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AGRI 503**

**NOTE**

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from:	General Secretariat of the Council
to:	Delegations
Subject:	Partial summary of the meeting of the <b>Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI)</b> of the European Parliament, held in Brussels on 9 and 10 July 2012

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– Item 16 on the agenda

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The meeting was chaired by Mr de Castro (S&D, IT).

**Exchange of views with Sofoclis Aletraris, Cypriot Minister for Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment, President-in-Office of the Council, on the programme of the Cyprus Presidency**

Minister Sofoclis Aletraris informed the Committee about the priorities of the Cyprus Presidency for the second half of 2012. In his presentation he highlighted in particular the following points:

a) Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy

The Minister appreciated the progress made during the past six months and considered the Progress Report<sup>1</sup> prepared during the Danish Presidency a milestone. He intended to take the work forward and to further clarify the Council's position on outstanding issues. A first political debate was planned to take place at the July Agriculture and Fisheries Council on the regulations on Rural Development and Single CMO, the Minister said.

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<sup>1</sup> 8949/12 AGRI 244 AGRIORG 90 AGRIFIN 72 AGRISTR 50 CODEC 1036.

The main objective of the Presidency in the area of the CAP reform was to reach a partial general approach at the Agriculture and Fisheries Council in November which would reflect the centre of gravity in Council on the four main draft regulations.

b) Animal health, animal production and food of animal origin

The Minister said that a series of proposals was expected to be adopted by the Commission during the Cyprus Presidency which focused on the following areas:

- recast of EU-wide zootechnical legislation: the objective would be to improve the coherence of current provisions, to fully implement them and to create a higher degree of accessibility and legal clarity;
- revision of EU legislation concerning the rules on food and feed hygiene: this act would aim at further simplifying and clarifying the hygiene provisions with a view to reducing administrative burden. The legislation would also be aligned with the new provisions on delegated and implementing acts introduced by the Lisbon Treaty;
- new and comprehensive European Union Animal Health Law: it would set a legal basis for a common EU animal health policy and a single regulatory framework for animal health, covering the whole range of disease control measures and ensuring conditions for early detection, disease notification and surveillance.

c) Alignment of agricultural legislation with the Lisbon Treaty

Minister Aletraris recalled that the two institutions were engaged in informal trilogues on a number of dossiers such as the "outermost regions", "smaller Aegean islands" or "organic farming". He assured the Committee that the Cyprus Presidency was fully committed to making good progress on all alignment dossiers and hoped to be able to present successful and workable outcomes on these files.

In his presentation the Minister mentioned the importance of the ongoing work on the following dossiers:

- Regulation concerning the regime of the single payment scheme and support to vine-growers  
An agreement at the trilogue in Strasbourg on 4 July was reached and the Parliament was expected to adopt its first-reading position at the plenary session on 10 to 13 September.

– Transitional Regulation for Direct Payments

The Parliament adopted its first-reading position at its plenary session in Strasbourg. The Minister was optimistic that both of these regulations could enter into force on 1 January 2013.

– Codex Alimentarius

The involvement of the EU in this field remained highly important so that food safety standards and fair trade in food could be ensured, Minister Aletraris said. At the request of the Cyprus Presidency, the outgoing Danish Presidency would continue its work in the context of Codex-related activities until the end of 2012.

– Marketing Standards

There were some remaining open issues to be clarified (e.g. scope of specific marketing standards, volume control) and the Presidency remained committed to making progress on this file. Points outstanding would be further examined in the context of CAP reform, the Minister indicated.

– Promotion of agricultural products

The Presidency supported the promotion policy reform process which was an essential tool in ensuring the competitiveness of EU farming and food processing, and the success of the CAP reform. The Commission adopted its Communication on "Promotion measures and information provision for agricultural products" in March 2012 and the Presidency looked forward to the outcome of the debate and especially to the legislative proposals to be presented by the Commission by the end of this year.

Following the presentation of the priorities, Committee members asked the Minister questions which *inter alia* related to the following areas:

a) Budget and financing of the CAP

Mr DESS (EPP, DE) inquired whether the Minister expected to find agreement on the CAP budget before the end of the Cyprus Presidency. He recalled that if no agreement on the budget was reached by the end of 2012, the financing of the CAP after 2014 would be uncertain.

Mr CAPOULAS SANTOS (S&D, PT) called for this issue to be included in the list of priorities of the Cyprus Presidency and stressed the need to make progress in this area as soon as possible.

Mr AGNEW (EFD, UK) and Mr LA VIA (EPP, IT) said that a slippage in the negotiations on the MFF had become apparent which could result in delaying the reform of the CAP. In order to avoid this, Mr LA VIA urged the Minister to take negotiations forward.

Minister Aletraris replied that he was in favour of an equitable and balanced agricultural budget and said he would not agree to substantially decrease the CAP's budget. He was aware of the impact the MFF negotiations undoubtedly had on the CAP reform process and he hoped to be able to overcome the delay during the Cyprus Presidency, partially by means of close cooperation with Parliament. He also assured the Committee that the Presidency would fully respect the role of the Parliament as co-legislator.

b) Alignment of agricultural legislation with the Lisbon Treaty

Mr LA VIA (EPP, IT) and Mr PAPASTAMKOS (EPP, EL) stressed the need to tackle the question of alignment urgently. Mr LA VIA said that if no agreement could be reached on this issue it could also bring about delays for the CAP reform process.

The Minister acknowledged the problem and said that the Council had already carried out in-depth analysis on the share-out of responsibilities when it came to the application of different acts. The Minister said the Cyprus Presidency would continue work on this issue and he hoped to come forward with solutions in November or December this year.

c) International trade / external dimension of the CAP

Mr DANTIN (EPP, FR), rapporteur on the single CMO proposal, stated that while countries such as Brazil were considered developing countries some years ago, today they were major competitors in the agricultural sector. One of the reasons for this development was that developing countries had redefined their agricultural policy and increased the agricultural budget. Also, the US was revising its current agricultural aid in order to make it more beneficial for farmers. Considering these developments, Mr DANTIN stressed the need to maintain the management of markets policy of the CAP designed to protect both producers and consumers. Even more important would be to prepare the European Union to effectively tackle challenges of the 21st century, Mr DANTIN said.

Mr SIEKIERSKI (EPP, PL) and Mr PAPASTAMKOS (EPP, EL) also referred to the external dimension of the CAP (export of wine, emerging markets and concessions) while Mr ALVES (S&D, PT) mentioned the issue of trade agreements on banana and their impact on the outermost regions. He called for impact assessments to be carried out prior to new agreements in order to better estimate the impact of such agreements in the outermost regions.

The Minister replied that the EU was one of the most important players in the area of international trade and added that a realistic view and innovative ideas could help better exploit the advantages the European market had to offer, such as high-quality produce. With regard to the outermost regions he acknowledged the importance of the agricultural dimension in these areas. He said that this regulation would go along with the horizontal regulation on which he expected concrete results by the end of 2012.

d) Greening

Mr AGNEW (EFD, UK) reiterated his criticism of the Commission's plans to green the CAP by offering only three concrete measures (creation of Ecological Focus Areas, crop diversification, and permanent pasture). He emphasised that the implementation of these measures would not only create enormous problems for farmers but they would also put secure food production at risk. Therefore, he asked the Minister to look again at these issues as, in his view, they would not deliver the results they were expected to.

Mr Aletraris said that the Cyprus Presidency recognised the gravity of greening in the CAP reform and also the gravity of the link established between greening measures and budgetary obligations. He promised that the Presidency would return to this subject at the appropriate time. He stressed at the same time that the Commission had already demonstrated a spirit of conciliation and responsiveness in its proposals. The Minister was therefore confident that if negotiations continued in the same spirit of cooperation a good result could be achieved on this issue.