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Directorate C. Strategy, simplification and Policy Analysis
C.1. Policy perspectives

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MEETING MINUTES

Subject: Meeting of Commissioner Wojciechowski with the leadership of COPA-COGECA on 16 February 2021 (virtual meeting)

Participants:

COPA-COGECA: [REDACTED]

European Commission: Commissioner Wojciechowski, [REDACTED].

Take away messages

- Frank exchange of views, showing diverging views on the future of European agriculture
- COPA-COGECA [REDACTED] expressed worry about the combined effects of Green Deal targets, a CAP reform with large eco-schemes and trade deals (Mercosur) that negatively affect EU farming.
- Commissioner Wojciechowski defended the Green Deal and the eco-schemes, sketched future perspectives through short supply chains and underlined that the overall picture of trade is positive for EU farmers.

Commissioner Wojciechowski followed the prepared briefing note and highlighted the work of the Commission in relation to climate neutrality, the CAP Strategic Plans and the recommendations to Member States with regard to – in particular – the Green Deal targets. He flagged in particular the differences between Member States in terms of emission levels, notably greenhouse gas emissions per hectare, for which it will be difficult to find a fair approach among Member States. As regards the reform of the CAP, Commissioner Wojciechowski flagged the Commission's positions on a number of key issues in relation to competition law and cooperation among farmers in the Common Market Organisation, on the CAP Strategic Plan regulation, in particular on eco-schemes, indicators and on controls. He flagged the importance of avoiding having both a compliance and performance system.

underlined European farmers counted on Commissioner Wojciechowski to be the voice of farmers in the discussion on the future of the CAP and in particular in the trilogues.

- **Eco-schemes.** She recalled the very considerable efforts farmers make for the environment, for animal welfare and for the countryside via conditionality (since 2004) and greening (since 2014). She underlined that 20 or 30% of direct support for incentive based eco-schemes could mean an important loss for farmers not benefiting from these schemes. She called on eco-schemes to be practicable and accessible, underlining that the Commission should listen to farmers who have to execute these schemes and not just to many on the sidelines with opinions on the future of agriculture.
- **Green Deal.** She expressed the worry that the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies would result in food production in Europe of insufficient volume and quality and underlined that these strategies install fear in farmers. She asked why the Green Deal targets have been launched without an impact assessment, which is what she would have expected from the Commission.
- **Level playing field.** Ms Lambert expressed worry that the wide consultation and bottom up approach would lead to very different strategic plans in the EU. She called on the EU institutions to ensure a level playing field for the future CAP and asked for draft plans to be reviewed by Council, including the eco-schemes, to ensure a similar approach.

focused on **market management** and stressed the need for tools to address market crises, such as the results of the COVID-19 pandemic. He said COPA supports wine labelling proposals, but not the authorization of new varieties, as this might risk profitability of a large number of producers. He underlined the role of producer organizations and cooperatives.

focused on eco-schemes and environmental targets.

- **Eco-schemes** are a complete change, he said, which could lead to farmers losing 20 to 30 % of their basic payment if they cannot manage to deliver an eco-scheme. He recalled enough food had been produced during the global pandemic situation and that this must continue to be the case.
- As to the **GHG emission targets**, he underlined that the focus should be on carbon neutrality, as agriculture binds a lot of carbon in grassland and hedge rows in Europe.
- As regards the **reduction targets for pesticides, fertilizers and the increase in organic farming**, he called on the Commission to assess impact of the proposed targets.

recalled the important comments passes to the services of DG AGRI with regard to **conditionality** (he mentioned GAEC 7 in particular). He called for flexibility in CAP Plans.

Commissioner Wojciechowski replied thoroughly to the questions and arguments raised.

- On **CAP Strategic Plans**, he underlined the common rules on which these 27 plans are prepared, but that the plans must also take account of considerable differences among MS, such as in terms of emissions per hectare or use of pesticides. He recalled the differences in livestock farming, with an average Danish farm housing 2700 pigs, while this is 3 pigs in Romania.
- On **structural development of agriculture**, he underlined the importance of support for small farms and recalled the loss of 4 million farms over the past couple of years, a decline which should be stopped, to avoid that Europe's countryside starts to look like America.
- On **eco-schemes**, he dismissed fears, explaining that 20% or 30% funding would be advantageous for farmers. The Commission paper with types of eco-schemes is very concrete with examples, which will ensure considerable harmonization between MS. In particular, he expressed satisfaction with the support from the European Parliament for inclusion of support **for animal welfare** in these eco-schemes.
- On the **livestock sector**, he recognized the fear for the future expressed by the COPA-COGECA representatives and underlined his support for animal welfare, but not for a tax on the animal sector. He welcomed support from the Council for a European animal welfare label. Recalling that farmers must be part of the next generation EU recovery plans, and also benefit from the 420 billion fund, he underlined the importance of prioritizing short circuits and local production, with regional slaughterhouses and local markets. This will help the position of farmers.
- As regards **trade**, he recalled the work done to support markets for cheese, and for wine, he also referred to comments of the new US secretary for agriculture, which indicate possible changes. He underlined he had used all the measures at his disposal to support farmers, within the framework set by Council. The Commissioner defended the approach to trade indicating that the analysis of 11 **free trade agreements** concluded a positive impact for European agriculture. But he also said not all trade deals could be positive for agriculture and that measures should be taken to support farmers that would be affected by particular deals, such as Mercosur. He underlined the competitiveness of beef on our EU markets and the resilience of short supply chains for beef with a radius of less than 100 km. He recalled that the EU produced 7-8 million tonnes of beef per year, and that the TRQ negotiated with Mercosur is only 99.000 tonnes, which is not a volume which will destroy EU farmers, while their concerns must be taken seriously, particularly in Ireland, affected by Brexit.

In an **exchange of questions and answers**, the farm representatives addressed trade challenges in combination with the Green Deal. [REDACTED] asked what future young farmers have in face of increasing imports from e.g. Mercosur. Should they stop production or expand and invest? [REDACTED] asked why the Commission does not support farmers suffering from trade measures that have no relation to agriculture (Boeing/Airbus dispute with the US). In response to earlier comments from Commissioner Wojciechowski, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] said they were shocked about the position of the Commissioner that the 99.000 tonnes of beef import from Mercosur would not affect the EU market in light of other trade deals and declining beef consumption. [REDACTED] added the fear that once the UK does a deal with Mercosur, Irish beef will increasingly find its way on the EU market and depress prices. In

response to the Commissioner's points on the importance of short supply chains, the farm representatives expressed worry that this would not be enough in light of the considerable exports on which many agricultural regions depend.

Commissioner Wojciechowski thanked for the frank and open discussion and closed the debate by asking the question **whether the current situation of farming is good?** Farm numbers are declining, livestock is transported over longer and longer distances, crops are produced everywhere and increasingly transported even though this is not necessary.

Electronically signed

