



Friday, 8 November 2019

INTERVENTION BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE PRINCIPALITY OF ASTURIAS, ADRIÁN BARBÓN

Inauguration of the IV European Rural Parliament

This is the first time that the European Rural Parliament and the European Rural Youth Parliament have met in Spain. I thank you for honouring us with this decision and I assure you that you will not regret it, because you have chosen an excellent port of call: neither Candás nor Asturias are going to disappoint you.

As President of the Principality, I have the honour to welcome you. I wish you a good stay in our land and I trust that your work will be fruitful. Above all, I hope that you will make yourselves heard, because that is one of the main objectives of this meeting: to serve as a loudspeaker for rural areas, that their needs and proposals are listened to and taken into account as they deserve. Let silence, which is the word of oblivion, not be the sound of the European countryside.

This meeting is important for various reasons - for the large number of regions and countries represented, for the issues to be dealt with, for the cooperation effort - but it is also taking place at a time of particular importance, on the watershed of a new development model in which you have much to contribute. I will try to explain briefly how I can support this assertion.

In December, Madrid will host the United Nations Climate Change Conference. It will be a relevant event because never before has there been such collective awareness of the urgency of halting global warming. For the same reason, because of this shared urgency, especially by the younger generations, its conclusions and commitments will be evaluated in detail. Millions of people hope that the climate summit will not disappoint them.

In Asturias we deal with this issue frequently. As we are a community with a strong industrial tradition, we are attentive to the consequences that the ecological transition will have on our companies, to what extent they will be able to adapt and consolidate in the face of a change that is predicted to be rapid and inexorable. We talk a lot, almost every day, about the carbon dioxide market, about the cost of energy and about electro-intensive companies.



Don't worry, I'm not going to dwell on the industrial problems. What I want to tell you is that at this point, at least in the most informed and mobilized layers of society - those embodied in Greta Thunberg's youth protest - there is already an awareness that we are heading for a new economic order. Some of us advocate that it be associated with a new green deal that promotes the hegemony of renewable energies, energy efficiency and the fight against pollution, among other requirements for achieving a more sustainable world.

We are therefore living in a time of change, of crucial change, and, like all episodes of this kind, it is risky and stimulating. Now, let me share with you a few questions. Can all these objectives be designed with our backs to the countryside? What role does it have in this new green deal that we are advocating?

Personally, I have no doubts: it has to have an angular role in this conception that we almost glimpse. What am I talking about, specifically? Well, among other issues, the models of agricultural and livestock exploitation, the limitation of methane emissions, the importance of biodiversity and natural resources to absorb CO₂ or viable forms of settlement. All, basic issues for the rural milieu and for our own future as a species.

I am saying that if the consequences of warming fully affect the countryside - increased aridity and erosion, production made more vulnerable by extreme weather events and other risks - we must also fully rely on the rural world to combat climate change and create another system of growth.

It is imperative that Europe listen to the rural world today. The path towards a balance between growth and the protection of the planet cannot be explored with deaf ears for farmers, stockbreeders, fishermen and inhabitants of villages, towns and villages. We turn our eyes to industries because they will have to change their production model in the short term, we look at cities because other transport habits are imposed or areas are restricted to traffic... All right, all that is important, but let us not forget that the equation of climate change cannot be solved without including the variable of the rural milieu. Let us not fall into the error of thinking of an economic paradigm without rural areas.

That is why, I repeat, it is so important for you to make yourselves heard. Let us governors understand -and let us make it understood- that the destiny of the rural milieu is not to be reduced to a theme park, a territory for weekends in perpetual demographic winter, but to recover its condition of space of opportunities, where it is possible to promote emerging initiatives whose competition is essential to ensure sustainability.



There are experiences that tell us the right course. In our case, to tell you about Asturias, the Rural Development Network stands out, which groups together eleven local action groups. Pioneering initiatives stand out, such as the rural entrepreneur's ticket, conceived to promote diversification, create employment and fix population. I remember, by the way, that my government is prepared to increase the ticket endowment by 40%, now set at 25,000 euros.

We are also determined to promote generational change, an essential priority. To demonstrate this, our government has proposed an amendment to the Rural Development Programme to increase aid for young people entering the countryside from the current EUR 50 000 to a maximum of EUR 75 000. We will accompany this aid with training plans that facilitate the success of the projects. I stress this with all my ambition: we want young people and the countryside to be able to go hand in hand, without being condemned to be surprised.

And, of course, it is in this context that we must understand the common agricultural policy. We, the Government of Asturias, will call for it to have a sufficient budget to support the income of farmers and stockbreeders and to generate employment and activity. We will also propose the application of positive discrimination mechanisms for mountain areas and small farms.

On this point, allow me to presume: our family farms, in addition to being part of the cultural and economic identity of the Principality, contribute to preserving the habitat and mitigating climate change. Far from being a problem, they constitute large effective CO2 sinks. They are an example of sustainability, respect for biodiversity and landscape creation (in fact, the shepherds have been, still are, the great gardeners of the beautiful Asturian landscape). For this reason, we would like to take advantage of the modification of the RDP to strengthen environmental payments.

I shall conclude by saying that you will have to talk about all these issues these days. Common problems, such as the ageing and loss of population, and shared demands, such as the development of broadband so that rural areas are not marginalised by the new communication infrastructures.

Do so. Debate and freely agree that you are at home. As I said at the beginning, I want you to make yourselves heard. May their powerful voice, full of reasons, be heard from Candás, so that the future of Europe is not designed behind the backs of the rural world.