



Council of the
European Union

191399/EU XXVII. GP
Eingelangt am 03/07/24

Brussels, 3 July 2024
(OR. en)

11601/24

PHYTOSAN 166
VETER 87
AGRI 542

OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
No. prev. doc.:	11022/24 INIT + COR 1
Subject:	Council conclusions on the Union co-financing of phytosanitary and veterinary programmes and emergency measures

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on the Union co-financing of phytosanitary and veterinary programmes and emergency measures, approved by the Council (Agriculture and fisheries) at its 4037th meeting held on 24 June 2024.

**Council conclusions on the Union co-financing of phytosanitary and veterinary programmes
and emergency measures**

1. The Single Market Programme is the Union financial instrument to support actions in the Member States to ensure, among other things, a high level of animal and plant health in the European Union. Over the recent years, the Member States have been confronted with a significantly reduced Union co-financing rate allocated to their veterinary and phytosanitary control and eradication programmes in comparison with previous years. This has been seen by the Member States as impacting the achievement of the Union policy objectives concerning a high level of animal and plant health.
2. In this context, the Belgian Presidency undertook to assess the impact of the reduction in that co-financing, in combination with the general increase in costs in recent years, based on questionnaires addressed to the Working Party on Animals and Veterinary Questions (Chief Veterinary Officers) and to the Working Party on Plants and Plant Health Questions (Chief Plant Health Officers).
3. The draft Council Conclusions set out in the Annex to this note are based on the outcomes of those questionnaires and the subsequent discussions by the above two Working Parties and have received the support of all delegations at Working Party level¹.
4. In the light of the above, the Permanent Representatives Committee (Part 1) is invited to:
 - a) confirm its agreement on the text of the Conclusions as set out in the Annex to this note,
 - b) recommend that the Council approve the Conclusions as set out in the Annex to this note.

¹ Meeting of Counsellors/Attaches (AGRI – Veterinary, Phytosanitary) on 10 June 2024 followed by an informal consultation (WK 8338/2024).

Conclusions of the Council

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1. EMPHASISING that maintaining a high level of animal health and plant health is vital for the Union as this plays a key role in human health, food security and safety, biodiversity and the economic prosperity of the Union.
2. STRESSING that supporting plant health and animal health is crucial to the agricultural sector and HIGHLIGHTING that effective animal and plant health management, including surveillance and eradication measures, is essential for ensuring the safety of imports and internal market and safeguarding exports.
3. UNDERLINING that the heightened threat from plant pests and animal diseases arising from passenger movements, climate change and constantly growing global trade increases the risk of adverse effects on plant health and animal health.
4. STRESSING that prevention and early detection of possible outbreaks of plant pests and animal diseases are of the utmost importance, as eradication measures are associated with higher costs, including financial costs and costs related to impacts on human health, the environment, ecosystems, society and a negative impact on public perception.
5. RECALLING that the yearly Union co-financing rate for phytosanitary and veterinary programmes and emergency measures has been reduced by 60 % for the period from 2023 to 2027, as a consequence of the budget previously allocated to such programmes being reallocated to tackle unforeseen sanitary crises.

6. HIGHLIGHTING that the reduced Union co-financing scope (eligible pests/diseases) and rate, together with increased costs, have affected the capacity of phytosanitary and veterinary services to implement effective surveillance to achieve the objectives of prevention and early detection.
7. POINTING OUT the need to reduce the administrative burden arising, for instance, from the management of Union co-financing grants, which takes up an even more disproportionate part of the grant amount due to the reduced Union co-financing rate.
8. HIGHLIGHTING that it is crucial that competent authorities have at their disposal sufficient financial and human resources to carry out the necessary tasks, taking into account the wide range and complexity of the tasks in the fields of plant health and animal health in a One Health approach.

Plant health

9. EMPHASISING the importance of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 on protective measures against plant pests, which aims to prevent quarantine pests and new plant pests from entering and spreading within the EU.
10. STRESSES that prevention and early detection of possible plant pest outbreaks is of the utmost importance, in particular as regards the priority pests which pose the most serious economic, environmental and social threats to EU countries.
11. FURTHER STRESSES that surveillance and outbreak management of quarantine plant pests is particularly challenging and highly complex because this covers approximately 400 Union quarantine pests and pest groups on a wide range of plant species and plant products in a broad variety of environments (forests, agriculture and urban areas).

12. EMPHASISES that the implementation of the new plant health regime has brought a substantial increase in tasks and workload for the Member States, especially with regard to surveillance and eradication measures.
13. POINTS OUT that Union co-financing for phytosanitary programmes and emergency measures is an essential part of the new plant health regime and the Single Market Programme and is an indispensable element for achieving their objectives.
14. RECOGNISES the importance of the implementation of qualitative and quantitative plant pest surveys, in particular for priority pests, in this regard, and IS DEEPLY CONCERNED that the impact of the reduced Union co-financing scope and rate is already being felt and might jeopardise the early detection objective and that fulfilling the obligations arising from the current plant health legislation and programmes becomes more challenging
15. EMPHASISES that support for plant health is also support for the agricultural sector, as it eliminates or reduces the need to combat further new pests or quarantine pests, and therefore enables farmers to better implement integrated pest management.

Animal health

16. RECALLS that the mechanism for co-financing veterinary programmes and emergency measures has been in place for many years and has proved its worth, since it has been used to eradicate a number of diseases in several Member States and to improve the animal health situation with regard to many other diseases.
17. STRESSES that maintaining a high level of animal health is an important goal for the EU as this plays a significant role in human health, through combating zoonotic diseases, improving food safety and food security, and also through a reduced need for treatment with antimicrobials and hence a reduced risk of antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

18. NOTES that the reduction in the scope and rate of co-financing has already impacted the achievement of a high level of animal health in some Member States as it has shifted additional costs to farmers and competent authorities, forcing them to reprioritise animal health programmes, and RECOGNISES that some Member States' ability to prevent and control diseases other than those belonging to categories A and B has also been put under pressure.
19. ACKNOWLEDGES that all Member States expect an even greater negative impact on animal health and welfare in the future.
20. REITERATES its concerns over the current workload and administrative burden for the Member States.
21. STRONGLY EMPHASISES that due to the risk of not being able to provide proper financing, at EU and Member State level, fulfilling the obligations arising from the current animal health legislation and programmes becomes more challenging, and STRESSES that this might result in reduced uniformity of animal health across the EU.

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22. INVITES the European Commission, while respecting the ceilings in the Union's multiannual financial frameworks, to reflect on a level and way of financing phytosanitary and veterinary programmes and emergency measures which:
 - a) is commensurate with the resources needed to achieve the objectives of the plant health and animal health regime;
 - b) also provides sufficient flexibility to take into account crisis situations arising from sudden plant pest and animal disease outbreaks;
 - c) takes into account the reported significant increase in costs of staff and laboratory analyses.

23. CALLS ON the European Commission to explore ways of improving the management of Union co-financed phytosanitary and veterinary programmes and emergency measures under the Single Market Programme (food chain strand), and reducing the administrative burden, especially by:
- a) aligning the application procedure for Union co-financing grants with the other reporting requirements;
 - b) critically scrutinising, in close cooperation with the Member States, the information required for the Union co-financing grants application procedure, in order to reduce the level of details of that information and to improve its alignment with the practice;
 - c) ensuring timely communication of changes in the system, and of potential changes in the budget;
 - d) simplifying the process of this part of Union co-financing, for instance by making the application platform more user-friendly and by establishing complete and easily accessible guidelines, taking into account that this process applies to direct grants to Member States as opposed to grant agreements allocated to competing entities.
24. INVITES the European Commission and Member States to continue to explore more efficient and targeted means of cooperation between Member States to increase efficiency in plant pest and animal disease prevention measures, for instance by implementing common vaccination policies for animal health or by fostering surveillance collaboration between Member States for plant health, and to increase efficiency in their eradication and containment management.
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