



Conclusions
from the meeting of the Committee on Agriculture delegations
of the Visegrad Group countries' parliaments
Warsaw 14 May 2021

We, the committees on agriculture of the Visegrad Group countries' parliaments, present at the meeting held in Warsaw on 14 May 2021, under the Polish Presidency of V4, bearing in mind the 30th anniversary of this forum for cooperation and exchange of experience, note the role to be played by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in the age of diagnosed problems related to the climate policy and biodiversity, the fight against the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and a need to create a fair, healthy, environmentally friendly food system.

Common Agricultural Policy 2023 – 2027

We are of opinion that it is important to conclude the negotiations on the CAP reform for the years 2023-2027 as soon as possible, due to the fact that farmers and the Member States need to be clear on the final shape of future solutions. This will allow to finalize the work on the CAP Strategic Plans, which will define the implementation of the reform at the national level. We support further simplification and modernization of the CAP procedures in order to reduce the bureaucratic burden on farmers and administrations.

Farmers should continue to be the major beneficiaries of funds paid under the CAP. We maintain the position contained in the conclusions adopted at the meeting of the Chairmen of Committees on Agriculture held on 15 February 2018 in Budapest. We conclude with regret that there is still lack of complete convergence of the level of the direct payments. We highlight that voluntary coupled support measures contribute substantially to the economic activity of rural areas and to maintaining employment in the countryside. We therefore have to preserve these forms of support, preferably with a wider scope and with appropriate financial resources of the level of at least 13 + 2 %, as stated in the Council position from October 2020. We believe that equal access to CAP funds should be ensured for all farms. We think that the introduction of capping of direct payments should be voluntary. Nevertheless, given a need to develop a compromise approach, we would support

a minimum level of redistribution, where Member States would be allowed to choose the appropriate mechanism.

It is required to maintain the possibility of applying transitional national support. It should be maintained at a stable level and with the possibility of updating the base period. The European Parliament's solutions in this regard should be accepted by the Council.

We are of opinion that the approach to including the social dimension in the CAP, as proposed by the European Parliament, is a solution that excessively increases the administrative burden. The legal and institutional mechanisms which are already in place in the Member States and are used to monitor the compliance with labor law and requirements to be observed by employers are sufficient.

We see a positive impact of some proposals of European Parliament, this applies, in particular, to proposals increasing the possibilities of stabilizing agricultural markets, such as the creation of an observatory of agricultural product markets, the introduction of an early warning mechanism for crisis situations or the extension of the range of sectors covered by market intervention. The Parliament also proposes beneficial changes, which, in our view, will provide a better protection for the EU market against import, especially the one which does not meet the EU standards with regard to the production of plants and animal welfare. In our opinion, these activities are particularly important in the context of implementing the "Farm to Fork" strategy and biodiversity strategy.

The level of expenditure for eco-schemes, determined under the general approach of the EU Council, i.e. 20% of allocation for direct payments before the transfer of funds from the second pillar, is, in our opinion, sufficient to achieve the environmental objectives of the CAP. Any increase in this level will increase the risk of loss/non-use of funds, due to the limited possibilities of adapting support to the conditions of the Member States. Nevertheless, given a need to develop a compromise approach, we are willing to support setting this value at a somewhat higher level, assuming that all flexibilities developed in the forum of the EU Council are maintained.¹

European Green Deal and the EU sectoral "Farm to Fork" strategy

We recognize that the overarching objective of agriculture is to guarantee food security for EU society. We support the objectives of the "Farm to Fork" Strategy, which aims at creating a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system. A general description of initiatives and EU lines of action, planned in the coming years, is aimed at reducing the environmental impact of agriculture. These are very ambitious objectives, beneficial from the viewpoint of sustainable

¹ A two-year period for „gathering experience, possibility of managing unused funds, as well as balancing the limit with expenditure for environmental measures in the second pillar of the CAP and calculating the level based on the allocation prior to the transfer of funds from the second pillar of the CAP.

development, but requiring significant adjustments on the part of farmers, the food industry, trade, also the industry of inputs for agriculture, science and education, advisory services and consumers. We believe that setting overambitious reduction objectives can reduce the agricultural production in the EU and diminish its contribution to global food security. We are of opinion that if organic farming development plans are to create new jobs and attract young farmers, while contributing to the protection of biodiversity, it is necessary to provide financing at a sufficiently high level. We propose to reach an agreement on average indicators for the application of pesticides, fertilizers and antibiotics, which are common for all EU. We regret the absence of Commission commitment on the holistic and combined impact analysis of the Farm to Fork Strategy objectives on the agri-food sector, and, therefore, we call on the Commission to provide comprehensive and impact study in order to use this proposal to set out a holistic common food policy aimed at reducing the environmental and climate footprint of the EU food chain in order to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050.

We would like to point out that it is important to distribute the burden of achieving the Strategy's objectives evenly among all links in the chain, so as not to place an excessive burden on small and medium-sized farms, which are the most vulnerable in the food supply chain. At the same time, it is necessary to provide adequate financial support from the EU which will make it possible to transit to more sustainable production systems and thus will empower them in the food supply chain.

Given that European food is already synonymous with safe and high-quality food, we stress the need to promote EU food in order to make it recognizable among consumers in and outside the EU. In doing this, the EU trade policy should seek to obtain trade and sustainable development commitments and sustainable quality systems from third countries. Only then, will fair competition conditions be guaranteed. Excluding some products from this policy, such as meat or wine, would not only damage the worldwide competitiveness of the EU, but also benefit third country products complying with much lower environmental and health standards. Therefore, we call on the Commission to include all sectors in the promotion policy.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on agriculture and support from the EU Recovery Plan

The COVID-19 pandemic affected everyone, including rural residents. It had a very strong impact on the global economy and on all national sectors, including the agri-food sector. This entailed a need for enormous expenses from national budgets to help affected producers and processors of food.

We believe that the package of regulations introducing aid for private storage of dairy products and meat, launched by the European Commission, as well as other forms of aid, are a step in the right direction and contributed to reducing the negative effects of the pandemic in agriculture.

An important element of support for agriculture and rural areas in connection with the COVID-19 effects will be the funds from the Next Generation EU Fund, which are aimed, *inter alia*, at strengthening interventions for the rural development in the Member States in the years 2021-2026. The most important element of the Fund is the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), whose funds will significantly support the modernization and development of technical infrastructure in rural areas, the meeting of needs with regard to providing public services, as well as measures supporting support digital and green transition in the agri-food sector and in rural areas. While appreciating the opportunities provided by the flexibility of spending funds granted from the RRF and spent through the National Recovery Plans, we would like to note that in the case of an adverse development of the pandemic situation, it will be necessary to increase EU funds to help farms and rebuild the agricultural sector.

Combating animal infectious diseases

The prevention of occurrence of animal diseases must not be limited to national measures only. We consider it necessary to take measures at the EU and international levels based on scientific knowledge, while maintaining financial support from the EU budget. This will be particularly important for transboundary diseases such as African swine fever (ASF) and highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), where harmonized action is essential in combating these diseases in an efficient manner.

We agree that constant monitoring of the occurrence of infections in animals, *inter alia*, through the implementation of monitoring and control programs, should be continued. The exchange of information among the countries should be a key element. Also, we must not forget about strengthening international scientific cooperation. We consider it necessary to coordinate measures and links among all research initiatives, taking into account the analysis of gaps in available studies and scientific advice in the area of targeted measures to control animal infectious diseases.

We believe that combating (ASF) or (HPAI) should be more geared towards the protection and support of farms and towards limiting trade restrictions to the minimum necessary, as well as towards minimizing the administrative burden. In our opinion, it is also necessary to increase control over the wild boar and wild bird populations and, based on the experience of various Member States facing the disease, to consider the possibilities of adopting new, more targeted measures with financial support for them on the part of the EC.