

TROODOS DECLARATION

To the Attention of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus

We, the participants in the European Conference "*Mountain Territories of the Large Mediterranean Islands: European issues, national and regional policies and local mechanisms*", have met in Troodos, Cyprus, from 28 to 31 January 2020, and based on Article 174 of the Treaty on the European Union which pays "*particular attention*" to the "*island, cross-border and mountain regions*", declare that, in response to the urgent challenges faced by large Mediterranean islands' mountain communities, there is an urgent need to implement a new multi-level, multi-actor, inclusive and sustainable strategy for the mountainous and insular areas and their communities. As an immediate response in the preparation of the next programming period of cohesion policy, EU-Member States and their Regions should take opportunity to prioritize mountain regions in their strategic planning and operational plans.

The strategy (1) recognises the key role of insular mountains while (2) underlining the need of revising policies in order to allow their needed adaptation to local conditions, in order to (3), when it comes to define concrete measures or actions, to follow five common principles, which are relevant for the mountainous and insular communities:

(1) Recognising the key role and the specificities of mountainous and insular areas at all levels

The aim of this declaration is to recognize **the importance of mountain areas in the Mediterranean** as well as the need **to strengthen the corresponding territorial strategies**. It brings together the six large Mediterranean islands of common interest and should participate in further debates at the European level, expected to go deeper on particular issues related to the mountains on islands, their environment and their sustainable territorial development issues.

The mountain areas reflect a range of problems, challenges and opportunities no matter whether they are "insular mountains", mountain ranges in islands with coastal plains, being Regions or States. These highlands are European hotspots of biodiversity and environmental capital. They are places **under pressure and often in decline but, at the same time, they are undergoing new and innovative dynamics, and have endogenous resources as well as a rich heritage of European Community interest**.

Nevertheless, the large Mediterranean islands, likewise other European mountains and islands, despite their assets – touristic dynamics and environmental, cultural, and landscape value – are particularly "sensitive" areas and include "declining rural areas". The

economic, social, and connectivity problems become more serious as the inexorable and complex ecological turns are worsening – due to climate change, the collapse of biodiversity and the degradation of resources (water, soil, forests, etc.). They require particular focus in order to implement the new European “Green Pact” and the new long-term vision on rural areas.

Assessing the effects of climate change and its impact on natural and semi-natural environments, and developing adaptation strategies are not only local-level issues. They must be seen, at EU level, as affecting **public goods of primary importance**, such as island mountain areas, which are crucial at a regional level, but also at a national and European levels. Therefore, sustainability strategies are at the same time based on the collective action of local actors and designed to respond to collective European issues; first those of the environment, and second those of the economic and social transformation. They will enable the preservation of threatened heritage resources.

The engagement of local and regional actors, especially the women and the young people, is here, even more than anywhere else, a necessity, because these specific environments require knowledge from practitioners – know-how that is often traditional and passed to new actors of local dynamics. Convergence of interests of mountain communities is a must to define strategic choices for the territories. Hence the need to focus the work and research on the actors and the local/regional action, while taking into account the global challenges and the prevailing and forthcoming EU mechanisms on these issues. These local actors dynamics must also be accompanied by “jumping-scale” strategies (regional, national, European or even international) to mobilise institutional, intellectual, scientific and technical resources, as well as the required practices and means.

(2) Renewing policies and mechanisms for the development of mountain and island areas

We consider that it is necessary to **renew the vision as well as the policies and development mechanisms of these areas, in order to make better use of their assets and better prepare them to face the environmental, social, economic and governance challenges.**

These areas are at the crossroads of major global and EU issues, as well of very specific local and regional dynamics. The experiences and innovations taking place there, coupled with policies and tools (regional, national and European) are of utmost importance and include the **use/adaptation of new technologies** (digital, energy, etc.), which make it possible to meet both local expectations and global challenges. The same applies to agricultural production and the management of semi-natural areas, as long as **sustainable tourism** and **high quality and highly authentic products** reinforce their values, and as funding schemes defined in the Common Agricultural Policy are uptake in the national strategies and in the operational plans, in particular those that are foreseen for promoting High Natural Value (HNV) and Natura2000 protected area.

More generally, the ambition for these areas should be to:

- **Give priority to the quality and sustainability of landscapes and activities** (quality products, short value chains, recognition of the full value of forests, industries oriented towards new technologies, food, wood or mineral processing, contribution of sustainable tourism to the local and heritage resources) by limiting competition between the various land uses (residential, recreational, productive, logistical, etc.) and the pressure on natural resources;
- **Encourage accessibility** as well as the provision of equipment (networks, infrastructures) and basic services (education, training, health, etc.), while reducing the “barrier” effects thanks to exchanges and networking between the various actors (public institutions, communities, members of the diaspora, businesses, NGOs, etc.);
- **Anticipate the vulnerability to climate change and its effects** on the conservation of biodiversity, on the increase of natural risks, on the viability of agricultural or tourist systems, and on the traffic flows;
- **Fight against the alteration of mountain culture and for the continuity of specificities of Mountains** (risk culture, management of “common goods”, etc.) as to **strengthen their resilience.**

The mountain areas of the large Mediterranean islands are faced with specific challenges. However, strategic solutions are developed through participation in European debates. **The Troodos Conference participants insist on the need to strengthen the cohesion policy for mountains and islands** – as much as sectorial policies for agriculture, the environment, research, health, transport, innovation, etc.

For the Troodos Conference participants, it would be misleading to deliver a single “model” for the Mediterranean insular and mountain territories, or even general recommendations, which are often not quite applicable in practice. It would be as well misleading to set experiments as “good practices” that could simply be reproduced in any other territory. On the contrary, it is necessary to feed **the policy decision-making with reflexions coming from all mountain insular geographies, bringing together the actors and identifying the innovations from which everyone can draw inspiration while caring local specificities and problems.** As the discussion on declining rural areas has intensified over the past years, it is becoming necessary for Euro-Mediterranean insular mountain areas to strengthen cooperation both among themselves and with continental massifs in order to participate actively in the preparations for the development of appropriate European policies.

In this new framework of negotiations, a remarkable European debate is developing, as well as an accumulation of innovative and alternative initiatives and experiences, which can contribute significantly to the sustainable development of mountain and insular areas.

(3) Defining some main principles of action for Euro-Mediterranean mountainous and insular areas

The Troodos Conference participants agree on the following five principles for action:

3.a. **The need for multi-scale, multi-stakeholders and multi-institutional consultation in order to push a strong political project**, capable of overcoming the challenges faced by mountain and insular areas, and thus calmly anticipating changes in contemporary society, techniques, markets and environments and making them tomorrow's assets and sources of values. The facilitation capacities for working together at local level, which as well make the link with regional, national and European consultations' platforms, are key, and should get more support.

3.b. **The principle of equitable, inclusive and sustainable territorial development** must enable these mountains to achieve living standards and conditions comparable to those of national mainland territories, and to provide national and European communities high quality products, eco-systemic services, and natural resources.

3.c. **The need for fair treatment and solidarity between territories** in order to preserve and enhance the resources and amenities of mountains, by establishing reciprocities between coastal, lowland, urban centres and mountain areas (water, biodiversity, cultural and identity patrimonies) and promoting a multi-functional approach, while obviously correcting specific handicaps which would limit these opportunities for sustainable and inclusive development.

3.d. The bet that **innovation**, beyond a set of measures, will be achieved **by mobilising different forms of intelligence and valuable resources which are all too often disregarded in the territories, and by bringing together the conditions for joint action**, on the basis of:

- **An improved "integrated" building-up of the challenges of innovation, conservation and development in a "learning territories" spirit;**
- **A form of governance in which the managing authorities and each mountain stakeholder are clearly associated** – this is the heart of environmental and social justice;
- **Renewed and more participatory methods, placing the stakeholders involved at the heart of the actions, allowing them to experiment**, to adjust standards, regulations or financial frameworks, and to develop their own responses, acting as close as possible to the people and their needs by relying on local engineering.
- **Local facilitation capacities acknowledged and funded through public funds.**

3.e. The need to create and maintain, at EU-level, **knowledge exchange networks between the six large Mediterranean islands**. The needs relate, firstly, to the establishment of **knowledge infrastructures** that establish long-term collaboration between training and research institutions and that support the initiatives of insular mountain communities by high-level expertise. The needs also relate to mobility funds to open opportunities to organise exchanges of experience and establish partnerships to access European funds for

cross-border, transnational or territorial cooperation. Needs are identified to establish **“innovation laboratories”** at territorial level around innovative projects undertaken by entrepreneurs, whether they are farmers, business leaders, heads of associations or other forms of organisation in the circular, social and solidarity-based economy, complementary to the action of territorial authorities. Finally, in the age of digital transition and coupled with real exchanges, a multi-lingual virtual platform for education and exchanges to disseminate knowledge and contribute to innovations in these areas, is required.