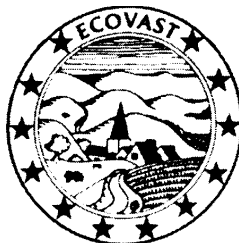


## EUROPEAN COUNCIL FOR THE VILLAGE AND SMALL TOWN



A Strategy for Rural Europe – ECOVAST 1994

### Summary

- 1 Europe's countryside, and the people who live in it, are affected by major forces of change. ECOVAST calls for action to protect their well-being, in the interest of all Europeans.
- 2 We seek a balance, and mutual support, between people and the environment. We look for integrated action between different arms of government, and between government and local people. We expect the local people to be consulted and involved.
- 3 Determined action is needed to revive and strengthen the economies of Europe's rural regions.
- 4 We wish to see farming sustained throughout rural Europe. The emphasis in farming policy should move from quantity of food to quality of food. Farmers should be enabled to gain income through adding value to farm products, and other economic activity. They should be paid to act as stewards of our heritage.
- 5 Forestry policy should be reviewed to place greater emphasis on the multiple purposes that it can serve, to benefit the countryside and rural people.
- 6 Manufacturing and service industries should be encouraged, on a base of regional resources and local entrepreneurship. Telecommunications can greatly assist this process.
- 7 Rural tourism should be promoted in a way which respects the character and capacity of the receiving areas.
- 8 Rural people should be enabled to gain good housing with modern amenities, while respecting local traditions of building. Government should sustain rural services, and encourage the social and cultural vitality of rural communities.
- 9 Governments and peoples should accept the need for long-term stewardship of Europe's heritage of wildlife, landscape and culture. Effective systems should be introduced and pursued in each country to assess, protect and maintain features of heritage value, and to extend public understanding of the heritage.
- 10 Responsibility for action lies with the rural people themselves, and with local authorities and a wide range of non-government organisations.
- 11 Regional and national government should recognise the special qualities of rural areas and the needs of rural communities; and should reflect these in integrated Rural Strategies and in all relevant sectoral policies.

- 12 The Council of Europe should sustain and extend its interest in the countryside, and particularly in the architectural heritage, the protection of the countryside and coastline, and integrated rural development.
- 13 The European Union should rapidly extend its effective involvement in, and stimulus to, rural development and environmental protection, both within the 12 countries and in its aid to Central and Eastern Europe.
- 14 The Governments and peoples of Central and Eastern Europe should grasp their new opportunities to strengthen their rural economies and revive their rural culture.
- 15 ECOVAST, as a pan-European association, is committed to the pursuit of these purposes, and will play an active role in the widespread partnership which is needed to serve and enhance rural Europe.

## Introduction

1. ECOVAST is a pan-European Council of organisations and individuals which aims to promote the well-being of rural communities, and to safeguard the rural heritage, throughout the continent of Europe.
2. The countryside of Europe (*in 1994*) covers 85% of the continent's land area, and contains the homes of more than half its people. It is the source of most of Europe's food, and of much of its timber, minerals and other raw materials. It offers beauty, peace and recreation to all Europeans, and to a growing number of visitors from outside the continent. It is a rich reserve of wildlife and of human culture.
3. This countryside, and those who live in it, are severely affected by major forces of change. This policy statement is designed to alert the peoples and decision' makers of Europe to these changes, and to the need for action to protect the well-being of the countryside and of the rural people. Such action is needed in the interest of all Europeans, including those who live in the cities but who draw benefit from the countryside in many ways.

## The impact of change

- 4 The main *forces of change* affecting the European countryside are these:
  - Continued *depopulation* of many peripheral, remote or sparsely populated regions in Western Europe, and of rural settlements generally in much of Eastern Europe; plus the decline of rural economies, and the loss of rural services, in many of these same areas.
  - In more central regions, the rapid *expansion of cities*, the outward movement of people and of industrial activity, and massive growth of built development of all kinds. These often occur at a pace which existing rural communities cannot absorb, and with a scale and style of development which submerges the rural character and culture and may destroy the architectural and natural heritage.
  - The modernisation of *agriculture*, which has brought great benefit to Europe by producing relatively cheap and abundant food, but at the cost of widespread change to the landscape, loss of wildlife, reduction in farming jobs, and in some areas abandonment of land.
  - *Pollution* of soil, water and air, and the spoliation of many lands and forests, by industrial and other effluents and by unwise practices of land management.
  - The growing and widespread attrition of landscape and cultural quality by excessive or ill-conceived development of *recreation and tourism*.
  - The general trend towards *centralisation* of commerce industry and government, and towards *standardisation of culture*. These have done much to diminish both the diversity of regional culture in rural Europe and the ability of rural people to determine or influence their own lifestyle.
  - The general *economic crisis* and rapid political changes, in Central and Eastern Europe. The fact that many *policies* which powerfully affect rural areas are animated by urban thinking or priorities, and often fail to reflect the character and needs of rural areas.
- 5 The impact of these changes varies greatly from one rural region to another, but the results include:
  - Weakness, and lack of diversity, in local economies, with resulting low incomes and low standards of living: in many rural regions there is widespread poverty
  - Inadequacy in much rural housing and in many rural services

- A loss of social and cultural vitality in many areas
- Damage to landscape, wildlife and the health of soil and water systems
- Loss of architectural riches and of regional and local cultures
- A reduction in the ability of local populations to express their own ideals, to influence policies which affect them and to take their own initiative.

6 *ECOVAST is committed to the search for policy and action which will tackle these problems.* We do not oppose change. Rather, we wish the change to be moderated and guided so that it promotes, rather than damages, the well-being of the countryside and of those who live in it. Achieving this will also serve the wider interests of the whole European population.

### Three key principles

7. The policy proposals which follow are animated by the purpose just stated, and also by three principles to which ECOVAST is committed.

- *People and the environment.* We have an equal concern with people and with place, that is the environment and the heritage. We seek a balance and a mutual support between the two. We seek a quality of rural life which is both modern and sustainable. We believe in the long-term stewardship of natural resources and of those inherited and still evolving cultures which give Europe its rich local diversity.
- *Integrated action.* Vast damage has been done in many rural areas by narrow sectoral policies, or inflexible 'topdown' thinking, which took no account of other aspects of life or of the subtle variations between one area and another. In all programmes of public policy and action, at whatever geographical scale, we call for effective integration between different arms of government, and between government and local people. We are encouraged by the growing awareness of the need for integrated thinking and action, at all levels.
- *Consult and involve the people.* Local people often have a far better feel for what is appropriate and sustainable in their area than do governments. Moreover, it is *their* future which is decided when each change is made. In considering the means for action, we therefore place a first focus on the views and wishes, the resources and energies, of local people in each place. The challenge is to link their views and resources to those of governments at all levels.

Proposals for policy and action

### Revival of rural economies

- 8 There was a time - before transport systems developed and trade became more universal and centralised - when each rural community had its own diverse local economy. Food would be produced and processed; goods would be made locally by a range of craftsmen; services would be provided. Changes since then have tended to discourage local processing of food, timber or other raw materials, to replace rural craftsmen by distant urban industries, and to cause services to move into larger towns. Thus the local economies of many rural areas have become narrow and relatively weak, with an over-dependence upon economic decisions made in distant cities.
- 9 *We believe that concentrated effort is needed to revive and strengthen the rural economies of Europe.* In the Europe of the 1990s, with the 'single market' within the European Union and the growing openness of trade in the rest of the continent, we cannot return to pre-industrial conditions. But the centralising trends in some economic sectors - such as automobile manufacture, and standardised building materials - are being offset in other sectors by growing demand for purer food, for regional food

products, for hand-made goods, for rural tourism. Moreover, modern technology, which has done much to impel centralised industry, has now produced - in telecommunications - a powerful enabler of decentralised activity.

- 10 *The revival and strengthening of rural economies must take these modern trends and ally them with the heritage of resources, cultures and skills.* In each area, the precise solutions will depend upon that local heritage, upon local or regional products, markets and opportunities. Thus the relevance of the following ideas will vary from place to place.

### **Agriculture: changing the emphasis**

- 11 Farming has always been the foundation-stone of most rural economies. It has sustained the way of life, and created the cultural landscape, in most of Europe's countryside.
- 12 *ECOVAST wishes to see farming sustained throughout rural Europe - North and South, West and East, on rich land and on poorer land.* This is needed not only to produce Europe's food, but also in order to help to sustain the way of life, the rural economy and the cultural landscape of all such areas. For these reasons, we are opposed to processes which would wholly withdraw farming from marginal areas, or which would excessively concentrate food production upon the richest or most accessible farmlands.
- 13 *Quality in food products.* Food surpluses within the EU, plus growing concern about healthy food and about the impact of farming upon the natural environment, have shifted the emphasis within the Common Agricultural Policy. The focus is moving from quantity of food to *quality* of food, with increased concern for animal health and for the environment. Similar changes are coming elsewhere in Europe. *We believe this shift should be welcomed and accelerated.*
- 14 *Adding value to farm products.* Farmers and other country-dwellers should be encouraged to gain extra income from local 'adding of value' to farm products - turning milk into cheese, meat into traditional local products, fruit into preserves, wool into garments - and (where possible) retailing them within the region to tourists or to city-dwellers.
- 15 *Farmers as stewards of the heritage.* Farmers manage the greater part of Europe's land. They should be recognised as the stewards of our heritage, and rewarded for this role. In many regions, central and local governments are making payments to encourage farmers in their efforts to protect, maintain and enhance the locally- distinctive qualities of landscape, wildlife or culture, and to provide for public access to their land. In parts of the European Union, governments are grant-aiding the continuance of the traditional farming practices which created the cultural landscape and are the best guarantee of its future. *These initiatives should be pursued throughout Europe.*
- 16 *Diversifying farm incomes.* Farmers, and particularly those on small farms who may not be able to make a living from farming alone, should also be encouraged and enabled to diversify their income through other activity on or off the farm. This may be in non-food crops; forestry, or woodland management; farm-based tourism; agricultural contracting or similar activity; or part-time work of many kinds within the wider local economy.

### **Forestry**

- 17 In many European countries, forests and woods cover much of the land. They form a major element in the landscape of our continent, in national cultures and in habitats for wildlife. They help to moderate the climate, to limit soil erosion, to prevent avalanches, to provide fuel. Their products have been reflected in the buildings and craft traditions of many parts of Europe.

- 18 During this century, the pattern of forestry has become somewhat distorted and simplified. Native trees and mixed woodland have in many places been replaced by imported species and monoculture. Unwise forestry practices have prompted soil erosion. Much woodland has fallen into neglect. Many traditional uses of timber products have lapsed; and the commercial use of woodlands is increasingly focused on large-scale logging, with processing in massive centralised plants. As a result, added value in local economies is lost, and woodlands support far less employment than before.
- 19 *We need a reappraisal of policy and practice in Forestry, parallel to that for agriculture.* Forestry should be seen as a multi-purpose activity, concerned with production of timber, with stimulus to local economic activity (through diversified forest products and added value), control of soil erosion and avalanches, amelioration of climate, habitat for wildlife, provision for recreation and tourism.
- 20 This renewed vision can build upon traditional skills in forestry and the use of forest products, supported by modern technology (e.g. in use of laminated timber). It may point, in some countries, to an extension in the area of forest, as a complement to changes in agriculture. It also underlines the importance of securing sharp reduction in levels of acid rain and environmental pollution, which are currently causing widespread damage to Europe's forests.

### **Manufacturing, craft & service industries**

- 21 Centralisation of economic activity has led to a decline in the industrial sector of many rural regions. This is a major cause of the current weakness in rural economies throughout Europe, and of the crowding of people into cities.
- 22 ECOVAST advocates *a counter-attack, to revive a strong industrial element in rural economy.* This can build upon the desire of many people, and many firms, to move out of the cities; upon the growing demand for regional goods and craft products; and upon the growth in tourism, which brings purchasing power into rural areas. It can harness modern information technology, which offsets the long-standing rural disadvantages of distance and sparsity of population.
- 23 These factors are being used by governments and local authorities to encourage a revival and new growth of manufacturing, craft and service industries in rural regions. ECOVAST applauds this effort, and urges that *further economic activity be conceived in a manner as locally-rooted and as sustainable as possible.* The focus should be on adding value to local primary products; on use of traditional skills and products from each area; and on local control of individual or co-operative enterprises, rather than dependence on subsidiaries of distant firms who can too readily kill off a branch enterprise because of problems elsewhere.

### **Rural tourism**

- 24 Throughout Europe, tourism is being seen by governments, local authorities and others as a growth sector in national and local economies. These bodies look increasingly to rural areas as a new tourist destination, and perceive that tourism can bring new economic life and new opportunities into these regions. *Tourism is already bringing significant new income into rural areas,* creating jobs and encouraging added-value enterprises. It is also *prompting action to protect and enhance the heritage* of landscape, history and culture which is a major part of the tourist attraction.
- 25 *But rural tourism also contains great potential dangers.* In excessive numbers, tourists and their equipment can swamp small towns and villages. Their culture may be alien and

offensive to the receiving communities. Their demands for entertainment and for products may distort and debase local culture. Tourist developments may, by their scale and style, do grave damage to landscapes and to ecosystems.

- 26 To avoid these dangers, while gaining the benefit of tourism, demands *clear perception of goals and strong management of programmes for local tourism development*. It demands the development of tourist 'products' which are based directly on the resources of the area and on local entrepreneurship. It means aiming at markets which are relevant to those products and culturally compatible with the host population; controlling the quantity of tourist activity; avoiding ugly development or heavy traffic; securing quality in new development; and bringing financial benefits directly to local people. It depends upon *positive policies of land use planning and countryside management*.
- 27 In order to encourage policies of these kinds, ECOVAST was party to the creation of other European bodies concerned with rural tourism and is working closely with them to promote well-conceived development in this field.

### **Telecommunications**

- 28 *Modern telecommunications can assist the revival and strengthening of rural economies and services*. They encourage decentralised economic activity, and offset the rural handicaps of distance and sparse population. They, and computers, can permit small and medium-sized enterprises in rural areas to gain access to markets, suppliers and collaborators at any distance, and to increase their work efficiency. They can help in service provision, e.g. through telephonic shopping, electronic libraries, fax-based enquiries. They can bring training and education to people where they live.
- 29 For these reasons, *those concerned with the well-being of rural communities should understand and apply the benefits of telecommunications*. A key element in this is the telecottages movement. Telecottages are centres, within small towns or villages, equipped with computers and telecommunication systems which local people may use for learning or work. The first such centre was created in 1985. The idea has spread rapidly, and there are now over 100 telecottages in European countries, and many more in process of creation. ECOVAST is working with other bodies to encourage the widespread creation of telecottages, and through them the use of telecommunications in ways which benefit rural people.

### **Rural Housing**

- 30 Those who live in rural areas deserve, and should be enabled to secure, good housing with modern amenities. Particular priority should be given to adequacy of housing for people who have their roots, or jobs, in rural areas, but whose income is low. National and local governments should take action to meet the needs of such people.
- 31 At the same time, we place great importance upon local traditions of building. These traditions are reflected in the scale, shape, structural methods and materials of the buildings that we inherit. They have generally stood the test of time in their fitness for function and climate, and they embody a major part of the collective memory and culture of the people. Within most of these traditions, the existing buildings are capable of internal modernisation, without damage to their essential character. New buildings can be designed to complement the traditions through use of appropriate scale and materials.
- 32 We look for policies of housing and of planning control which permit and encourage the provision of adequate housing, using both inherited buildings and new ones. The aim, within a living countryside, should be to achieve high quality in the meeting of modern needs while respecting local traditions of building. Our hope is that each rural region will

retain, and indeed further develop, its distinctive character of buildings, rather than succumb to a European uniformity through standardised building designs and excessive use of mass-produced building materials.

### **Rural Services**

- 33 A vital element in quality of life for rural people is quality of, and reasonable access to, services - such as shops, post offices, banks, hospitals, surgeries, schools, public transport. The last thirty years have seen widespread decline in such services within villages and small towns. This has particularly tended to happen where local government has been reorganised into larger units.
- 34 *This decline in rural services is not acceptable and should be resisted. Service providers should recognise the suffering caused in rural areas - particularly to the elderly, the children and those without private transport - by withdrawal of services. They should note that attempts to save money in one service may simply cause costs in another service. They should be resourceful and flexible in sustaining services, for example by use of multipurpose facilities, provision of mobile services, or encouragement of self-help by village communities.*
- 35 *Rural areas also need a modern infrastructure of roads, railways, energy and water supplies, sewerage and telecommunications. The emphasis of governments on arterial systems or major urban investment has led them to neglect the infrastructure of many rural regions. New or modernised facilities of these kinds are needed, and should meet acceptable modern standards while not doing violence to the rural environment. They may be best provided on a decentralised basis.*

### **Social and cultural vitality**

- 36 A major factor in the well-being of rural communities, and in the sustaining of their services, is the vitality they have in social and cultural terms. This vitality may be reflected in traditional customs and festivals, and in minority languages and cultures, which have high importance to the people and which also contribute to the cultural richness of Europe. It may be reflected also in the confidence with which rural communities tackle their own problems and cooperate with each other in their social organisation, and adapt their collective systems to modern needs.
- 37 This vitality may depend, however, upon stability of population, with a balance between age groups and a strong kinship structure. In many rural areas, the decline of population and a certain isolation of culture have weakened this vitality, and has led rural people to under-estimate their own abilities and to under-value their traditional resources and culture. Elsewhere, the rural culture is threatened by too rapid an influx of people from the cities. Many European governments, and non-government agencies, are seeking to *stimulate the understanding and involvement of rural people, by offering animation, education and training. We urge an expansion of such activity. We also urge action to moderate the pace of influx of people from the cities into the countryside.*
- 38 *Education and training have a vital role, too, in the economic field. The development of local economies - in the ways earlier described - will depend upon the development of technical and entrepreneurial skills among both young and older people. Governments and other agencies should ensure that opportunities for education and training are readily available to rural people, on a geographically dispersed basis.*

### **Safeguarding the heritage**



- 39 Europe has an astonishing diversity of land form climate and natural habitat - from sea level to high mountains, islands to wide continental plains, Mediterranean to Arctic climates, the richest alluvial plains to the most barren wilderness. Within and across this natural setting, mankind has moved and settled tilled the land and built settlements, over thousands of years. From this interaction have arisen local cultures, whose diversity is as great as that found in nature itself.
- 40 This great diversity of nature and of human culture enriches the quality of life for all Europeans. It is our duty to understand, protect and enhance this heritage. We must evolve a modern way of life in our rural areas which respects this heritage and which enriches rather than diminishing it.

### **The natural heritage**

- 41 In many parts of Europe, the wealth of wildlife has been severely diminished over the last 50 years by human action - drainage of wetlands; canalising of rivers; heavy use of fertilizers; pollution of air, land and water systems, development of towns, industries and transport systems, excessive shooting of small birds and mammals; and heavy tourist developments on coasts. Elsewhere, human action has enriched the habitats for wildlife, as in the creation of new wetlands and water systems, the planting of woodlands, the greening of cities, and the expert management of national parks, nature reserves and other areas.
- 42 *ECOVAST calls for a greater degree of public and political understanding of the importance of wildlife and natural systems; and acceptance of the need for the sound long-term stewardship of this heritage, both for its own sake and for our long-term wellbeing.* There is a crucial need for action at national and international level, bearing in mind that natural systems (such as rivers, bird migration routes, or the winds that carry acid rain) over-arch the boundaries between nations. A major requirement is effective legal protection for a wide range of specific species, backed by the setting aside and skilled protective management of those natural habitats which have highest significance at European or national level.
- 43 We applaud the work of the national and nature parks throughout Europe: the moves by the EU to reinforce the network of effectively protected habitats; and the initiative of the World Conservation Union in its action plan for protected areas throughout Europe. We call for the commitment of governments and peoples to this work. But this focus on the areas of highest value for wildlife must also be complemented by a greater awareness of wildlife throughout Europe, reflected in policies for the use and management of land. These should reflect the principles of BioDiversity and Sustainable Development to which many of Europe's governments committed themselves at the 'Earth Summit' in Rio.

### **The cultural heritage**

- 44 Rural regions contain a great wealth of evidence of our past interaction with the land. This is reflected in buildings of all kinds - houses, farms, mills, churches, castles, bridges and the like - and in the manifold intricate features of the landscape. The landscape is like a rich history book, revealing how generations have worked the land and changed its appearance. Similarly, the population or folk culture of each rural community - music, song, dance, traditional costume, customs, festivals, language, religion - express the inheritance of that community.
- 45 *This heritage of landscape and of popular culture represents a large part of our collective memory.* It provides 'roots' for modern people, a sense of place, a link to the past, a

storehouse of ideas on how we can use the land, a vital source of culture and of spiritual creation. It represents a massive inherited 'capital' of human effort, which we may (to our cost) ignore or waste or we may choose to use and adapt.

46 ECOVAST takes no static view of this heritage. We do not wish to 'stop the clock' in the countryside. The heritage is so rich precisely because it has been added to, changed and adapted. But *we call for a greater awareness of the heritage*; a willingness to build on it and adapt it, rather than ignore or destroy it; and the humility to learn from, and value, our ancestors' experience and to hand on a heritage to our children.

47 At present, in some parts of rural Europe, the cultural heritage is being rapidly eroded and even destroyed by social or technological changes, modern agriculture, urban growth, neglect and other forces. Elsewhere, more sensitive policies are being applied. Governments or local authorities in many areas are seeking to encourage continued use of traditional houses, farm buildings or churches, or their sensitive conversion to new uses; to sustain traditional farming practices, thus maintaining terraces, hedges, drystone walls or other landscape features; to ensure that new buildings are in harmony with long-established local traditions.

48 *ECOVAST is committed to the search for a constantly renewed equilibrium between the heritage and human needs in the countryside.* It wishes to see the rapid and widespread development of policies, and of practical action, which will serve this equilibrium. These must include:

- Systematic and continuing surveys of the heritage in order to provide the knowledge upon which action can be based
- Formal measures of statutory and legal protection of the heritage
- Systems of expert advice about the use, maintenance and (where appropriate) adaptation of traditional buildings and other features.
- Financial and fiscal help, for example towards repair of historic buildings or pursuit of traditional farming practices
- Training of professionals involved in land use, land management, building and related fields, so that they more fully understand how heritage features can be sustained or adapted to meet modern needs.
- Training and encouragement of craftworkers in traditional skills, and of the suppliers of traditional building materials, plus systems for salvage and re-use of traditional building materials
- Exchange of ideas between people involved in all these processes, in order to stimulate progress.

49 At present, actions of these kinds tend to be mainly focused on places of high heritage interest - the finest monuments, the best-preserved ancient towns, the most spectacular historic landscapes. We wish the protection of such places to continue. But we place equal importance upon the *rapid extension of relevant policies to the whole of the European countryside*, building upon the experience which has been gained in the special places.

### **Interpretation and education**

50 It is not enough to apply professional effort to protect the heritage. The aim must be to *enlist the understanding, enthusiasm and positive involvement of the population, particularly those who live in each locality, about their own local heritage.* We support the work of many public and voluntary bodies which seek to interpret the heritage to the public. We also see a major role for educational enterprises of all kinds, from primary and secondary schools to those involved in adult, community and continuing education. It is of great importance, for example, that children learn about the history, wildlife and modern

life of their own village, small town or rural area.

51 Also vital is the *education of the urban population about rural life and rural heritage*. There has been a welcome growth in general public understanding of the values of the countryside. Recreational use of the countryside, and rural tourism, are introducing millions of city-dwellers to rural life as never before. The opportunity must be taken to interpret that rural life, and the rural heritage, to them. Their understanding will influence their support (as citizens and voters) for policies which affect the countryside. Their behaviour as visitors will improve as their understanding increases. They may even contribute as volunteers to practical projects which serve rural needs or protect the rural heritage.

52 *The protection and interpretation of heritage features should preferably be done on their original site*, in order to give the public a truthful impression of their origin, context and supporting landscape. We recognise the educational value of open-air museums, into which buildings and other features have been moved from their original sites. But such museums should not be used as an easy alternative to the (much to be preferred) retention and display of buildings on their original sites.

### **Partnership in policy and action**

53 This broad range of policy and action demands the involvement of many bodies, governmental and non-governmental, at local, regional, national and international levels.

54 *At local level, a prime responsibility rests with the people* - that is, those who live in the countryside, the villages and small towns. They include those who have been there for generations, and those who have newly arrived. They should not hesitate to act within the limits of the resources they control, and to press governments at all levels to help them.

55 *The role of local authorities*. A crucial mechanism for local initiative is the local authority, democratically elected and based in the rural area. There is great variation, within Europe, in the extent to which such authorities are truly local, and in their responsiveness to the needs of their electors.

56 Reorganisation of local government has seen small-scale authorities in many countries amalgamated into larger units, whose activities thereby become more centralised and distant from many of their electors. In such areas, interests of smaller settlements may easily be subordinated to those of the larger towns. Deliberate effort is needed, within each authority, to ensure that the voice of local people is constantly heard; and to encourage the active participation of rural people in local affairs.

57 By contrast, other countries have retained independent communes, often very small in size. This can do much to ensure that local aspirations are expressed. But it may impede the collaboration between communes which may be needed in order to create significant public facilities, such as schools or hospitals.

58 There can be no ideal formula for local government, applicable to all countries. But ECOVAST would wish to see a system in each country which permits both the expression and fulfilling of local needs within each village or similar small settlement, and collaboration between a group of towns and villages within a district to meet needs of a wider kind.

59 Whatever their size, *local authorities have a leading role in formulating local policy for their own area* in all the fields outlined in this Strategy; in harnessing financial and other resources to the needs of their area; in stimulating the understanding and involvement of the people; and in ensuring that necessary action is taken by themselves or by others.

60 This purpose should be reflected in a *Rural Strategy* prepared by each local authority for its area. This should be done in concert with other relevant agencies, and should be based on the three key principles stated at the beginning of this document.

61 We place great importance, also, upon the activity of *voluntary, private and non-profit groups within rural communities*. They include co-operatives, trusts, societies, syndicates, associations, women's organisations, church groups, youth clubs and many other agencies. The special strength of such bodies is their close knowledge of and commitment to local issues, and their directness of action. By their energy and voluntary effort, they often meet needs which would otherwise place heavy burdens upon public authorities. For that reason, public authorities should help such bodies in their work, in a highly flexible way. Such help may take the form of grants, tax exemption, physical help, animation, and many kinds of partnership.

62 *Regional and national governments*. Many of the forces affecting rural areas originate at national or regional level. For that reason, many of the policies needed to influence those forces must also originate at that level

We look to regional and national governments to:

- recognise the diversity of regions, the special qualities of rural areas and the needs of rural communities
- reflect these qualities and needs, plus the policy ideas outlined in this Strategy, in their policies related to agriculture, forestry, industrial development, tourism, transport, housing, services and the environment
- publish their own Rural Strategies, which should be prepared in concert with all relevant agencies and should reflect the three key principles stated at the beginning of this document.

63 *International action*. We have been encouraged by the growing interest of European intergovernmental bodies in rural affairs. This was shown by the European Countryside Campaign, launched by the Council of Europe; and by the European Commission's report of 1988 on 'The Future of Rural Society'. These have shown a rapid broadening of political perceptions of rural affairs.

64 *The Council of Europe*. ECOVAST played an active part in the European Countryside Campaign of 1981-88; and was disappointed when the Council of Europe decided not to sustain the impetus of the campaign when it was formally concluded. We have been encouraged by the continuing interest of the Parliamentary Assembly in certain aspects of rural life, for example agricultural policy, rural tourism and the architectural heritage. We ask the Council and the Parliamentary Assembly to sustain this interest, and in particular to:

- ensure the implementation of existing conventions relating to the architectural heritage
- develop a convention for the protection of the countryside and coastlines of Europe
- promote debate and inter-governmental exchanges on integrated rural development, noting the three key principles proposed at the beginning of the strategy.

65 *The European Union*. Agricultural and rural policies have been reviewed within the EU. Other EU policies have a major impact on rural areas, in a manner which extends beyond the 12 countries. We urge the EU to ensure:

- increasingly effective and integrated application of the Structural Funds (FEOGA, the Social Fund and the Regional Fund) to broad issues of rural development and protection of heritage and environment

- continuation and progressively wider application of LEADER, the EU's excellent initiative in integrated rural development
- widespread application of the lessons about locally-based development, learned through the LEDA (Local Employment Development Action) programme, with a growing emphasis on social and environmental (rather than solely economic) development
- within the Common Agricultural Policy, a further significant switch of funds from the guarantee to the guidance section, with an emphasis on the points outlined in the Agriculture and Forestry sections of this strategy
- a greater measure of integration, and particularly more involvement of local authorities and of the - rural people, in the Integrated Mediterranean Programmes
- a sustained programme of assistance to the promotion of rural tourism on a soundly-conceived basis
- continued assistance for the application of telecommunications in rural areas
- extension of the EU's aid programme to the countries of Central Europe, with a strong element of support to the diversifying of their rural economies and the protection of their heritage and environment
- full adoption and implementation by member governments of the Habitats Directive, and full implementation of the Birds' Directive
- bringing forward of proposals for further protection of European landscapes and coastlines.

66 *Central and Eastern Europe.* The governments and peoples of Central and Eastern Europe are faced now with a crucial challenge and opportunity in rural policy. In agriculture, the challenge is to sustain the level of demand for farm products, and to find the right balance between private and cooperative ownership of land. In this way, a fair measure of employment may be sustained on the farms. However, since few other jobs exist in many rural areas, there is still the danger of further depopulation of the countryside and more crowding of cities whose support systems are already over stretched.

67 For this reason, these countries are beginning to take a more rounded approach to their rural development. Key elements in this may be rural tourism, using their remarkable heritage; food and timber processing, and other kinds of added-value enterprise; manufacturing and crafts industries; and the rapid improvement of rural infrastructure (notably telecommunications) and of social services. Major effort will be needed to help the rural population to adapt to change; to grasp unfamiliar opportunities with courage; and to create voluntary, private and non-profit groups to assist the process of rural development. ECOVAST, with its rapidly growing membership in Central and Eastern Europe, is striving to help in this vital process of strengthening rural life.

## **Conclusion**

68 In conclusion, we re-emphasise the central role which the rural people themselves should play in the evolution of policy, and the taking of action, to serve their well-being and to protect their heritage. Government alone cannot do the job. Means must be found to enable rural communities to express their needs and aspirations, and to apply their energies to meeting these. Effective links must be created between governments and rural communities, so that resources (national and local, public and private) can be harnessed to the task.

69 ECOVAST - as a pan-European body whose membership embraces government agencies, nongovernment bodies and individuals - is committed to encouraging the creation of these links. Its main role in this great theme of rural life in Europe is one of stimulus, through the exchange of practical ideas and living experience. *We wish to strengthen the voice, and illuminate the action, of rural people everywhere.*