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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
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Subject: Joint Declaration of the Ministers of Agriculture of the Visegrad Group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), Bulgaria and Romania on the Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy in the light of the European Green Deal, the “Farm to Fork” and “Biodiversity” Strategies and the COVID19 pandemic
- Information from the Czech delegation on behalf of Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia

Delegations will find:

- In the Annex information from the Czech Delegation on a Joint Declaration of the Ministers of Agriculture of the Visegrad Group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), Bulgaria and Romania on the Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy in the light of the European Green Deal, the “Farm to Fork” and “Biodiversity” Strategies and the COVID-19 pandemic;
- In the Annex to the Annex the Joint Declaration.

The abovementioned documents will be dealt with under "Any other business" at the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council meeting on 20 July 2020.

Joint Declaration of the Ministers of Agriculture of the Visegrad Group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), Bulgaria and Romania on the Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy in the light of the European Green Deal, the “Farm to Fork” and “Biodiversity” Strategies and the COVID19 pandemic

Information from the Czech delegation on behalf of Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia

1. During the videoconference of the enlarged Visegrad Group on 19th June, the Czech Presidency decided to focus the discussion on the main topics of the ongoing debate on the future shape of the Common Agricultural Policy. The discussion on the future CAP has been among top priority topics of the EU agricultural Ministers for several months. The process of negotiation has been affected by the COVID19 pandemic. The pandemic not only slowed down the discussion, but its impact will also have to be reflected in the final legislation acts. The ongoing negotiation must also consider the newly published strategies linked to the European Green Deal, namely the “Farm to Fork” Strategy and the “Biodiversity” Strategy. All these aspects, new high ambitions in the environmental and climate area and the impact of the COVID19 pandemic, will have to be incorporated in the future shape of the CAP, so that the EU agricultural sector can maintain its competitiveness on the global market.
2. Accordingly, the Ministers of Agriculture of the Visegrad Group countries, Bulgaria and Romania agreed during their videoconference meeting on 19th June on a common declaration that reflects the main challenges of the future Common Agricultural Policy and the most important topics raised by the Ministers during the meeting.
3. The Joint Declaration of the Ministers of Agriculture of the Visegrad Group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), Bulgaria and Romania on the Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy in the light of the European Green Deal, the “Farm to Fork” and “Biodiversity” Strategies and the COVID19 pandemic is attached.



Joint Declaration of the Ministers of Agriculture of the Visegrad Group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), Bulgaria and Romania

ON THE REFORM OF THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY IN THE LIGHT OF THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL, THE “FARM TO FORK” AND “BIODIVERSITY” STRATEGIES AND THE COVID19 PANDEMIC

The Ministers of Agriculture of the Visegrad Group countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), Bulgaria and Romania

- STRESS that the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) shall remain, even in the light of the current crisis situation, a strong and adequately funded policy in order to successfully meet public expectations concerning food security, environmental protection, climate, animal welfare issues, as well as all current and future challenges, including societal challenges and those associated with a successful implementation of the European Green Deal (EGD) and respective strategies and furthermore it should ensure regular, continuous and sufficient supplies of high quality and safe food to consumers within the EU.
- UNDERLINE the significant role of the sustainable management of natural resources, such as forests, water and soil, and related climate protection measures. Therefore, CONSIDER that sustainable management actively contributes to the targets set out in the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategy related to the environmental and other non-production functions of agriculture and forestry, as well as to maintain and further promote its economic and social functions.

- ARE CONVINCED that the key to success lies in realistic and simplified rules that are easy to implement and are understandable to farmers. New administrative requirements, such as capping of direct payments, must be voluntary for the Member States according to their specific situation.
- STRESS that preserving the competitiveness of European agriculture is of crucial importance - the ambitions of climate action should be balanced with regard to the competitiveness of European producers.
- EMPHASIZE the vital role of farmers and the entire agri-food sector in ensuring the supply of quality food and food security and UNDERLINE the importance of strengthening the farmers' position in the agri-food supply chain.
- WELCOME the steps taken by the European Commission to propose and adopt sectoral support measures. However, POINT OUT that the impacts of the crisis might go beyond the short and medium term, and that further appropriate measures should be explored in order to tackle possible difficult situation in the future.
- UNDERLINE the importance of a sufficiently long transitional period, at least two years, according to the need of the Member State concerned to ensure a smooth transition between the current and the new programming periods.
- EMPHASIZE the importance of the CAP in promoting the preservation of traditional landscape character as an important part of Europe's cultural heritage, in promoting the improvement of the quality of life in rural areas and their attractiveness, increasing the viability and competitiveness of the agricultural and the closely linked processing sectors, as well as the urgent issue of generational renewal.
- EMPHASIZE the key role of forests and the forestry sector in contributing to the sustainable development of rural areas in Europe that should be strengthened by diversified measures and adequate financing in the CAP.

- ARE CONVINCED that the CAP is undoubtedly one of the policies that shall help addressing challenges related to environmental protection including biodiversity conservation, and to mitigation and adaptation to climate change. When introducing specific solutions, it should be taken into account that some group of farms already meet high requirements in the field of environmental protection and climate change.
- NOTE that the key role of the CAP is also to support research, development and innovation and to transfer their results into practice, in synergy with collaborative research initiatives such as BIOEAST, initiated by the Visegrad Group Countries.
- EMPHASIZE that with support of the CAP the EU food production has globally achieved the highest quality and safety standards. Therefore, CONSIDER it necessary to take into account all aspects linked to the goals set in the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies in the light of global production and market situation.
- HIGHLIGHT that international trade agreements under negotiation and concluded by the EU enshrine the principle that imports from third countries have to respect high environmental, sanitary and phytosanitary EU standards, while promoting sustainable food production, deforestation free supply chains, social and labor fair production, and animal welfare.
- EMPHASIZE that another aspect that has to be taken into account is the ongoing negotiation between the EU and the UK, where the final impact of Brexit on individual sectors it is not clear yet.
- ARE CONCERNED that the New Delivery Model (NDM) proposed by the European Commission could cause the increase of administrative burden for both farmers and administration. In this context they ARE also CONCERNED about uncertainties and possible financial risks connected with the NDM.
- SUPPORT taking into account the specificities of the Member States and ensuring sufficient flexibility in the implementation of the measures of the new CAP.

- DRAW ATTENTION to the fact, that requirements that have not been efficient in the past should not be included in the toolbox of the new CAP - an example is the concept of the genuine farmer.
- BELIEVE that social and economic stability of agriculture should be achieved together with the environmental sustainability of the sector. Coupled support and transitional national aid are interventions that significantly contribute to the achievement of these goals and their positive effects should be properly utilized in the reformed policy. Increasing the potential of these instruments should be reflected by adequate financing.
- NOTE that the EU is already facing visible negative consequences of climate change for the entire natural landscape and the economy, including agriculture and forestry. Droughts noted in the period of last 5 years significantly threatened the economic existence of many agricultural and forestry holdings in the affected areas. Another problem is the occurrence of new pests and diseases. In this regard, RECOGNIZE the crucial need to adapt agricultural and forestry ecosystems to climate change.
- ARE CONVINCED that the EU cannot remain alone in meeting the environmental and climate ambitions.
- In this context, they INVITE the European Commission to make every effort, which will lead to the active involvement of other key actors, such as the third countries.
- CALL on the European Commission to actively discuss the objectives of the EGD and the Farm to fork and Biodiversity strategies with individual Member States and other stakeholders, taking into account the specificities, needs and conditions of each Member State in terms of the ability to meet the objectives. An impact assessment should inevitably accompany and facilitate this discussion.
- EMPHASIZE that the CAP should be functioning on the basis of a solid legal background as it has been doing ever since it exists. Therefore only those targets and conditions should be requested from the Member States during the approval of their Strategic Plans, which are laid down in the basic acts.

- DRAWS THE ATTENTION to the fact, that a transparent and objective assessment procedure of the CAP Strategic Plans is an essential starting-point for a smoothly functioning future CAP. Specific recommendations of the Commission in relation to the requirements of the Farm to Fork and EU Biodiversity Strategies should only serve as a guidance document helping Member States throughout the planning process and should not influence legally the formal approval of the strategic plans.
- STRESS that great challenges faced by farmers, including the requirements stemming from initiatives of the EGD and “Farm to Fork” and Biodiversity Strategies, are the same in all Member States. Therefore, CONSIDER that the significant differences in direct payments levels among the Member States are no longer justified and CALL for closing these differences in the period 2021-2027.
- CALL for prompt implementation of new funds from European Recovery Instrument targeted to repairing economy after the COVID-19 crisis.
- REQUEST an adequate level of funding for the CAP under the new Multiannual Financial Framework. EMPHASIZE that, given the number of new challenges the CAP will face in the future, inter alia in relation to the EGD and accompanying strategies and in the context of constantly growing new demands on the agricultural sector, securing sufficient funding is essential.

19 June 2020
