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President **Clint Camilleri**
Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and
Animal Rights of Malta

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- Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
- Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
- Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

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ITEMS DEBATED

AGRICULTURE

Organic production and labelling of organic products

Ministers held an policy debate on the legislative proposal for a new regulation on organic production and labelling of organic products. They focused in particular on the negotiations with the European Parliament.

Ministers restated their commitment to finding an agreement on the issue and discussed possible ways of overcoming the current deadlock. They tasked the presidency to work on a compromise text that could form the basis of further discussions with the EP. The presidency therefore undertook to convene bilateral meetings with the delegations in the days following the Council meeting, and to bring forward an updated text as soon as possible, with the objective of having a final trilogue with the EP by the end of its term.

However, in order to proceed, the presidency requested a formal mandate from the **Special Committee on Agriculture (SCA)** ahead of the future trilogue, and that delegates should be fully empowered to agree on a mandate at the next SCA meeting.

The proposal on organic production and labelling of organic products, presented by the Commission in March 2014, is aimed at revising the existing legislation on organic production and labelling of organic products so as to remove obstacles to the sustainable development of organic production in the EU. Its objectives are also to guarantee fair competition for farmers and operators, prevent fraud and unfair practices and improve consumer confidence in organic products. The Commission proposed to strengthen the rules on the control system, trade regime, animal welfare practices and non-authorised substances.

The Council reached a general approach on the regulation on 16 June 2015 and the EP Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (COMAGRI) voted on its report on 13 October 2015. Negotiations started in November 2015 and so far seventeen trilogues have taken place.

The Special Committee on Agriculture considered a new revised mandate on 29 May 2017 with a view to a further round of negotiations, but was unable to endorse it.

Market situation

In line with its commitment to follow the market situation closely, the Council was briefed by the Commission on the latest developments in the main agricultural sectors.

The Commission considered that the market situation had significantly improved in several sectors in recent months although there were some exceptions, for instance in the poultry sector and in some member states' pig meat sectors.

Ministers generally welcomed these positive signals, but some drew attention to particular sectors which are still experiencing difficulties due to seasonal oversupply, bad weather or veterinary restrictions.

Several market support measures amounting to more than €1.5 billion were adopted between summer 2014 and mid-2016 to mitigate the impact of the Russian embargo.

Following a continued crisis affecting several agricultural sectors - notably the dairy, pig meat and fruit and vegetables sectors - the Council endorsed a €500 million package of support measures for farmers in September 2015 (mainly direct aid) and a second package in March 2016 ([7108/16](#)). The latter featured mainly budget neutral instruments such as the voluntary and temporary reduction of milk production and a temporary relaxation of state aid rules for member states' support to farmers.

At the AgriFish Council meeting in July 2016, in response to the continued market downturn, and to the concerns highlighted by ministers at previous meetings, the Commission put forward a third package of support measures worth €500 million, targeted mainly at the dairy sector. These measures were aimed at tackling the crisis by stabilising production and (indirectly) prices, and providing liquidity for farmers. In particular, €150 million were distributed through an EU-wide measure to those farmers who voluntarily decided to reduce their milk deliveries, and €350 million were made available through national financial envelopes.

Any other business**– *The position of the EU in WTO negotiations on agriculture***

The Austrian, Bulgarian, Cyprus, French, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian, Slovak and Spanish delegations asked the Commission to brief the Council on the preparations for the WTO ministerial conference that will take place in Buenos Aires on 11-14 December 2017, and will discuss the introduction of new support rules for agricultural producers.

These delegations asked in particular to be briefed on the prospects for an agreement at the ministerial conference and on the progress in negotiations with Brazil to develop a joint negotiating proposal. They also took the opportunity to call on the Commission not to change the current CAP mechanisms as a consequence of future EU commitments at the WTO, and to ensure the continuation of current support mechanisms, such as the single area payment scheme (SAPS) and the basic payment scheme (BPS). In their opinion negotiations should not cover the "blue box" and "green box" support categories and should not introduce disciplines on support by product.

In the ensuing debate, the position of the twelve delegations was supported by other member states.

– *Negotiation of the association agreement between the EU and Mercosur*

The Austrian, Bulgarian, Cyprus, French, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Polish, Romanian, Slovak and Slovenian delegations presented to the Council a paper on the negotiations for a EU-Mercosur association agreement, in which they requested transparency from the Commission and continued dialogue with member states. In particular they invited the Commission to halt negotiations until the Agriculture and Fisheries Council was in a position to fully assess the terms of a potential agreement.

Ministers were generally in favour of an ambitious trade agreement with Mercosur but called for caution and for a balanced approach in the negotiations. In particular they were worried about the potential impact on sensitive agricultural sectors and asked the Commission to protect them and not to sacrifice the interests of farmers.

Negotiations for an inter-regional association agreement between the EU and Mercosur were launched in 1999, suspended in October 2004, and re-launched officially at the EU-Mercosur summit in Madrid on 17 May 2010, with the aim of reaching a comprehensive free trade agreement. Since then two rounds of negotiations have taken place, in October 2016 in Brussels and in March 2017 in Buenos Aires.

At the November 2016 Council the Commission presented its [study on the cumulative impact of free trade agreements on the EU agricultural sector](#).

- *EU-AU agriculture ministers conference "Making sustainable agriculture a future for youth in Africa" (Rome, 2 July 2017)*

The Commission informed the Council about preparations for the agriculture ministers conference "Making sustainable agriculture a future for youth in Africa" that will take place in Rome on 2 July.

The conference will be co-hosted by the European Commission together with the African Union Commission and the incoming Estonian presidency, and will contribute to the preparation of the 5th EU-Africa summit that will take place in Abidjan on 28-29 November 2017.

The main themes that will be discussed in Rome are: the promotion of responsible private sector investments, research and innovation and the role of digitalisation, sustainable water management, and climate-smart agriculture and the reduction of food losses and waste.

EU-Africa summits of heads of state or government take place every three years in Africa and Europe alternately. These summits take stock of progress in the implementation of commitments and provide political guidance for further work.

The fourth and most recent EU-Africa summit took place in Brussels on 2-3 April 2014 to discuss the future relationship between the EU and Africa and to foster cooperation, under the heading 'Investing in people, prosperity and peace'.

– *The European soya declaration*

At the request of Germany and Hungary, ministers discussed the role of soya in the European agriculture and food industry and were informed about the upcoming signature of the "European soya declaration". The declaration supports increased production of legume crops, soybeans in particular, for food and feed as a contribution to the development of more sustainable and resilient agricultural systems in Europe, to the United Nations Agenda 2030 and the EU sustainable development strategy.

In the ensuing debate ministers welcomed the initiative and underlined its potential role in boosting the production of GMO-free soya in Europe and in reducing its dependence on imported soybean.

– *Emergency preparedness for plant and animal health*

The presidency informed the Council about the actions it undertook in the first half of 2017 in the field of emergency preparedness in the veterinary and phytosanitary sectors. In particular work was carried out in the working parties of chief veterinary officers (CVOs) and chief plant health officers (CPHOs).

The presidency encouraged delegations to constructively participate in the final discussions of these working parties during the Maltese term of office, with a view to recommendations on emergency preparedness on animal health, and a EU awareness raising strategy for plant health.

In light of the recent crises and emergencies that the EU has had to face in relation to animal diseases and plant pests, African swine fever and *Xylella fastidiosa* to name just a few, the Maltese presidency indicated in January 2017 that emergency preparedness in the veterinary and phytosanitary sectors was one of its priorities.

– *Veterinary medicinal products*

The presidency briefed ministers on the state of play on the proposed regulation on veterinary medicinal products. In particular it elaborated on the work carried out in the last 6 months by the Working Party of Veterinary Experts (Animal health).

During the Maltese presidency special attention has been given to fleshing out the proposed rules in order to facilitate their implementation once the regulation is adopted, while also safeguarding the current level of animal health, public health and environmental protection. Work has also focused on improving the proposed framework to regulate the use of antimicrobials on animals to contribute to reduce the risk of antimicrobial resistance, in particular by strengthening the legal provisions on prudent use of veterinary medicines. In addition, the Maltese presidency has extensively revised the requirements concerning to the reporting and recording of adverse events of veterinary medicines and strengthened considerably the provisions concerning manufacturing standards.

In the Working Party of Veterinary Experts the presidency adopted a topic-based approach and made significant progress on the provisions related to the use of veterinary medicinal products, pharmacovigilance, and manufacturing and wholesale distribution. The presidency also explained that to complete the technical examination, further work would be required on the harmonisation of the "summary of product characteristics" and the annexes to the Commission proposal.

In the Council debate, delegations generally reiterated their agreement with the objectives of the proposal and underlined the important role of new rules in the fight against antimicrobial resistance. Some signalled their readiness to cooperate with the presidency to be able to start negotiations with the European Parliament. The incoming Estonian presidency informed delegations that it intended to continue work on the dossier with a view to reaching an agreement between member states and starting trilogues with the EP as soon as possible.

The proposed regulation on veterinary medicinal products was tabled by the Commission in September 2014. It addresses a wide scope of issues which relate, among others, to the availability of veterinary medicinal products, to the functioning of the internal market and to antimicrobial resistance.

– *Meat fraud in Brazil*

The Council was updated on the latest EU measures to respond to the meat fraud discovered in Brazil in March 2017.

Following the measures put in place immediately after the fraud was detected, i.e. the suspension of imports from the fraudulent establishments and reinforced import control checks, the Commission carried out an extensive audit in Brazil in May 2017. As the results of the audit were not considered to be satisfactory, the Commission indicated that further action was required from the Brazilian authorities.

In the following debate delegations expressed their worries as to the fraud and commended the action taken by the Commission. Some asked for an even stricter approach vis à vis the Brazilian authorities.

The Commission said it would continue to monitor the situation closely and would keep the Council informed. It also confirmed that, if Brazil failed to comply with the EU's requests, more decisive action would be considered.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

AGRICULTURE

Placing of plant protection products on the market: low-risk active substances

The Council did not oppose the adoption of a Commission regulation amending regulation No 1107/2009 concerning the placing of plant protection products on the market as regards the criteria for the approval of low-risk active substances ([8318/17](#) + [ADD 1](#)).

Regulation No 1107/2009 aims at facilitating the placing on the market of plant protection products containing low-risk active substances by setting criteria for identification of low-risk active substances and accelerating the authorisation procedure for low-risk products.

The new Commission regulation amends point 5 of Annex II to regulation No 1107/2009 to indicate that baculoviruses are to be considered as low-risk substances as there is no scientific evidence that they have any negative effect on animals and humans.

EU reference laboratory for foodborne viruses

The Council did not oppose the adoption of a Commission regulation amending annex VII to regulation No 882/2004 as regards the designation of the EU reference laboratory for foodborne viruses ([8273/17](#)).

Regulation (EC) No 882/2004 lays down the general tasks, duties and requirements for EU reference laboratories for food and feed and for animal health. It also includes the list of these laboratories in part I of annex VII.

As this annex currently does not include an EU reference laboratory for foodborne viruses, the new Commission regulation amends it to include Livsmedelsverket, the selected laboratory in the field.

The Commission regulation is subject to the so-called regulatory procedure with scrutiny. This means that now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt the regulation, unless the European Parliament objects.

FISHERIES**Conservation and Management of Pollock Resources in the Central Bering Sea: position of the EU**

The Council adopted a decision establishing the position to be adopted, on behalf of the European Union, at the annual Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Pollock Resources in the Central Bering Sea (CCBSP).

The CCBSP aims to establish an international regime for conservation, management and optimum utilisation of pollock resources in the convention area, restore and maintain the pollock resources in the Bering Sea at levels which will permit their maximum sustainable yield and favour cooperation in the gathering and examining of factual information concerning pollock and other living marine resources.

China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Poland, the Russian Federation and the United States of America are contracting parties to the convention, but the European Union is not.

Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement: position of the EU

The Council adopted a decision establishing the position to be adopted, on behalf of the European Union, at the meetings of the parties to the Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (SIOFA).

SIOFA is an inter-governmental agreement which aims to ensure the long-term conservation and sustainable use of the fishery resources in the SIOFA area through cooperation among the contracting parties. It also aims to promote the sustainable development of fisheries, taking into account the needs of developing states bordering the area, in particular the least-developed among them and small island developing states.

To date, SIOFA has been ratified by Australia, the Cook Islands, the European Union, France on behalf of its Indian Ocean Territories, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mauritius and the Seychelles. Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique and New Zealand are also signatories to the agreement but have not ratified it.

Commission of the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation: position of the EU

The Council adopted a decision establishing the position to be adopted, on behalf of the European Union, at the annual meeting of the Commission of the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFMO).

The SPRFMO is an inter-governmental organisation that is committed to the long-term conservation and sustainable use of the fishery resources of the South Pacific Ocean and in so doing safeguarding the marine ecosystems in which the resources occur. The SPRFMO convention applies to the high seas of the South Pacific, covering about a fourth of the Earth's high seas areas. Currently, the main commercial resources fished in the SPRFMO area are jack mackerel and jumbo flying squid in the Southeast Pacific and, to a much lesser degree, deep-sea species often associated with seamounts in the Southwest Pacific.

The SPRFMO Commission has currently 15 Members from Asia, Europe, the Americas and Oceania, including the European Union.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Sanctions against North Korea

The Council conducted its annual review of the EU's autonomous listing of persons and entities from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. This resulted in amendments to the statement of reasons where appropriate and the removal of one person and one entity from the sanctions list, bringing the number of those autonomously designated by the EU to 40 persons and 6 entities.

EUCAP Sahel Mali

The Council adopted a decision to open negotiations with Mali to conclude an agreement on the status of the EU civilian CSDP mission in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali). This agreement will be based on [the model agreement](#) on the status of the EU civilian crisis management mission in a host state and will replace the agreement in the form of an exchange of letters between the EU and Mali concluded in October 2014.

EUCAP Sahel Mali was launched on 15 January 2015, following an official invitation by the Malian government to assist its internal security forces following the 'Northern Mali Crisis' that left large parts of the country under the control of various factions. The mission provides experts to give strategic advice and training to the Malian Police, Gendarmerie and National Guard and the relevant ministries in order to support security sector reform.

[EUCAP Sahel Mali](#)

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

Internal security fund - Iceland

The Council adopted a decision on the signing and provisional application of the agreement between the EU and Iceland on supplementary rules in relation to the instrument for financial support to external borders and visa, as part of the Internal Security Fund for the period 2014 to 2020. It also decided to forward the draft decision on the conclusion of the agreement to the European Parliament for its consent once the agreement had been signed.

FOOD LAW

Stabiliser in wine

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission regulation authorising potassium polyaspartate as a stabiliser in wine and to assign E 456 to this food additive ([9384/17](#)).

The Commission regulation is subject to the so-called regulatory procedure with scrutiny. This means that now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt the regulation, unless the European Parliament objects.

INTERNAL MARKET

Chemicals (REACH) - CMR substances

The Council did not oppose the adoption by the Commission of a regulation amending the REACH system as regards substances that are classified as carcinogenic, mutagenic or reproductive toxicant (CMR).

The new Commission regulation will amend annex XVII to the [REACH regulation](#) (regulation 1907/2006 on the registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals) ([7868/17](#) and [7868/17 ADD1](#)).

The draft Commission regulation is subject to the regulatory procedure with scrutiny. This means that now that the Council has given its consent the Commission may adopt it, unless the European Parliament objects.

Motor vehicles - Technical prescriptions for type-approval

The Council adopted a [decision](#) aimed at supporting certain amendments to UN regulations under the agreement of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) concerning the adoption of uniform technical prescriptions for wheeled vehicles, which need to be adapted to reflect technical progress.

The decision includes support for:

- two proposals for amendments to UN Global Technical Regulations (GTR) 1 and 15
- a proposal for a new UN GTR on the evaporative emission test procedure
- the reaffirmation of three listings in the Compendium of Candidate UN GTR
- one consensus decision on the use of the term "UN GTR".

[UNECE](#) develops harmonised requirements intended to remove technical barriers to trade in motor vehicles between the contracting parties to the agreement. The EU is a contracting party to this agreement and votes on behalf of the member states.

TRANSPORT

Satellite navigation – cooperation with Switzerland

The Council adopted a decision on the position to be taken on behalf of the EU at the EU–Switzerland GNSS (global navigation satellite system) Committee regarding the adoption of the committee's rules of procedure (Council decision: [5448/17](#); EU–Switzerland GNSS Committee's decision regarding the adoption of its rules of procedure: [5450/17](#)). The EU–Switzerland GNSS Committee was set up by the cooperation agreement between the EU and its member states and Switzerland on the European satellite navigation programmes.
