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P R E S S

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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****Post-2020 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform package**

In public session the Council exchanged views on the Commission proposals that are part of the CAP reform package:

- a regulation on CAP strategic plans ([9645/18](#) + [ADD 1](#) + [COR 1](#))
- a regulation on the financing, management and monitoring of the CAP ([9634/18](#) + [ADD 1](#) + [COR 1](#))
- a regulation on common market organisation of agricultural products ([9556/18](#) + [REV 1](#) + [COR1](#))

The debate was based on a presidency's report on the state of play of the three files ([7482/1/19 REV 1](#)), with reference to three revised texts summarising the work carried out since January at working party, SCA and Council level:

- a regulation on CAP strategic plans ([7485/19](#))
- a regulation on the financing, management and monitoring of the CAP ([6981/1/19 REV 1](#))
- a regulation on common market organisation (CMO) of agricultural products ([7451/19](#))

Ministers were invited to comment on the progress report and answer the following question included therein: would you in principle endorse the Romanian Presidency's orientation given for each of the three regulations, and which elements included therein, if any, would not be acceptable to you at this stage?

Delegations generally welcomed many elements of the progress report and the revised texts. As regards the CAP strategic plans regulation, delegations generally welcomed the performance orientation, but some pointed out that more in-depth discussion was needed on the performance framework and in particular on the frequency of the milestones, as well as on the new green architecture (to be discussed at a later Council). Other comments revealed diverging views on the following: the definitions of 'permanent grassland', 'young farmer' and 'genuine farmer', the Farm Sustainability Tool for Nutrients (FaST), the option of redesignating the areas for natural or other specific constraints and the support rate for investments.

The Horizontal and CMO regulations emerged as the most advanced ones although concerns were raised regarding the threshold for financial discipline, roll-over of unused amounts from the current crisis reserve in 2020, and paying agencies in the Horizontal regulation, as well as about wine-related provisions, market measures and budget allocations for school schemes in the CMO regulation.

The Commission's proposals for a CAP reform introduce a new delivery model whereby member states will have more flexibility in how to use their funds and will be able to tailor-make their programmes. A single set of 9 EU-wide economic, environmental and social objectives will have been identified at EU level and each member state will have to draw up a Strategic Plan covering the whole programming period, setting out how it intends to meet those objectives, using both direct payments and rural development. The Commission will approve each plan to ensure consistency and the protection of the single market, and monitor the progress towards objectives and targets using a set of result indicators agreed at EU level.

The Commission proposals also outline new obligations and incentives for farmers in the area of the environment and climate action. Direct payments will be conditional on enhanced environmental and climate requirements and member states will have to offer eco-schemes to support farmers in going beyond the mandatory requirements, funded with a share of their national direct payments allocations.

Moreover the new CAP is intended to better target small farmers and young farmers, thereby facilitating generational renewal, and to foster greater use of knowledge and innovation.

Bioeconomy

The Council exchanged views on the bioeconomy and the role of the agricultural sector ([7429/19](#)).

The bioeconomy comprises those parts of the economy that use renewable biological resources from land and sea to produce value-added products such as food, feed, materials and energy. In 2012 the Commission published its Bioeconomy Strategy and in 2017 started a review which led to the publication of an updated strategy on 11 October 2018 ([13229/18](#)).

The updated strategy encompasses different sectors and policies, ranging from agriculture to climate, research to fisheries, and others, and aims to strengthen the connections between the economy, society and the environment, thus maximising the contribution of a sustainable bioeconomy to the Commission's priorities and to many of its policy objectives.

Ministers were invited to answer a series of questions on:

- the sharing of best practices in the implementation of the updated Bioeconomy Strategy: several delegations mentioned the activities of the BIOEAST group, while others shared their experiences regarding, among others, national or regional bioeconomy strategies, transnational research initiatives, and cooperation between businesses and research centres,
- how the future CAP and other instruments can help deploy the bioeconomy successfully: some delegations praised the inclusion of the bioeconomy among the 'specific objectives' of the future CAP and considered that rural development in particular was key to deploying the potential of the bioeconomy in the different member states. In the opinion of those delegations, administrative obstacles should be reduced and the CAP should better interface with other related funds and policies, e.g. the circular economy. Moreover, cooperation should be ensured between farmers, foresters and other actors in the agri-food chain,

- the possible contribution of the new research and innovation framework programme: several delegations welcomed the inclusion of the bioeconomy and agricultural priorities in the new research and innovation framework programme, stressing the positive contribution of technology and innovation in agriculture. Some commented on how cluster 7 of the programme ('Bioeconomy, Food, Natural Resources and Environment') could be better targeted to agricultural needs and what its priorities should be.

The bioeconomy is one of the priorities of the Romanian Presidency, which plans to organise an awareness-raising conference on this subject in Bucharest on 4-5 April 2019. The bioeconomy will also be the main topic of discussion at the informal meeting of agriculture ministers on 3-4 June 2019.

Any other business

- ***Outcome of the conference ‘CAP strategic plans, exploring eco-climate schemes’, Leeuwarden, 6-8 February 2019***

In the context of the wider debate on the post-2020 CAP package, the Dutch delegation informed the Council about the outcome of the abovementioned conference ([7415/19](#)).

Around 150 participants from the European Commission, 25 member states, farmers’ organisations, NGOs and researchers explored together how to design National Strategic Plans for the future CAP, with a focus on the proposed eco-schemes. According to the Dutch paper, the conference showed that the CAP proposals give countries opportunities to develop eco-schemes that lead to better environmental and climate conditions and also fit farmers’ practices.

- ***Future of coupled income support in the Common Agricultural Policy***

In the context of the wider debate on the post-2020 CAP package, the Czech delegation, on behalf of Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Latvia, Slovakia and Slovenia, drew the attention of the Council to the future of coupled income support in the context of the next CAP ([7440/19](#)). In particular, the abovementioned member states asked for the financial allocation for coupled income support to be increased, flexibility for member states to be enhanced, and coupled income support to be excluded from the scope of degressivity and capping of direct payments.

- ***Decision by the technical board of appeals of the European Patent Office regarding the possibility of patenting the results of classical plant breeding***

The Dutch delegation drew the attention of the Council to a recent decision (T 1063/18) by the Technical Board of Appeal of the European Patent Office (EPO), in which the Technical Board of Appeal ruled that a product resulting from traditional plant breeding can be patentable ([6976/19](#)).

The Dutch delegation took this opportunity to restate its support for the interpretative notice (2016/C 411/03) issued by the European Commission in November 2016, in which it is stated that the products of essentially biological processes should not be patentable, and asked the Commission and other member states to continue advocating this interpretation both within the European Union as well as within the European Patent Office.

Several delegations supported the Dutch declaration and the Commission recalled that the approach taken in the Commission interpretative notice was widely supported in the EPO, including by non-EU parties to the European Patent Convention.

– ***Outcome of the workshops organised by the Commission’s task force on water and agriculture, Sorø, 27 November 2018 and Bucharest, 5-6 February 2019***

The Commission informed the Council of the outcome of the abovementioned workshops, which were part of a series of events (7295/19) organised by the Task Force on Water.

The Task Force on Water was established to look at various ways of improving water status in the EU in a cross-sectoral manner and with immediate effect, and spearheaded the Commission Staff Working Document on [Agriculture and Sustainable Water Management in the EU](#), published on 28 April 2017.

– ***Situation in the meat market***

The Polish delegation informed the Council of the difficulties experienced at national level in the context of fast-growing imports of poultry meat from Ukraine, the possible granting of preferences to meat producers and exporters in the framework of FTA negotiations with Mercosur, Australia and New Zealand, as well as a no-deal Brexit (7489/19).

Many delegations took the floor to share the concerns expressed by the Polish delegation and the Commission took the opportunity to touch on the issue of Brexit-related contingency plans in agriculture.

FISHERIES**Any other business**– *Small-scale fisheries*

In public session, the Slovenian delegation, on behalf of Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Poland and Portugal, presented a joint statement ([7071/1/19 REV 1](#) + 7071/19 COR 1) to highlight the importance and precariousness of small-scale fisheries in the context of the Commission's proposal for a new, post-2020 European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). In particular, the abovementioned member states called for support for small-scale fisheries in the new EMFF regulation. In addition to the other signatories, several delegations took the floor to support the statement, while others opposed the idea that the EMFF could be used to support activities running against the objective of sustainable fishing.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

AGRICULTURE

International Agreement on olive oil and table olives 2015

The Council adopted a Council decision on the conclusion, on behalf of the EU, of the International Agreement on olive oil and table olives 2015 (6781/19). The Council also decided to transmit the decision, together with the text of the Agreement ([11178/16](#)), to the European Parliament for its consent.

BUDGET

Office accommodation of EU institutions

The Council adopted conclusions on the European Court of Auditors' special report No 34/2018: 'Office accommodation of EU institutions - Some good management practices but also various weaknesses' ([6867/19](#)).

TRANSPORT

Satellite navigation

The Council adopted a decision on the signing, on behalf of the EU and its member states, of the accession protocol of Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania to the Cooperation Agreement on a civil global satellite navigation system (GNSS) with the Republic of Korea ([7211/19](#) + [7211/19 COR 1](#); [6756/19](#); [6738/19](#)).

ENVIRONMENT

Methoxychlor

The Council adopted a decision on the submission, on behalf of the EU, of a proposal for the listing of methoxychlor in annex A to the Stockholm Convention on persistent organic pollutants ([7147/19](#), [6920/19](#)).

Annex A to the Convention lists chemicals to be eliminated. Methoxychlor (CAS No: 72 43 5, EC No 200 779-9) was phased out in the Union many years ago, but the Council considers that wider international action is necessary to restrict its use.

This decision enters into force on the date of its adoption.

CUSTOMS UNION

Council decision on EU position in the World Customs Organization*

The Council adopted the position to be taken on behalf of the European Union in the World Customs Organization in relation to a draft amendment to the Harmonised System Nomenclature.

The agreed position can be found in document [7138/19](#) + 7138/19 ADD 1.

TRANSPARENCY

Public access to documents

On 18 March 2019, the Council approved the reply to confirmatory application No 03/c/01/19 ([6192/19](#)).