

Message of Dacian Cioloș, Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development

for the conference

High Nature Value Grasslands: securing the ecosystem services of European farming post-2013.

Sibiu, România, 9 September 2010

Dear participants,

I am sorry I cannot be physically with you during this conference but I take the opportunity offered by modern technology to send you this video message.

First of all, let me congratulate you for the idea of this conference and for its subject. Looking at the region where you are organising this meeting, I am certainly not surprised either by the location, or by the chosen theme of the conference. The city of Sibiu – a former European Capital of Culture, surrounded by a beautiful and diverse landscape, rich in traditions, will certainly inspire your debates.

In the next few minutes, in my message, I would like to address four main issues.

First of all, I want the future Common Agricultural Policy to address as much as possible the expectations of the European Union's citizens. The public debate that we have organised in the last few months has shown that the issues you are discussing here today - preservation of habitats with a rich biodiversity, with a high biological value - is one of the themes of concern and interest for European citizens. They want the EU to have a competitive agriculture but they also want an agricultural sector that makes better, more efficient use of natural resources, which performs better in the management of these resources, ensuring farming throughout Europe. Therefore, the discussions, the conclusions you are drawing here, your ideas, will contribute to the definition of the Common Agricultural policy after 2013.

Secondly, High Nature Value landscapes and preserving biodiversity cannot be envisaged independently from their economic, social and environmental dimensions. I cannot imagine protecting biodiversity in these areas without taking into account the challenges that farmers in these areas are facing. The High Nature Value landscapes are under threat not only from intensive agriculture – exploiting the soil, water and vegetation resources - but also from depopulation and land abandonment. For a good management of resources, no extreme is good – neither the ultra-exploitation of the natural resource, nor the abandonment of these resources – soil, vegetation, biodiversity, water, etc. We have to find the right balance between the economic, environment and social dimensions, and if this is met, then intervention through public financial support is entirely justified.

In any case, the Common Agricultural Policy offers the instruments that allow for a rational use of these resources. I hope that the Member States will make better use of the opportunities available, **and it is our intention to find new ways to better value these regions.**

Thirdly, I believe that it is more efficient to support farmers in these regions to work their land in a way that preserves habitats instead of abandoning human activities in these areas for the preservation of biodiversity. This is one fundamental principle of the Common Agricultural Policy – to provide specific measures to support agricultural production (and thereby preserve and develop biodiversity), also in economically difficult areas, but where there might also be a high biological/natural value.

I also want to underline that most, if not all of the financial support for these regions so far has come from the Common Agricultural Policy. Building on this idea of the CAP a sectoral policy with a multi-sectoral approach, I can assure you that this type of regions will be financially supported in the future, maybe even more than in the past. I've already had discussions with my colleague, the Commissioner for Environment, Janez Potočnik and he supports the idea of having an approach which takes into account the environmental policy within the Common Agricultural Policy, together with its economic and social dimensions.

Fourthly, I want to assure you that this type of agriculture will be promoted and supported by the future Common Agricultural Policy. We will do this in two ways.

- On the one hand through measures to stimulate all farmers in Europe to farm with care for habitats and an efficient, sustainable use of natural resources.
- But also through Rural Development programmes, in the second pillar of the CAP, we will offer the member states the possibility to apply well targeted, specific measures to address local or regional challenges and specificities, for a balanced, rational use of the resources in these regions.

Thus, the priorities and measures foreseen in Rural Development programmes after 2013 will not only include financial support for producers working their land in these regions with respect for biodiversity, but also measures to support farmers to sell their production. Perhaps we could use a specific logo for local product coming from these regions, or support local markets, short circuits/direct sales between producers and consumers for the distribution of food products, or allow measures to support small farms, or the activity of groups of producers in these regions respecting certain guidelines.

I believe it is also very important to support farmers to make the best use of all the benefits generated by this kind of High Nature Value landscapes – not only through farming but also eco-tourism, traditional products, local markets and niche markets.

To conclude, I congratulate the organisers of this conference, the ADEPT Foundation. I know the involvement and the commitment of this Foundation for all its work in Romania and more specifically in Transylvania. So again, congratulations for the organisation of this conference and good luck in your work in the future.

Thank you!