

***Mr Donal CASHMAN  
President of COGECA***

Mr Chairman, Members of European Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure being here on behalf of the farmers and cooperatives of Europe to take the opportunity of supporting the work that you are doing.

Looking at all these slides around the room and listening to the presentations that we've had, I think the message is very clear: we must retain in a meaningful way the populations of the mountains in making them get a living from their production of special goods. And we must recognize our special goods. We are living in an age when the consumer likes something special and I think it is not necessary a tool measurement we are talking about, but about special foods and special products that come from the mountains and that evoke in people's minds, the question of the beauty and the hill sides.

I will give just one small story. About thirty years ago in our farm in Ireland we had a student from Austria and she invited us back to visit her country. She told us she was taking us to an 'alum', I said what is an 'alum'? She proceeded to park the car and we walked for two and a half hours before we reached the 'alum' where two teenagers were for the summer: milking the cows, getting up at 5 o'clock in the morning, making special cheeses which were special to that area in this region of Austria. Now, that to me was a lesson of people working very hard, making a special product, it was thirty years ago but the reason today is more valid than it was then.

COPA/COGECA represents all those farmers, from those regions as well as from the lowlands. , I come from an island where the highest mountain is only 1200 meters and there is no soil on it, so no crops can grow there. But that doesn't take away from the fact that we are a European organisation. More important however, is that cooperative members - farmer cooperatives particularly by their nature are users, owners of the locality and they reflect what is in the area, and they have the interest in promoting products of the area. So for that reason it is especially important for us to support the work that you are doing in Euromontana, to be in the position of working alongside with you – because we are looking today at proposals from WTO, which threaten the very existence of agriculture in Europe.

I think MEP Mr Daul, present here today, clearly pointed that out during his presentation and our biggest desire is to ensure that farmers continue in business – whether they are up in the mountains or down in the level as our Dutch friend, Lambert Van Nistelrooij said a while ago, the highest mountain in the Netherlands is somewhat like 20m, maybe. But the reality is that we have a common interest all of us to recommend and to support the work that you're doing and it's a pleasure for me to have the opportunity of supporting the work here this evening. Thank you.