

Outcome Informal Meeting Agriculture Ministers La Hulpe, 21/09/2010

On 21 September 2010, during the informal meeting of Agricultural Ministers in La Hulpe (Belgium), the Belgian Presidency organised an exchange of views on the future of the CAP, entitled "Choosing Today for a Strong CAP Tomorrow" (ref. doc 13452/10).

Based on the positions of the Member States, that were expressed at this occasion, the Belgian Presidency drafted some general findings.

"Choosing Today for a Strong CAP Tomorrow"

On September 21st 2010 the Belgian Presidency hosted an informal meeting of Agriculture Ministers in La Hulpe, Belgium. The purpose of this meeting was to bring forward the debate on the CAP post-2013, taking into account the findings of previous discussions in the Council of Agriculture Ministers, the results of the public debate and the opinions voiced during the July conference organised by the European Commission.

The debate - entitled "Choosing today for a strong CAP tomorrow" - was organised around three working groups in which the Ministers addressed two questions: "Which role should be given to the first pillar of the CAP" and "How to ensure that the future CAP has the necessary flexibility to address the regional specificities and to manage unpredictable economic crisis situations". The conclusions of each working group were presented in a plenary session, in the presence of Commissioner CIOLOS and Mr Paolo DE CASTRO, Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development.

The Ministers welcomed the debate and showed a joint commitment to a strong future CAP that is able to address the challenges (e.g. EU2020, climate change, biodiversity, ...) and meet its objectives in an effective and efficient way, to the benefit of European farmers and citizens. Maintaining the capacity of European farming to contribute significantly to food security in a sustainable way is seen as vitally important. Ministers emphasized again that the future European budget for agriculture should allow the CAP to fulfil its objectives.

The participants agreed on the need for a Common Agricultural Policy based on European added value. The two Pillars structure was not questioned but both pillars have to complement each other. Tasks should be divided between pillars and care should be taken that both pillars act in coherence with each other.

A spectrum of views was presented on the kind of balance which should be established between income support and the rewarding of the public goods provision while some expressed concerns on a better balanced distribution of the CAP support. Pillar I should continue to provide a safety net against extreme price volatility and crises and ensure fair competition conditions between European and imported products. In addition, new initiatives are needed to

improve the capacity of farmers to obtain a reasonable and sufficiently stable income from the market, and to support young farmers. A renationalisation of the CAP, or of its first Pillar, is not an option. A targeted policy for mountainous and less favoured areas remains necessary.

The future CAP will have to take better account of the diversity of European agricultures, rural and peri-urban areas and of the territorial function and dimension of agriculture. Member States should be allowed a sufficient level of flexibility in both Pillars, within a strong European framework and respecting the objective of the Single Market and of territorial cohesion. This flexibility should allow Member States to select those measures that are best suited to their local situations, and to respond in a more timely manner to local crises. However, it should not negatively affect their commitment to address common challenges and goals or impede their ability to compete on a level playing field.

The participants appreciated the European Commission's recent efforts to clarify the expectations of EU citizens and stakeholders regarding the future of the CAP. Increased public awareness and understanding of the CAP are necessary but, within the CAP, this has to be matched by increased simplicity, fairness and transparency.

The Ministers await the Commission's planned Communication on the future of the CAP with great interest.
