

# THE EUROPEAN SHEPHERD NETWORK



Fernando Garcia Dory\* *European Shepherd Network - shepherdnet.eu*

## 1. Our mission

The European Shepherd Network (ESN) is the only continent-wide organization representing pastoralist grassroots groups, bringing pastoralists together and making their voices heard. Our members include custodians of the land from across Europe: from the Arctic tundra and the Atlantic islands to the Mediterranean and Black Sea, from the lowlands and dykes of northern Europe to the Alps and Carpathians. We come from a rich diversity of herding cultures: crofters, transhumant or nomadic herders and other extensive forms of livestock farming. We keep sheep, cattle, goats and reindeer, many of them local breeds that are highly adapted to their local environments.

The ESN's mission is to promote knowledge and recognition of the role of pastoralism in the sustainable development of European territories. Its operation covers disadvantaged or mountainous areas that are underpopulated and suffer from major economic handicaps. ESN brings together different types of territorial partners so that they can establish technical and economic strategies and propose improvements for policies and public action.

ESN directs its activity through different campaigns covering the main issues that we have identified currently facing pastoralism in Europe:

1. Specific legislation for extensive pastoralism under the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP);
2. Opposing the Electronic Identification System for sheep and goats and legal bureaucracy;

3. The relationship between pastoralism and predators;
4. Shepherds schools and regeneration.

## 2. Background

The ESN was created in 2008 after realising that, although there are different realities in each country, we all face similar problems and difficulties. Looking back, we can find a certain history of the movement. The Pastomed project from 2003 to 2006 brought together pastoralists from France, Spain, Italy and Greece. We realised that, despite a common European Union (EU) regulation, member states were applying it in different ways. For example, while in France artisan cheesemakers had a more sensible legal frame, in Spain there were only industrial requirements in place with which small pastoralists and cheesemakers had to comply.

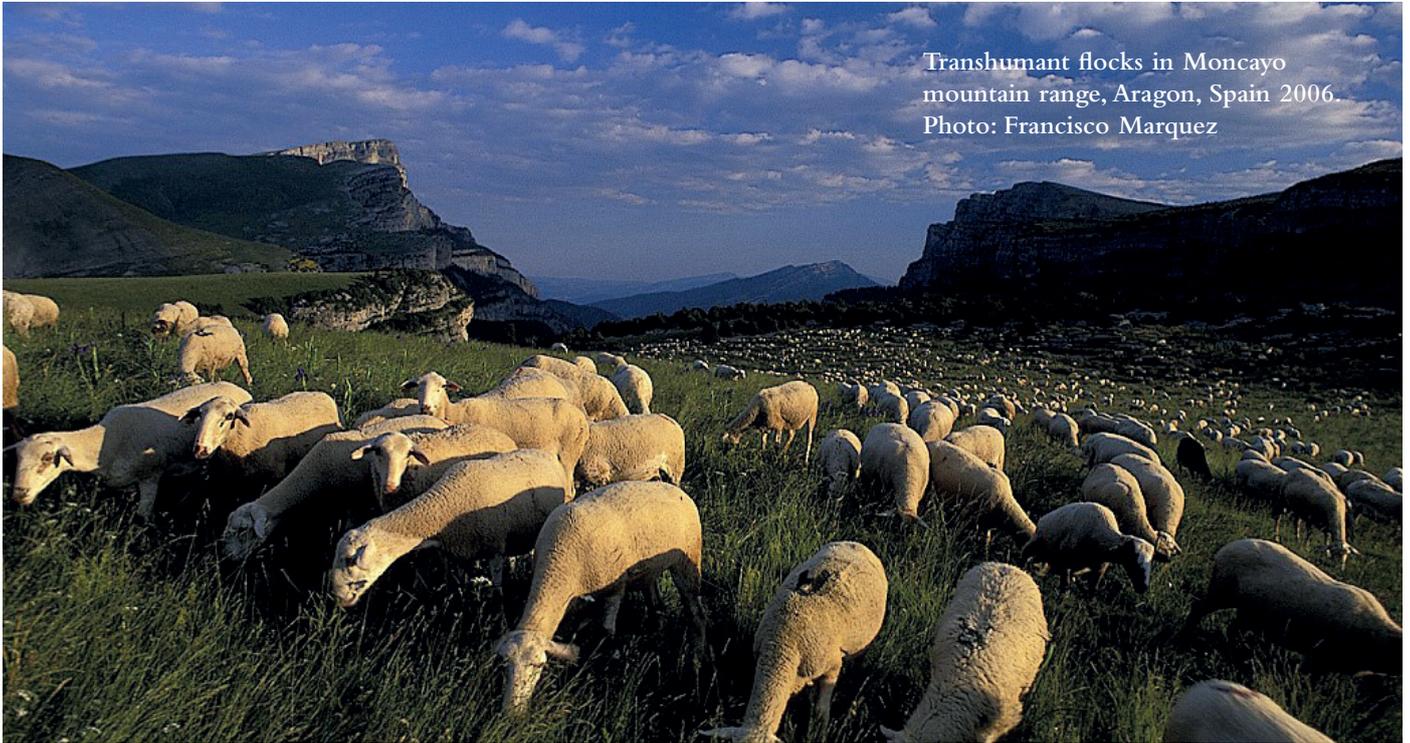
In 2007 a delegation of European pastoralists met at the World Gathering of Nomads and Transhumant Herders in Spain, where the World Alliance of Mobile Indigenous Peoples (WAMIP) was created. Inspired by the mobilisation of their colleagues in other parts of the world, there was some intention to stay in contact and establish a European section of WAMIP.

EU legislation from 2010 imposing mandatory Electronic Identification of Sheep (EID) was crucial to catalyse the movement. A first meeting in Frankfurt, under support of the Local Livestock for Empowerment (LIFE)<sup>1</sup>, a non-profit organisation that supports pastoralists, brought together shepherds from six countries.

\*Corresponding author: [pastoralism\\_secretariat@campoadentro.es](mailto:pastoralism_secretariat@campoadentro.es)

<sup>1</sup>The LIFE Network (Local Livestock For Empowerment), is an action research and advocacy network of organizations and individuals who are concerned about the future of local livestock breeds, and about the people who rely on these animals for their livelihoods. <http://www.pastoralpeoples.org/partners/life-network/>

Transhumant flocks in Moncayo mountain range, Aragon, Spain 2006.  
Photo: Francisco Marquez



A campaign against EID was launched with actions at national level and in Brussels. It culminated with two important initiatives: i) the denouncement in Strasbourg of the EU Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development that imposed the new rule on pastoralists, led by the German Sheep Herders Union; and ii) the European Transhumance action in 2010 that involved a chain of shepherds from Berlin to Brussels.

The organisation principles were framed in the Ermelo Gathering in the Netherlands, in June 2011. It was not only the imposition of EID but also better access to markets, mandatory vaccination, difficulties for mobility in extensive pastoralism and other specific issues, made clear the need for a special framework acknowledging the specific reality of mobile pastoralism in Europe. We, the different professional shepherds' associations of the country members, would like to continue lobbying for specific legislation for extensive livestock farming within the EU agrarian policy framework.

Shepherds carry out many functions in rural development. They play a direct economic role by maintaining jobs and services in difficult areas and supplying consumers with quality agricultural products. Livestock plays a role in the management of natural areas stretching from coasts to alpine areas, including hundreds of thousands of hectares in each of the regions involved. It is now important to monitor trends, share experience and ensure that they are recognised by all those involved in both farming and non-farming activities in order to improve the efficiency of community, national and/or regional policies.

### 3. Our contributions to society

In June 2015, more than 50 shepherds from 17 European countries met at the European Pastoralists Assembly organized by ESN in Koblenz, Germany. A Declaration was written and signed, explaining how pastoralism makes Europe a better place.

“We celebrate our many contributions to culture, society, the environment, healthy food and the economy:

- We create economic value by supplying a range of high-quality products for consumers: meat, milk, cheese, wool and hides;
- We protect the environment by preserving valued ecosystems where threatened plants and animals can survive, preventing the spread of shrubs and reducing the risk of fires. We use areas that are unsuited for and complementary to other forms of farming. Grazing helps to store atmospheric carbon in the soil and thereby mitigates climate change. We successfully manage natural resources because we live from them, keeping them for future generations;
- We contribute to society by producing wholesome food, valuable products and attractive landscapes, nurturing local economies and fixing human populations in remote and mountainous areas, keeping the environment alive and rural areas vibrant, enriching these areas and enhancing the quality of life for both local residents and visitors;
- We embody a rich cultural heritage based on ancient skills and knowledge. Our culture encompasses material and intangible heritage, gastronomy and

animal breeds. It preserves rural populations and societies and represents an opportunity for young people to earn income and live a meaningful life that has its own values.

Our production system is unique and different from conventional intensive farming, with different needs.”

#### 4. Pastoralism under threat

Pastoralism has existed since time immemorial, evolving together with the landscape. It lies at the heart of European culture. But today pastoralism is threatened as never before by the forced industrialization of livestock farming:

- Our cultural richness is in danger. Our identity is being eroded as policies fail to sufficiently include, understand or even recognize the existence of pastoralism. We are losing our freedom and capacity to keep our traditional systems.
- Low economic returns and a lack of recognition mean that young pastoralists in some areas feel forced to leave our way of life or switch to more intensive forms of farming. For young people, it is often difficult to gain access to land.
- We are losing grazing land due to competing types of land use: infrastructure and energy development, mining, nature reserves, leisure housing, biofuel crops, intensive farming, forestry, fragmentation, etc. This makes it increasingly difficult for us to maintain our traditional systems, especially where these depend on moving animals from place to place during the year.
- Our identity is often expropriated by large-scale producers and agri-food corporations that sell inferior, industrially produced imitations of our products. This makes it difficult for us to differentiate the special qualities of our products in order to get a fair

price for them. Rising costs make it ever harder for us to compete with intensive, industrial farming. In some areas, the cost of access to private pastures is becoming prohibitive.

- The symbiotic balance between pastoralism and the environment is put in danger by unfavourable policy decisions that do not include pastoralists in the decision-making process, such as the creation and management of protected areas without consultation with pastoralists. The re-introduction or return of predators and the policy-driven increase in their numbers are causing damages to our flocks. The costs of these damages are incurred by pastoralists but unrecognized and under-compensated. Damage (such as predation) is sometimes hard to document in a way that is acceptable to authorities. However, we want to work together with conservationists on damage prevention, population monitoring and compensation.
- Policy decisions are made with little or no consultation of local communities. We are the traditional land users, but we are systematically excluded from decisions on land management. This lack of consultation extends to all levels: local, national, regional and the EU. The Common Agricultural Policy, in particular, fails to recognize the specific features of pastoralism, putting this production system at an economic disadvantage. Bureaucratic requirements, biased towards intensive livestock production, impose a huge and unrealistic burden of paperwork on pastoralists.

#### 5. A call to policymakers

The final part of the Declaration included specific requirements of our policymakers:

- To recognize the special nature of pastoralism and its products, adapting legislation to promote the artisanal production of traditional foods;



The World Gathering of Nomads and Transhumant Herders, Segovia, Spain 2007. Photo: Fernando G. Dory.

- To establish measures to assure fair prices for pastoralist products, enhance local markets and innovative marketing systems and consider a labelling system that distinguishes them;
- To respect pastoralists' traditional knowledge and experience of managing, breeding and identifying animals;
- To develop a common framework and repository of heritage and recognize intangible cultural heritage;
- To include pastoralists in the making of decisions that affect them and the areas where they raise their animals;
- To recognize grassroots pastoralist organizations across Europe as partners and support them so they can effectively represent their members, build their capacities and implement the action plan agreed at the European Pastoralists Assembly of 2015;
- To revise the rules of the Common Agricultural Policy with the involvement of pastoralist representatives. The reform currently being implemented perpetuates many of the mistaken assumptions about pastoralist systems we have suffered for years. "Pastures" are eligible for subsidies, but vast areas of historical grazing land, open forests and rocky areas where grazing is a major environmental asset are excluded. Similarly, the value of grazing in preventing fires and in using non-arable marginal lands is ignored. Pastoralists provide many environmental benefits that are not currently recognized and only they can provide these services;
- To re-consider penalties regarding divergence from cross-compliance with CAP requirements;
- To stop the loss of grazing land, "land grabbing" and the restrictions on mobility that make it impossible to maintain a viable pastoralist system. We support the designation and protection of a European network of transhumance trails.

## 6. Perspectives for the future

In the face of all the challenges mentioned above we still strive to succeed. All across Europe, we are getting organized into federations, building regional networks and gaining international recognition from



European transhumance action from Berlin to Brussels in 2010.  
Photo: Fernando G. Dory.



European Shepherds Network Assembly during Documenta, Kassel, Germany 2013. Photo: Fernando G. Dory.



European delegation at the third European Pastoralists Assembly, Koblenz, Germany 2015. Photo: Rudi Kumpen.

leading institutions. The 2nd ESN Assembly was organised in September 2016 in St. Floir, France. Despite the difficulties and lack of financial resources to have a stable secretariat, the ESN continues to strive to implement the Declaration. We represent the European Section of WAMIP and take part in various international fora as well as creating alliances with other civil society organisations to work on CAP and other issues.

We hope one day that our vision of a solid, influential and inspiring organisation will not only preserve and maintain the pastoralists' way of life but will also place them at the centre of an essential debate about the transition of Europe towards sustainability, social and economic justice and food sovereignty.