, Juanan Gutierrez stated that further actions could be to develop a **specific macro-regional strategy for the Carpathians**, to better systematically assess the **territorial impact of Cohesion policy in mountain areas**, to develop **cross-border Operational Programmes for some mountain ranges** and to develop **Smart Specialisation Strategies** better taking the mountainous strengths into account.

SESSION 1: How to encourage innovative and competitive SMEs in mountain areas?

During the conference, three thematic sessions were organised on three priorities of the Cohesion Policy, namely, SMEs, ICT and Climate change to better understand the specific needs of mountain areas, but also some innovative examples were identified that can inspire others.

This first session aimed to question the facilitation of innovation and competitiveness of small or medium-size enterprises (SMEs) in mountain areas. André Marcon, President of MACEO and Giacomo Mattinò, Head of Unit in DG Growth suggested solutions at the EU, at the entrepreneurial and at the regional levels, while Gauthier Mestrallet, Director General of Tri Vallées enterprise, illustrated a successful example of an innovative and competitive SME in the French Alps.



André Marcon, President of MACEO and former President of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry in France, explained that there are many very small SMEs with less than 10 employees in mountain areas. To become more prosperous, he insisted on **the importance for small businesses in mountain areas to focus on innovation** which is not only technical innovation, but the systems should adapt to the digital and economic mutations. This innovation should be taken forward by entrepreneurs. In particular, **mountain entrepreneurs must dare to undertake and should be proud of the mountains'**

richness and their territorial potential.

Two main actors, local authorities and entrepreneurs themselves, should play the main role in encouraging more innovation and competitiveness in mountain areas.

Local authorities have a great responsibility to make **mountain territories attractive** to entrepreneurs by providing services to facilitate work (such as providing buildings available for co-working, improving accessibility of the area or clearing road when it snows) and to facilitate living in this area (childcare services, schools, transport). They should also help/facilitate entrepreneurs' administrative tasks and support them financially (easier access to local banks or local crowdfunding). They should clearly explain that they value entrepreneurs and are happy to welcome them, even if they are new in the region.

Entrepreneurs in the field also have a responsibility to make their business competitive. They should work together, to have **collective intelligence**, join clusters and try to find **complementarity with other entrepreneurs**. Some collective systems like those for wood and stone in Massif Central have succeeded into bringing together all the actors of the supply chains and as a consequence have achieved great results. Entrepreneurs should also join **competitiveness centres** and go beyond the territorial limits to exchange with other entrepreneurs all over Europe. Thus, entrepreneurs need to open their mind, to have more **cultural and European opening**.

This opening to Europe is really necessary, as several tools are directly implemented by the EU **to encourage and support entrepreneurs**, as explained Giacomo Mattinò, Head of Unit in DG Growth. He presented two tools, both financed by the COSME programme, that can help and encourage SMEs in mountain areas: the **Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) and Erasmus for Entrepreneurs**.

The **EEN is the world's largest support arrangement for SMEs** with 506 organisations in the EU, including organisations in mountain areas. It has a structured and articulated presence in territory with innovation and internationalisation at the core of its services for SMEs. The EEN provides basic information on EU funding schemes, support for participation in EU programmes but also helps the organisations to have a consortia approach, as pulling resources together is very beneficial.

The second tool, **Erasmus for entrepreneurs**, **allows young entrepreneurs to get more experience** by sharing ideas and the know-how with entrepreneurs from other EU countries. So far, this programme has facilitated more than 7000 exchanges of experiences between entrepreneurs and is providing some per diem



allowances to the entrepreneurs who visit other entrepreneurs. Even if these tools are not directly targeting mountain entrepreneurs, they can help supporting them.

To illustrate how mountain enterprises can be innovative and competitive, Gauthier Mestrallet, Director General of Tri Vallées enterprise, presented the company, which successfully collects and **recycles ski material** and collects biowaste in the French Alps. His company is an **example of social and solidarity economy** with 55% of his 107 employees in social inclusion. He also underlined the need to work together in clusters and cooperation with other actors in order to find innovative solutions adapted to mountain areas. Tri Vallées, for instance, is part of the Cluster Montagne.

Gauthier Mestrallet emphasised the importance of constantly innovating in order to stay one step ahead of the giants of the waste industry. This is what they have done when they have developed a supply chain to recycle ski material, which is a typical mountain waste with a small volume in a well-defined territory. The objective was to find a solution to collect skis, to separate their different components, to recycle ferrous metals in a foundry and the rest in the cement industry. In total, in 2016, 420 tons of ski materials have been recycled, which represents 1/3 of the total mass of skis being discarded. ([Presentation available here – in French](#))



SESSION 2: How to enhance access to, use and quality of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and high-speed broadband in Europe's mountains?

This session questioned the access to broadband and good ICT infrastructure for mountain people and businesses. Marie Clotteau, Director of Euromontana, Jan Dröge, Director of Broadband Competence Offices support facility, Jose Manuel Hernandez Luque, DG Agri and Guido Giardini, doctor in charge of a telemedicine centre in Valle d'Aosta presented potential solutions to overcome the digital divide.

Marie Clotteau, Director of Euromontana, drew attention to the absence of the Internet and digital connectivity in mountain areas and its consequences for mountain attractiveness. Today, **only 25% of rural areas are covered by fast (download speed min. 30 Mbit/s) or ultra-fast broadband** (download speed min. 100 Mbit/s), as compared to around 70% coverage in urban areas. This represents a huge economic and social brake for these territories as the Internet is needed every day for many reasons: teleworking, access to data online, selling products, access to leisure, ... In the XXI^e century, **the Internet should be considered as a new service of general interest** as this is already the case in Switzerland and in Finland where the access to broadband is guaranteed up to the last kilometre. Marie Clotteau explained that the **development of infrastructures, ICT tools and IT knowledge and skills** (for people to know how to adequately use the tools adapted to their own needs) should be encouraged in mountain areas. A strong political will at the EU level, but also at the local and regional level, is needed to bridge this current digital gap. The absence of good access to the Internet and ICT represents a high risk for the attractiveness of the mountain areas. ([Presentation available here](#))



The European Union is aware of the potential that access to the Internet offers. More than € 6 billion will be invested in broadband connectivity in the current programming period and **already € 2.3 billion** were invested in 2007-2013 as explained Jan Dröge, Director of Broadband Competence Offices Support Facility (BCOs). His organisation is based on a network in each EU country, which facilitates the access to these funds, including in remote areas. These offices can **help project promoters**, by

providing **technical support, legal help linked to State Aid rules or Public Procurement issues and by sharing success stories**. Jan Dröge recognised that the main commercial operators are not always interested in developing their services in the white areas, many of them being in mountainous areas as they are often sparsely populated and don't have the critical mass of potential users. There are other challenges in mountain areas, such as the difficulty of implementing the broadband due to the topography which increases the investment costs of the implementation. *"In order to overcome specific challenges of mountain areas, we need a technology mix, which means using technology in different ways"*, stated Jan Dröge. The EU has provided a budget and a support, but it is more difficult for small-scale initiatives to be financed. Thus, he encouraged citizens to take into their own hand their future and try to **develop community-led projects**. These small projects can be a first step and make the difference when citizens aggregate the demand and create their own investment. ([Presentation available here](#)).

Jose Manuel Hernandez Luque, policy officer at the DG Agri, presented the European Commission initiatives of **Smart Villages** to improve the quality of life in rural areas. The concept of "Smart Villages" is relatively new (April 2017) and has been referenced in the [Cork 2.0 Declaration](#) and Cork 2.0 Action Plan. The Smart Villages concept *"aims at achieving synergies between different operations to addressed in future rural development strategies"*, explained Jose Manuel Hernandez Luque. It tries to integrate different approaches. The objectives are, among many, to attract young people, to improve job opportunities, to ensure basic services and infrastructures and develop the potential offered by **improved connectivity and digitization of rural areas**. **The EU action for smart villages gives visibility to the quality of life in rural areas, which is highly linked to connectivity**. In fact, Mr Hernandez Luque asserted that the Internet connectivity is needed indisputably to develop the full potential of rural areas. Once rural areas will have an Internet connection, rural areas will be more attractive places for both businesses and inhabitants.



The European Commission is currently organizing different events to present and to launch pilot projects on smart villages. Moreover, ENRD is also running a thematic group on SMEs working on digitalisation to identify good practices for smart villages. Mr Hernandez Luque concluded that in the end the responsibilities are not only in the hands of the EC and he invited citizens, like Jan Dröge did, to use the tools already available. ([Presentation available here](#)).



The Internet (and high-speed Internet) is also needed to develop telemedicine in mountain areas. Equal access to healthcare affects the attractiveness of rural areas and Guido Giardini, Doctor, in charge of a telemedicine centre in Valle d'Aosta region, in Italy, presented **how the Mountain Medecine Centre in Valle d'Aosta facilitates telemedicine and teleconsultations in mountain huts**.

With more than 10 years of experience in the region, Guido Giardini presented two examples supported by EU projects. The Valle d'Aosta is entirely mountainous, **most villages are located very far from the main hospital, in Aosta, which makes medical consultation very difficult**. Many inhabitants (especially the seniors) are not able to travel several kilometres to consult a doctor. The opening of a telemedicine centre aimed to facilitate consultations with specialist doctors, for patients who can't easily come to the hospital. A virtual centre monitors chronic patients. Older people have a mobile phone which communicates wirelessly with the other monitoring tools. Everyday a nurse looks at the graphs and data and will only contact the doctor if there is something wrong. *"People will be moved only when it is really necessary"* explained Guido Giardini, otherwise, information and medical data that are available are enough to monitor the patient's health in real conditions. Thus, this service really helped to improve access to public health services.

Guido Giardini also presented a second example of a cross-border telemedicine programme in the Mont Blanc area, for the Valle d’Aosta (in Italy) and Savoie (in France): the RESAMONT Network. The location welcomes 8000 tourists a year and the development of the telemedicine centre is therefore very useful. Up to December 2016, the telemedicine centre has conducted 500 teleconsultations. ([Presentation available here – in French](#))

SESSION 3: How can civil society help strengthen a European Mountain Agenda? (Round table)

Different organisations represent the mountain people at the EU level. Marco Onida, EC Officer of DG Regio, Georges Elzière, member of the French Federation of Alpine and Mountaineering Association, and José Basto, member of the Portuguese Alpine Club discussed the need to make the voice of mountain citizens better heard at the EU level and explored how the different actors could better work together.

There is no unique mountain policy in Europe, but several EU policies such as Cohesion Policy with the article 174 of the TFEU directly addresses mountains specificities, or the CAP with the specific optional quality scheme for mountain food products. In addition, many EU policies have direct impacts on mountain areas such as environmental and climate change policies. Marco Onida, DG Regio and former Secretary General of the Alpine Convention regretted that **the voice of mountain people is not always well heard by EU institutions**, including by the European Commission. He is convinced that **more active lobbying is needed, including coming from citizens**, to make the EU institutions better understand the real needs of mountain inhabitants and thus influence the EU policies. It is very important that also non-economic actors get together in a structured way in order to make their voice heard. This lobbying should also help citizens to better understand the way the EU institutions are working and how Europe can support mountain areas.



Georges Elzière is a member of the French Federation of Alpine and Mountaineering Association. He recognised that his members often live in urban areas but are mountain practitioners, who don’t always pay enough attention to what is happening at the EU level. This conference offered the opportunity **to discuss with other mountain actors and he stressed the need for dialogue, to exchange good practices and to collectively participate in more EU actions**. This is the lobbying work that can be done in Brussels that will make the voice of mountain people better heard.

José Basto from the Portuguese Alpine Club shared his concern about mountain villages that are deserted for most of the year and alive only during the summer holidays. He explained that there is the need to **have more solidarity between the actors**. Actors who can make their voice heard should also speak with the voice of the others who can’t be heard, like the senior people or the shepherds. More European networks are needed, not only in the Alps but in all mountain ranges.



The need to involve **local people actually living** in the mountain areas to develop an integrated policy dedicated to mountain areas, the question of the **involvement of other citizens** who don't live in a mountain area but who are going for holidays in mountain areas and the **specific situation of the Carpathians** were also discussed.



Regarding the way to make the voice of the citizens better heard at EU level, André Marcon explained that a lot of progress has already been made in the last years (with an intergroup dedicated to mountain areas at the European Parliament, with the optional quality term on mountain product, with some funds targeting mountain areas specifically under the CAP) thanks notably to the lobbying of Euromontana. Much more still has to be done, thus he encouraged continued collaboration with Euromontana.

SESSION 4: How to encourage adaptation and mitigation to climate change?

Because of their exceptional natural heritage and vulnerability to the effects of climate change, mountain areas should take the lead in responding to the challenges raised by climate change. Raul Cazan, Member of the 2Celsius Network, Dina Silina from DG CLIMA and Prof Sandor Szalai from the working group on adaptation to climate change in the Carpathian Convention explained how mountain areas can face these challenges.

Raul Cazan, Member of the 2Celsius Network, presented his organisation (a group of journalists) located in Romania that creates media production related to climate change in mountain areas. The idea of the Network is to promote issues related to climate change, researching facts and support advocating through the EU institutions. Their main research focuses on how climate change is impacting Europe. During his presentation, Raul Cazan broadcast a video, an excerpt of a documentary "Nos chers paradis". **The video illustrates how climate change impacts people who live and work in mountain areas in Central and Eastern Europe.** It is a compilation of several interviews with pastoral communities, interviewed for over 3 years. The purpose of the video is to show that **the biggest and most visible climate changes are happening in the mountains.** The most visible effects are plants and forests gaining altitude because of the rising of temperature, reduction snow and rise of rain in very high altitude (like it happened in Jungfrau in 2014). ([Presentation available here](#))



Dilina Silina, policy officer at DG CLIMA, presented the EU climate policy and some EU funding opportunities for projects and actions to adapt to climate change. **The European Union faces a dual challenge.** On the one hand, **the EU must sharply cut greenhouse gas emissions to prevent unmanageable impacts** ('mitigation'). On the other hand, **the EU must also adapt to climate change to increase society's resilience and manage unavoidable impacts** ('[adaptation](#)'). These two challenges are complementary and can be mutually reinforcing. Dina Silina also presented the findings of the 4th EEA report on "[Climate change, impacts and vulnerability in Europe](#)". The report

brings evidence such as an increase in the number of future climatic hazards in European regions (e.g. heat waves, droughts, top wind speeds, storm surges). To face climate change, the EU has comprehensive legislation on the table but still needs to better inform policy makers about the situation in every region. All regions are affected differently by climate change. **In particular, mountains are identified as particularly vulnerable.** The EU Adaptation Strategy has recognized the vulnerability of mountains towards climate

change. The specific effects experienced by mountains are: temperature rise larger than European average; decrease in glacier extent and volume; upward shift of plant and animal species; high risk of species extinctions; increasing risk of forests pests; increasing risk of rock falls and landslides and decrease in ski tourism. These effects affect different sectors in mountains areas such as agriculture, biodiversity, forestry and tourism. Being convinced that mountains are providers of key services to the European societies, the EC proposes transboundary co-operation to address the dangerous impacts of climate change.

To conclude, Dina Silina, presented the funding possibilities of the European Commission to address climate risks in mountain areas. **LIFE programme** is one of them, with more than €800 million for climate projects in 2014-2020 and some calls for proposals are directly targeting vulnerable areas, such as the coastal and the mountainous areas. The [2017 call is open](#) until September and the EC officer invited the audience to apply to these calls for proposals.

Some LIFE examples are already focusing on mountain areas, such as **LIFE ADAPTAMED**. This is a project which aims to mitigate the negative effects of climate change of key ecosystem services in Natural Protected Areas, including Mediterranean high mountain range Sierra Nevada nature area. The project focuses on adaptive management measures using ecosystem approach to provide for soil retention, pollination, pastures, temperature regulation, water, prevention of forest fires, and desertification. The results of LIFE ADAPTAMED show a diversity of protective services; 10% increase in water availability; 1km soil retention structures, 260 biodiversity boxes; etc. A second project is **LIFE SUSTAINHUTS**, which aims to reduce CO2 emissions in isolated environments, to prevent air pollution, to preserve mountainous forests, to promote sustainable tourism and to introduce environmentally-friendly methods for the production, distribution and use of energy.

This year, the EC proceeds to the evaluation of the EU Adaptation Strategy, to examine its actual implementation and achievement and to assess the relevance, the effectiveness, the efficiency, the coherence and the EU added value of the overall Strategy. ([Presentation available here](#))



Prof. Sandor Szalai, Chairman of the Working Group on Adaptation to Climate Change, in the Carpathian Convention presented the work of its working group and the importance of the Cohesion Fund. He explained that *“the Carpathian Convention aims at introducing a new Article on climate change because the topic is so important”*. **The activities and projects were possible thanks to the Cohesion Fund in the region.** The [Cohesion Fund](#) allocates a total of € 63.4 billion to activities under the different categories such as the trans-European transport networks and projects related to energy or transport. It aims inter alia to improve the competitiveness and global performance of the business sector, to promote employment through economic development, employment, education and social inclusion policies, to increase energy and resource efficiency and to tackle social and demographic challenges. The Carpathians and their foothills also have many thermal and mineral waters. The Southern Carpathians constitute Europe's largest unfragmented forested area. However, wetlands are the land use types suffering the largest decrease, partly because of the climate change tendencies in the region and partly because of the water management activities. Prof Szalai explained that many projects have improved the environmental situation, have supported adaptation to climate change, mitigated the climate change and increased effectiveness. He presented the project *“Ecological Restoration of Comana Wetlands”*. This project aimed to reconstruct and protect wetlands in Comana Nature Park, a Natura 2000 site in Romania, and helped to boost biodiversity and brought more visitors to the region (10.000 tourists every year). The success of the project showed to local community that environmental protection and the promotion of biodiversity can be hugely beneficial to the local economy, explained Prof. Szalai. ([Presentation available here](#))

SESSION 5: How regions are implementing the Cohesion policy for mountain areas? (Round table)

This round table discussed the existing tools used by regions to better take into account mountains specificities. Peter Takacs, European Commission Officer at DG Regio, presented three different tools while Sabrina Lucatelli, Coordinator of the Technical Committee for Inner Areas from the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers, André Marcon, President of MACEO, Armin Schabus, EU-programme coordination in Carinthia region in Austria and Dag Ronning, Chairman of the County Council of Hedmark in Norway presented some concrete examples at regional and national levels of how they have successfully used these existing tools.



Member States are required to pay some specific attention to territories with geographic specificities and thus have to implement the article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU as explained Peter Takacs, EC Officer from DG Regio. Even if at EU level, he was unable to say how much budget is directly spent on mountain areas, he identified three different tools that are currently used by some managing authorities to better take into account mountains specificities.

First, **the Partnership Agreements and the Operational Programmes** are used to define an integrated approach to address the specific needs of mountain areas in France with its **OP for the French Pyrenees, its OP for Massif des Alpes and for Massif Central and Italy with its OP for Friuli Venezia Giulia.**

Some specific needs such as remoteness, accessibility, digitalisation of services, education, SMEs were taken into account as targeted operations or horizontal principles in the Partnership Agreements or OP in Bulgaria, Slovenia, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

The second tool is the **integrated approach** using the new territorial instruments such as **Integrated Territorial Investments (ITIs) and Community-Led Local Development (CLLD)**. They can be used flexibly to implement multidimensional place-based strategies to tackle territorial challenges such as those of mountainous areas. Even if they require long-term planning, they permit the combination of different sources of thematic funding and confer responsibilities at local level. This approach was chosen in **Greece with the ITI in Sterea Ellada on cultural heritage and tourism development in the Mani peninsula and in Italy with ITI in the Isonzo valley (IT-SI) on cross-border cooperation among three municipalities; with CLLD in Tyrol and Trentino (so between Italy and Austria) on cross-border cooperation and urban rural linkages and in Valvecchiana 2020 on Inner peripheries in Italy.**

Finally, the third tool is the **macro-regional strategy** with both the **Alpine Macro Regional Strategy (Alps)** and the **Danube Region Macro Regional Strategy (Carpathians, Balkans, Rodopes)** which are important for the balanced and sustainable development of mountain territories. ([Presentation available here](#))

Other panellists gave some concrete examples at regional and national levels of how they have successfully used these existing tools.



Sabrina Lucatelli, Coordinator of the Technical Committee for Inner Areas within the Italian Presidency of the Council of Minister presented one concrete example of **an integrated strategy in Italy**. She explained how they have developed a specific strategy to tackle the issue of depopulation in Italy. Thanks to a multilevel governance strategy, the **Inner Areas approach** helped local inhabitants to facilitate the provision of services (like schools, health services) and investments in selected developments (such as energy, agriculture, crafts, cultural heritage, regional policy) to facilitate good conditions of living in these depopulated areas. In Italy,

inner areas cover almost the 60% of the whole national territory embracing about the 23% of its total population and more than 4000 municipalities, many of which are in mountain areas thus this strategy directly tackle some key issues in mountain areas.

This strategy is **multi-fund** (EAFRD, ERDF, ESF and national Funds are combined together) and is based on a participatory approach with the **active involvement of municipalities**.

Sabrina Lucatelli recognised that one of the biggest difficulties was to have **enough flexibility** to facilitate access to the funds while responding to the needs of the inhabitants in the territories. More flexibility from the Commission's side would be welcome to have an ever more targeted territorial approach in the future.



Armin Schabus, in charge of the EU-programme coordination in the Carinthia region in Austria, emphasised the importance of having **strategic thinking on how to improve cooperation at different levels to ensure good implementation of the Cohesion policy**. In the mountainous region of Carinthia for instance, they have developed **cooperation within the EUSALP strategy** as they play an active role in the implementation of this strategy, being one of the leaders of the action group 8. The **cross-border cooperation** is also developed with Slovenia and Italy with the implementation of the new CLLD tool or with the implementation of a **EGTC (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation) between Carinthia,**

Veneto and Friuli. But cooperation is not only cross-border or international, **cooperation between the different funds within the region** should also be improved. This is what his office is doing: trying to facilitate the implementation of the different funds: ERDF, ESF and the rural development programmes, including the LEADER approach in a coherent way to achieve the objectives of the region. This integrated approach is quite unique as there is a real coordination between the different contents of the programmes and the Managing Authorities who are implementing them.

In order to facilitate cooperation in the future cohesion policy, Armin Schabus identified the need to **simplify the implementation of the Cohesion Policy**: the CLLD tools are very interesting tools but the difficulties encountered in their implementation and the difficulty for local actors to see the added value of such tools are preventing a wider and easy implementation. Thus, rules have to be changed in order to **make these tools more attractive for local actors**.



André Marcon, as representative of the French National Mountain Council explained the approach implemented in France to better address mountains specificities within the Cohesion policy. In France, a new mountain law has just been adopted in December 2016. It confirmed the organisation of the Cohesion Policy for mountain areas through the **implementation of five "Comités de massifs" (mountain range committees)**. These mountain range committees are co-funded between the State, the Regions and the EU. A wide diversity of actors meets in these mountain range committees: **50% of them are local or regional administrations, 25% are socio-professional organisations** such as

chambers of commerce and the other **25% are associations including environmental ones**. All these organisations have to work together to **define a strategic programming** for several years. Once the OP has been signed, all the potential project partners can submit project proposals. The mountain massif committee follows up the programme, writes opinions and make some proposals for changes, if necessary.

According to André Marcon, this tool is very useful and facilitates a **participatory and constructive democracy** as the actors on the ground have participated directly in the elaboration of the programme. At the EU level, André Marcon dreams of a **European Mountain Council** with this tripartite approach that could better take into account mountain specificities while involving local actors who better knows the needs of their territories.

Norway is not part of the EU and as such doesn't implement the Cohesion policy. Nonetheless, as explained by Dag Ronning, Chairman of the County Council of Hedmark, **Norway is an active player in the Interreg programmes**. He explained how Norway is tackling mountain issues at regional level. Their regional policies for rural areas focus on how to maintain population in these areas. The specific mountain approach is based on the sustainable use of natural resources and on the nature protection areas. Their policies also address the specific challenges of mountain areas such as the provision of good public transport or access to broadband. To facilitate the development of these infrastructures, they have to be innovative. In the Hedmark County Council, access to broadband was facilitated by a cooperation between the County Council, some private companies and the citizens who cover the costs of installation to have access to infrastructures. This would not have been possible without the active cooperation of all these actors.



This round table showed that some regions and member States successfully achieved the adaptation of their priorities and governance to take into account the particular needs of mountain areas. This was possible thanks to innovative solutions and a strong political will to adapt the existing tools.

SESSION 6: What is the place for mountain areas in the future Cohesion policy? What can EU policy-makers do? (Round Table)

Viktor Blaskov, former assistant of MEP Iotova, Dilyana Slavova, from the European Economic and Social Committee, MEP Franc Bogovic and Cllr Tony Buchanan from the European Committee of the Regions discussed the future Cohesion policy and how their different EU institutions could help to pay more attention to mountain areas in the coming programming period.



Viktor Blaskov, former assistant of MEP Iotova, explained that the Iotova report on Cohesion policy in mountainous areas was adopted with a large majority in May 2016. The work has started with the adoption of this report and **MEPs have now to continue the fight to maintain the focus on mountain areas**. In addition to the support of the European Parliament, while writing the report, Ms Iotova has also received very large support from mayors in the Alps, in Bulgaria, in Germany, in Czech Republic, in all the different mountain ranges, showing that the initiative was very welcome on the ground.

Commissioner Cretu, in charge of the Cohesion policy, mentioned to Ms Iotova that a dedicated agenda for mountain areas was a possibility, but **it would require a large political support all across Europe, which is not the case for the moment**. Bulgaria will soon have the Presidency of the EU and will push for this mountainous agenda to be integrated in the Cohesion Policy. Nonetheless, the voice of mountain people need to be heard: civil society should mobilise itself in order to continue the momentum created by the adoption of the Iotova's report if we want to achieve establishment of a dedicated EU strategy for mountain areas or an EU Commissioner in charge of mountain areas.



Dilyana Slavova, President of the Section for External Relations of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), explained that the EESC also supports the Iotova's report and the idea to have a dedicated agenda for mountain areas. Unfortunately, mountain areas are not always very well represented at EESC but better attention should be given to these areas in the future CAP and Cohesion Policy. According to Ms Slavova, mountain areas should first **be recognised as a full priority** before speaking about the budget dedicated to the Cohesion Policy. More specifically, she

recommended that the future Cohesion Policy should have integrated a **specific agenda for mountain areas** and some **common funds for mountain areas**. She also recommended that some funds should be more **directly targeted to mountain areas** in the second pillar of the CAP and that the **optional quality scheme for mountain products should be more disseminated in order to facilitate its implementation at local level**.

Franc Bogovic, one MEP who has supported the adoption of the Iotova's report and who is a member of the RUMRA Intergroup, warned participants about the **budgetary issue**: discussions for the next MFF (Multi Financial Framework) are expected to be tough with the departure of the UK and with limited EU budget. Thus, the available budget will have to be used in the best possible way. According to him, Cohesion Policy should focus first on the provision of **basic infrastructures** to increase the accessibility of remote areas (with roads, highways, broadband). Once these basic infrastructures are provided, the Cohesion Policy should help to ensure that people can stay in the territories and have access to **basic services** such as schools, health



services, social care and culture. All these issues are really important for mountain areas and could avoid depopulation, especially of young people and improve the living conditions. Finally, he strongly supported the **principle of solidarity** between the Member States and between the regions, which is the essence of the Cohesion Policy. It is extremely important to maintain this solidarity with the less developed countries and regions in order to avoid reinforcing the development gaps between the different regions.



The Committee of the Regions (CoR) has recently adopted the Schneider opinion on "[The Future of Cohesion Policy beyond 2020](#)". This opinion is taking into account remote areas as explained Cllr Tony Buchanan, Vice-President of the Commission for Natural Resources of the CoR. To better address the territorial challenges and look at place-based territories, he believed that areas should be **made more attractive**. To do so, the challenges of access to broadband, access to basic services (such as local post offices or local recreation pubs), environmental protection and depopulation should be addressed within the Cohesion Policy. Thus, he recommended that the future Cohesion policy should be **more targeted** as it was sometimes too general in the past and that **local communities** should be put at the heart of the policy. He also recommended **simplification** in the implementation of the Cohesion policy.

CLOSURE



Jean-Pierre Halkin, Head of Unit in DG Regio (European Commission) encouraged regions and Member States to first better use the existing instruments, such as the **Partnership Agreements with the Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI)** tools, the **macro strategies or specific co-funding rates**, for mountain areas.

It is probable that the future priorities of the European Union will be changed with more attention on migration, security and defence for instance. It will also have an impact on the thematic priorities of the Cohesion policy. These expected changes are also opening a window to simplify the procedures as requested by different speakers during the conference.

Jean-Pierre Halkin congratulated Euromontana for the good timing of the conference. The European Commission will begin to discuss the future Cohesion Policy with stakeholders at the Cohesion Forum on 26-27 June. **Mountain people and administrations need to be strategically organised to make their voice better heard at the EU level.** Some strategic alliances with other organisations such as those representing the islands or sparsely populated areas could be developed to better lobby together.

This conference was the first step to support a future Cohesion Policy that better takes the mountain specificities into account. Euromontana calls upon all the organisations, especially the regions and Member States which participated in this conference, to **show their support for a dedicated approach for mountain areas**, including in the coming **open consultation on the future Cohesion Policy**. Finally, Euromontana commits itself to continue advocating for a Cohesion Policy that focuses more on territorial cohesion and fully takes the mountain specificities into account.



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