



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
 DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT
 Directorate C. Strategy, simplification and policy analysis
 The Director

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MINUTES

**SEMINAR/WORKSHOP ORGANISED IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE 32ND
 MEETING OF THE EXPERT GROUP FOR HORIZONTAL QUESTIONS
 CONCERNING THE CAP
 SUBGROUP SIMPLIFICATION**

**in Brussels, TOUR MADOU
 Meeting Room: MAD 00/AUDITORIUM 010**

on Wednesday 12th February 2020 from 09:30 to 18:00

9:30 – 10:00	<p>1. Welcome by the Commission and Croatian Presidency</p> <p>Deputy Director General Mihail Dumitru welcomed the experts. He provided an overview of the general context with negotiations on the CAP reform and preparations of strategic initiatives following the adoption of the 2019 Green Deal, including the Farm to Fork Strategy, ongoing. Mr Dumitru stressed the importance to well-prepare the CAP strategic plans, recalling that exchanges like the one of December 2019 and today’s event focusing on SWOT and needs assessment represented valuable occasions in this regard, and reiterated the Commission’s readiness to support Member States in this process, notably via the GeoHubs</p> <p>On behalf of the Croatian Presidency, Mr. Niksa Tkalec highlighted the importance of the SWOT analysis and needs assessment and he explained the efforts of the Croatian Presidency to advance the discussion on the future CAP Plan Regulation in the Council.</p> <p>[REDACTED], [REDACTED] of Unit of Unit C-1 (Policy perspectives), as a chair of the workshop, introduced the objectives of the event and insisted on the importance of the first programming stages in order to guarantee that the new programming period follows and evidence-based logic.</p>
10:00 – 11:00	<p>2. SWOT and needs assessment: general requirements for the CAP Strategic Plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation by Bulgaria: challenges and questions raised at the Seminar in Sofia (21-22/11/2019) - Presentation by the Commission on SWOT and needs assessment - Q&A and Debate
<p><i>1. Summary of interventions</i></p> <p>The representative from BG presented a summary of the main concerns raised at the Seminar organised in November. The concerns raised at that Seminar focused mainly on the data, the prioritisation of needs (criteria for the ranking) and the treatment of the cross-cutting objective. That Seminar also highlighted the importance of continuous feedback and the need to be aware of the cyclical dimension of the planning process.</p>	

The **Commission** explained that, in response to requests for clarifications, it is developing a series of tools on each part of the CAP Strategic Plan based on the CAP proposals. It then illustrated the reflections on the SWOT analysis, recalling the general purpose of the SWOT, which has to give a comprehensive and exhaustive picture of farming and rural areas in a given Member State using the nine CAP specific objectives (SO) plus the cross cutting objective (CO) as entry points. It also provided insight on how to cover territorial and sectorial specificities (e.g. coherent match of territorial/sectoral remit of SWOT information and interventions), on how to deal with the specific requirements for SO4-6 (e.g. take into account information in relevant sections of national planning tools linked to Annex XI of the draft Strategic Plan Regulation) and on how to deal with the specific requirements for SO7 (short analysis of factors influencing entry of young farmers) and for the CO (to be covered by a specific SWOT). In terms of data, it was recalled that both the mandatory context indicators and additional up-to-date evidence (qualitative and quantitative) need to be used and that the Commission has made available different pertinent deliverables (e.g. CAP indicator dashboards and analytical factsheets per Member State). With regard to the SWOT format, it was indicated that Member States are expected to provide the full SWOT analysis in Annex II of the CAP strategic plan, while including ten SWOT summaries (9 for SO+ one for CO) in the main body of the CAP strategic plan.

Concerning the needs assessment, the Commission asked for an *identification* of needs for each SO + CO (all the needs shall be described whether supported by the CAP or not) and for a *prioritisation* at CAP plan level based on a sound and justified methodology to be established by Member States and recalled specific requirements for certain SOs (e.g. a specific assessment for risk management for SO1).

2. Summary of Q&A

During the Q&A, Member States asked for further clarifications, in particular on the identification and prioritisation of needs. Some Member States indicated difficulties with the definition of needs (**BG, NL, FR**), in terms of formulation (objective or problem) and dependence from different points of view, while **BE** identified the involvement of different stakeholders to come to a commonly agreed compromise as possible solution. Several Member States indicated difficulties with prioritisation at CAP plan level, due to the different nature of the needs identified in the different Specific Objectives (**BG, ES, HR, EE, AT**), often mentioning ranking as major issue. Concerning the methodology, demands for possibility of grouping needs (**AT/PL**) and for more examples in terms of possible criteria were also voiced.

The **Commission** took note of the concerns voiced by Member States with regard to the prioritisation of needs. It explained that neither the definition of needs nor their translation into interventions is to be understood as an “automatic exercise”, but rather as a process in which, based on a sound and comprehensive analysis of the problem (SWOT), the most pressing challenges and opportunities should emerge from a broad debate including the involvement of stakeholders. The Commission also indicated that, while not required, Member States could envisage prioritising needs at SO level as intermediate step and that Member States benefit from ample flexibility in defining the concrete methodologies for prioritisation. It reiterated some of the examples of criteria previously provided (e.g. use of expert judgment or consolidated methodologies) and also recalled that a specific session on this topic was envisaged for the afternoon providing an opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences among Member States in a more interactive and targeted way.

11:15 – 12:00

3. **Member States experiences on the economic objectives**

- Presentation by Spain: Specific Objective 1
- Insights from the European Commission
- Debate

1. Summary of interventions

ES made a presentation on the on-going work to prepare the Spanish SWOT analysis and needs assessment for specific objective 1 (SO1). **ES** explained that they structured the analysis for SO1 around 4 topics: (i)

the agricultural income compared to the rest of the economy, (ii) farm income and differences between regions, sectors and farm size, (iii) distribution of income support and (iv) farm resilience. ES presented their analysis and emphasised that the context indicator for the income versus the general wage in the economy did not fit their reality and therefore it had calculated an additional indicator that allows for a more accurate comparison. In addition, ES also crossed FADN data with the tax database to measure the proportion of agricultural income in the total household income. For resilience, the ES analysis looked at the volatility in income and the Spanish insurance system. The Spanish needs assessment highlights the need to take into account the differences between farms when designing income support interventions.

After the ES presentation, the **Commission** shared its insights on Specific Objective 1. The presentation emphasised the scope of SO1, focusing on the need for Member States to analyse in the SWOT (i) development of the level and volatility of farm income over time (by sector, size and territory), (ii) the viability of farm income, and (iii) resilience and risk (management) in the agricultural sector. The SWOT shall be based on the common context indicators and other up-to-date information. For the SWOT the Commission will look at the completeness and coherence of the SWOT and see whether there is an adequate differentiation between territories, farm size and sectors where necessary. For the needs assessment there has to be an assessment of needs for risk management and, if applicable, an analysis for vulnerable geographic areas. Needs have to be described appropriately, meaning that it is possible to identify from the need in which direction a Member State wants to go with its interventions. The Commission provided an example of a SWOT table and needs assessment for SO1.

2. Summary of Q&A

During the discussion, **BE** enquired about which context indicators to use for SO1 and how to better distinguish between SO1 and SO2, as the list is not sorted by specific objective. BE finds a strong link between SO1 (farm income) and SO2 (farm competitiveness) as income has a strong impact on competitiveness and the elements are repeated in the SWOT for both objectives. **PL** asked about the link between SO1 and the cross-cutting objective. **DE** asked about what an appropriate description of needs means and how detailed such a description should be.

The **Commission** explained the nature of the context indicators that are organised by topic as some context indicators could be used for different objectives. The analytical factsheets treat most of the context indicators by specific objective. The presentation (ppt) mentions the indicators linked to SO1. Trade, farm investment and (labour) productivity are examples of indicators that fit under SO2. Elements on knowledge and innovation can be analysed under both SO1 and/or the cross-cutting objective. A cross reference can be used to refer where the details are explained in the SWOT. With regard to the level of details of the needs, the Commission explained that this was for the Member States to propose; what is important is that the needs described fit within the intervention logic and make clear what problems/opportunities need to be addressed in the agricultural sector.

12:00 – 13:00

4. **Member States experiences on the climate and environmental objectives**

- Presentation by Slovenia: Specific Objective 4
- Presentation by Germany: Specific Objective 5
- Presentation by the Netherlands: Specific Objective 6
- Debate

1. Summary of interventions

SI made a presentation on their SWOT analysis and the resulting needs assessment for the Specific Objective 4, relating to climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as sustainable energy. SI explained that it structured its preliminary list of needs around 5 topics: (1) reducing GHG and ammonia emissions from agriculture; (2) adaptation of agriculture to climate change; (3) increase in renewable energy production and energy efficiency; (4) proper soil management; (5) provide appropriate training, advice and information for the climate adaptation/mitigation. SI identified three issues in this process: (1)

findings that could be recognised as weaknesses in relation to one SO and strengths in relation to another; (2) lack of relevant data/indicators in certain areas; (3) use of the same indicators for various SOs.

After presenting its regionalised institutional framework, **DE** explained how it proceeded to carry out the needs assessment for SO5 relating to the efficient management of natural resources such as water, air and soil. This was done in three steps: (1) analysis of the 13 German needs assessments of the current funding period; (2) workshop with stakeholders using the needs assessment for the current period as input; (3) drafting the needs assessment for the CAP strategic plan by merging the outcomes of both previous steps. DE overcame the main difficulties encountered during the process by creating a steering group, which ensures participation and coordination with the level of federal states and by sharing with stakeholders the list of needs with the option of their multi- allocation. DE concluded by suggesting some criteria that could be used to prioritise the needs (e.g. financial importance, cost-benefit, favourable opinion of stakeholders etc.).

NL made a presentation on “biodiversity in the draft SWOT CAP Strategic Plan of the Netherlands”. Based on this example of the SO6, NL explained how it envisages carrying out the SWOT analysis for its CAP strategic plan taking into account the specific circumstances (process started in a rush, without official guidelines, updated data needed to finalise the analysis). NL started with a draft SWOT, which could be used for the needs assessment and which is to be backed by outsourced studies to finalise the SWOT. With regard to biodiversity, the draft SWOT identified the intensification of agricultural production as the main threat in NL. However, the improving environmental performance of farms, the predisposition to act collectively and the growing consensus that changes are necessary are all strengths and opportunities that could be used to overcome the identified issues in the NL.

2. Summary of Q&A

During the discussion, several Member States asked for further explanation on the links between the European Green Deal, the CAP reform and the CAP strategic plans. In particular, they wanted to know to what extent the planned Farm to Fork Strategy or the Biodiversity Strategy will influence the content of the CAP strategic plans.

The Commission replied that the European Parliament requested to analyse the contribution of the CAP reform proposal to the EU’s environmental, climate, and biodiversity protection commitments in order to fully align it to the goals set in the European Green Deal. In order to reply to this request, the Commission services are analysing the link between the CAP reform proposals and the Green Deal with a view to identify obstacles and/or gaps jeopardising the ambition level of the Green Deal in the agricultural sector.

14:30 – 15:30

5. **Member States experiences on the social objectives**

- Presentation by France: Specific Objective 7
- Presentation by Netherlands: Specific Objective 9
- Debate

1. Summary of interventions

FR presented its actions on SO7 focussing mainly on attracting young farmers. Facilitating business development in rural areas will be addressed by Specific Objective 8. FR will organise a public debate on the needs. There are concerns for the linkage of interventions and result indicators. FR had questions on the need of having intervention fiches per region in the CAP strategic plans. The **Commission** pointed out that there is clearly a linkage with SO8, but SO7 puts the focus on entering into farming and starting a business activity in rural areas in a comprehensive way in one objective. It is up to Member States to organise the way they present the elements in the Annex of the CAP strategic plan, but all the aspects of each SO need to be covered.

NL presented their on-going work on the Specific Objective 9. They emphasised that this objective appears

to be the most challenging due to its very large scope. The focus of the presentation was therefore to give insights as to how NL interprets this objective and to seek views of others on their approach. NL approach to this objective is to cover in the SWOT the following aspects (i) general context, (ii) food safety, (iii) sustainability, (iv) food waste and (v) new themes (striking a new balance between plant-based foods and animal source foods, online sales).

2. Summary of Q&A

In the ensuing discussion, the intervening Member States largely concurred with the NL that the scope of the objective is wide. BE questioned the level of detail required in the SWOT, particularly as there are many elements that fall outside the scope of the CAP. The question is whether the SWOT should provide a description of all these or concentrate on topics where the CAP can act. Similarly, LU stressed that many needs under this objective will be more soft skills (like educational measures) that are largely tackled through national measures. Therefore, clarity is needed as to how detailed the SWOT should be in these aspects, considering the interplay with national measures.

The **Commission** replied that this objective actually anticipated the big political priorities of the Farm to Fork Strategy that is currently being drafted. The objective is integrating societal demands/trends into the CAP policy. The scope can indeed be interpreted widely and many aspects are cross-cutting across different policies (e.g. influencing eating habits). The Commission reminded that we are at the stage of the SWOT, not yet of the interventions: we need a real analysis of the scope of problems related to the objective, which will normally be wider. It is then in the next stage that Member States will provide information on which needs will be covered by the CAP plan and which will be covered by national measures.

15:30 – 17:00

6. Methodologies on prioritisation in the needs assessment

- Presentation by the Evaluation Helpdesk: Experiences from the current RDPs
- Interactive discussions
- Debate

1. Summary of interventions

██████████ from the Evaluation Helpdesk set the scene by providing an overview of lessons learnt from the ex-ante appraisal of needs in the context of the 2014-2020 rural development programmes. He confirmed the view that needs assessment is a “systematic process” and that prioritisation of needs provides orientation (weight alternatives, level of ambition) and justification for decisions on interventions. He explained what ex-ante evaluators would look at when evaluating the prioritisation of needs, notably if the process was transparent (e.g. actors involved), if the approach was sound (e.g. different stakeholder views respected, accepted methods used) and if the outcome was plausible (e.g. in line with evidence provided). Mr Wimmer indicated the use of multiple criteria, the involvement of a variety of stakeholders, the use of evidence to inform the participatory processes and the documentation of the process as important lessons on the prioritisation of needs. In terms of examples for possible criteria for the prioritisation, he pointed to the magnitude / urgency of the need, the adequateness for CAP support, the potential impact and the coherence with policy priorities.

2. Summary of the interactive discussion

Member States experts and DG AGRI officials split up in several smaller **discussion groups** to shed more light on the prioritisation of needs in form of a more interactive exchange of views structured along the following three questions:

1. What are the two key criteria that you can use for the prioritisation of needs?

Examples of criteria identified in the working groups include cost-benefits (how much it would cost to address a need vs expected impacts); political relevance/coherence with political priorities of the government; needs of farmers as target group (possible trade-off between economic and

environmental/social needs); expert input and advice; and positions of different stakeholders. This is largely in line with the finding that the criteria for the “process” of needs prioritisation encompass both an objective/scientific and a more political dimension where prioritisation will be based on evidence, but also be subject to scrutiny in form of a political and societal debate.

2. *What is the main difficulty in the prioritisation of needs?*

The main difficulty emerging from the discussion in the working groups was the question how best to combine evidence-based insights with political scrutiny to a coherent outcome. Passing from the analysis to prioritisation, design of interventions and allocation of money is seen as a process with ever more political sensitivity in which political positions and a variety of (potentially opposing) stakeholder views can induce big discussions, in particular in a context of budgetary constraints. As a corollary, the absence of clarity on availability of financial resources was indicated as an additional difficulty.

3. *What do you think could help you to overcome this difficulty?*

Discussions in the working groups identified the demand for more flexibility when it comes to the prioritisation of needs. Concrete demands ranged from completely renouncing prioritisation, to renouncing of the ranking in particular. More operational proposals linked to the format of the prioritisation were also put forward, notably to allow classification by broad categories/groups either in terms of urgency (high priority needs vs low priority needs) or by theme (not a single list across the whole CAP strategic plan).

Based on the insights gained from the exchange of views, participants were asked to answer the same questions **in plenary**. Outcomes¹ were harvested in form of word clouds.

- **Q1 (n=24):** Political coherence/priorities/relevance, the expected impact, the urgency/magnitude of the need as well as the link to evidence emerged as the possible criteria for prioritisation of needs most widely considered. While this confirmed the mixed nature of the prioritisation process (between evidence and political scrutiny), the outcome clearly nuanced the political dimension more.
- **Q2 (n=29):** To strike the right balance between needs (potential contradictions/trade-offs) and to account for stakeholder interests/participation emerged as top difficulties followed by the need to consider the territorial dimension (regionalisation), the political dimension and the ranking requirement. Compared to the discussion in the working groups, it was not possible to identify whether the difficulty of “striking the right balance” was more a question of finding the appropriate methodology to reduce complexity or rather one of political sensitivity.



¹ N.B. The results reported are based on clusters of individual answers provided which is not 100% reflected in the clouds due to features of the software used. “n” in brackets indicates the number of respondents.

- Q3 (n=29): “Grouping needs”, “dialogue” and “no list” featured most prominently as solutions. On the one hand, this confirmed findings from the working groups where flexibility concerning the format of the prioritisation of needs had already emerged as proposal. On the other hand, this also reiterated one of the findings previously presented, notably the importance of dialogue and discussions among actors and with stakeholders confirming a positive lesson from the 2014-2020 programming period.



17 :00 – 17:30

7. Wrap-up by European Commission

[REDACTED], on behalf of the European Commission summarised the main conclusions of the event. He insisted on the fact that the Specific Objectives have to be the “entry point” for the analysis but at the same time, we need to be aware about the fact that several aspects can be covered by several Specific Objectives; a reasonable and balanced approach needs to be taken to avoid that the same type of things are examined in several SO; he also took note of the general calls to have a flexible approach in the “prioritisation of needs”, in particular concerning the “ranking”. He concluded on the importance to continue this type of exchanges along the process and the need to provide more guidance on how the novelties coming from the European Green Deal will affect the construction of the CAP Strategic Plans.

(e-signed)

Tassos HANIOTIS