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OUTCOME OF THE COUNCIL MEETING

3796th Council meeting

Agriculture and Fisheries

Brussels, 26 and 27 May 2021

Presidents

Ricardo Serrão Santos

Minister of Maritime Affairs of Portugal

Maria do Céu Antunes

Minister for Agriculture of Portugal

Rui Martinho

Secretary of State for Agriculture and Rural Development

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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

Future of the CAP after 2020

Over the course of the two-day meeting, the Council held a series of policy debates on the CAP reform package, based on information provided by the presidency and the Commission on the ongoing negotiations with the European Parliament. The sessions were chaired by the Portuguese Minister for Agriculture, Maria do Céu Antunes, on behalf of the Portuguese presidency.

A number of compromise proposals were presented to ministers, including on social conditionality, targeting of support and green architecture. The discussion centred around these and other issues. Ministers were asked to provide guidance on the approach that the Portuguese presidency should take in the ongoing interinstitutional negotiations with the Parliament, which were taking place in parallel.

Ultimately, although progress was made in several areas, a number of key issues remained outstanding. It was therefore decided to postpone talks until the next meeting of agriculture and fisheries ministers in June.

– *Social dimension*

Ministers discussed papers put forward by the Parliament and the Commission on incorporating social conditionality into the CAP. Although they were in favour of protecting the labour and social rights of farmers, many felt that the CAP was not the best tool to achieve this. Several ministers pointed out that farm workers' rights were already well covered by existing legislation, and felt that adding social conditionality to the CAP would create an unnecessary administrative burden.

– *Targeting of support*

The presidency briefed the ministers on the outcome of the ongoing interinstitutional negotiations. Ministers discussed whether redistributive payments should be mandatory, whether a percentage of redistribution should be used (and if so what that percentage should be), and what percentage of labour costs should be deducted. On the whole ministers were in favour of a more flexible approach in which member states would be able to choose which instrument to use in order to achieve the required redistributive effect.

– *Green architecture*

Ministers were briefed on the state of play regarding the eco-schemes and Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAECs), including the Commission's suggestions on the ring-fencing of first pillar funds for the eco-schemes. While all ministers acknowledged the importance of ensuring that the CAP was environmentally ambitious and provided a sustainable future for farmers, they emphasised the need for flexibility and to avoid additional administrative burdens. They drew attention to certain elements of the position set out in the Council's General Approach, including an initial learning period for eco-schemes, rebates of excess expenditure in pillar II, and measures for avoiding unspent funds. A number of ministers also highlighted the need to include crop diversification as an alternative to crop rotation under GAEC 8.

2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit

Ministers approved the Council conclusions on the EU's priorities for the United Nations Food Systems Summit, which will take place in New York in September. They agreed that the UNFSS was a landmark event which provided a genuine opportunity to pursue actions aimed at reshaping food systems at the global level, while also pursuing the aims of the European Green Deal and the farm to fork strategy. A number of ministers highlighted the public debates taking place in their countries in preparation for the summit, and stressed in particular the importance of agriculture and food systems for achieving the SDGs, the need to strengthen links between trade and sustainability, and the role the EU can play in terms of scientific innovation. A pre-summit will take place on 26-28 July in Rome.

Plant reproductive material

Ministers held an exchange of views on the study produced by the Commission regarding options to update the existing EU legislation on the production and marketing of plant reproductive material. On the whole they welcomed the study and recognised the need to modernise legislation on PRM, in order to respond to challenges such as tackling climate change, ensuring food security and preserving biodiversity, in line with the EU's farm to fork and biodiversity strategies. A number of ministers underlined that the best elements of the current framework should be maintained, with certain adaptations and improvements being introduced where necessary. More generally, several ministers called for simplification and flexibility to be the guiding principles of any new legislation.

New genomic techniques

Ministers held a debate on the conclusions of the Commission's study on new genomic techniques and explored possible future policy actions. Overall they responded positively to the study and appreciated the need to modernise the current legislation, while also recognising the particular challenges presented by such modernisation. They discussed the importance of reflecting the latest scientific developments when conducting risk assessments on new genomic techniques, and also the need to raise awareness and provide education on these issues.

Organic farming

The Commission presented its action plan on organic farming to ministers. The plan was produced in March 2021 in response to the organic farming ambitions set out in the European Green Deal, in particular the objective of increasing the share of organic farming to at least 25% of the EU's agricultural land. At least 30% of the budget is likely to be dedicated to funding research activity on topics specific to or relevant for the organic sector, such as increased crop yields, genetic biodiversity and alternatives to contentious products. Ministers discussed the level of ambition of the action plan, as well as its feasibility. Many of them expressed their support for the Commission's plan and outlined ambitions to increase the amount of land devoted to organic farming in their own member states.

OTHER BUSINESS

– *EU-UK fishing opportunities*

Ministers discussed the state of play of consultations with the United Kingdom on post-Brexit fishing opportunities, and took note of the comments made by a number of delegations. They reiterated their support for the Commission's approach in continuing to seek a comprehensive agreement, especially given that the outcome of these negotiations would set a precedent for future consultations with the UK.

– *WTO fisheries negotiations*

Ministers discussed the current situation regarding World Trade Organization negotiations on fisheries subsidies. They emphasised the need for a balanced outcome that was compatible with the Common Fisheries Policy and ensured a level playing-field between fishing fleets. They also stressed the need for an ambitious agreement that delivered on Sustainable Development Goal 14.6 and would boost the credibility of the WTO.

– *Visegrad Group declaration on CAP and farm to fork*

The Polish delegation provided information to ministers regarding the joint declaration of the Visegrad Group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) as well as Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Slovenia on the opportunities and challenges presented by the farm to fork strategy in terms of developing and implementing the CAP national strategic plans. This joint declaration was the result of a videoconference that took place between the member states concerned on 21 April 2021.

– *Agricultural sectors affected by frost*

France, Greece and Italy submitted a declaration to the Council regarding the need to support agricultural sectors affected by recent frosts. Following a period of warm weather, a sudden cold snap had had a significant effect on certain farming sectors in the member states concerned, in particular the wine and fruit and vegetable sectors. Ministers expressed solidarity with the member states concerned, with some observing that climate change increased the risk of poor weather affecting agriculture across the EU as a whole.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Council Decision authorising the opening of negotiations on an EU-Angola investment facilitation agreement

The Council adopted a decision authorising the opening of negotiations on an agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Angola on investment facilitation, and the accompanying negotiating directives.

Regulation establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI-Global Europe)

The Council adopted its position at first reading on the draft regulation establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument ([6879/21](#)), and the statement of reasons ([6879/21 ADD 1](#)), with Hungary abstaining.

GENERAL AFFAIRS

Council conclusions on a sustainable blue economy based on health, knowledge, prosperity and social equity

The Council approved the conclusions on a sustainable blue economy after the members of the Friends of the Presidency Group - Integrated Maritime Policy had examined it.

The conclusions underline the need for sustainable ocean governance, built on a sustainable blue economy, which is part of the EU's Integrated Maritime Policy. The Council highlights the sustainable use of oceans and seas, which plays an important role in the European Green Deal agenda. A sustainable blue economy is also essential to ensuring a green and inclusive recovery from the pandemic. ([8712/1/21 REV 1](#))

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

Council decision on managing the assets of the ECSC in liquidation

The Council agreed on a general approach regarding the Council decision amending decision [2003/77/EC](#) laying down multiannual financial guidelines for managing the assets of the ECSC in liquidation and, on completion of the liquidation, the assets of the Research Fund for Coal and Steel.

The proposed decision allows payments for research in sectors related to the coal and steel industry to be financed not only from the net revenue from the investments but also from the proceeds generated by selling part of the assets. It also updates the investment guidelines with a less restrictive approach to the types of assets that are eligible for investment ([8705/21](#)).

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

Fight against organised crime

The Council today adopted conclusions setting the 2022-2025 EU priorities for the fight against serious and organised crime through the European multi-disciplinary platform against criminal threats (EMPACT). Within the EMPACT framework, EU member states, agencies and other actors will work closely together to address these key criminal threats, using tools such as law enforcement training and joint operational actions to dismantle criminal networks, their structures and business models ([8665/21](#)).

[Fight against organised crime: Council sets out 10 priorities for the next 4 years \(press release, 26 May 2021\)](#)

UN General Assembly against corruption

The Council approved the EU's position, in view of the special session of the UN General Assembly against corruption to be held on 2-4 June 2021 (UNGASS 2021).

In the EU's position, the Council authorises the Commission to support the adoption of the political declaration by the UNGASS and also outlines the key elements to be included in the EU's statement to be delivered at the UNGASS 2021.

AGRICULTURE

VPA with the Republic of Honduras on forest law enforcement

The Council decided to adopt the decision on the conclusion of a Voluntary Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Honduras on forest law enforcement, governance and trade in timber products to the European Union (8221/1/21 REV 1, [12543/20](#)).

Regulation on TSEs

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission regulation amending annexes III, V, VII and IX to regulation (EC) No [999/2001](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards genotyping of positive TSE cases in goats, the determination of age in ovine and caprine animals, the measures applicable in a herd or flock with atypical scrapie and the conditions for imports of products of bovine, ovine and caprine origin ([8422/21](#), [7581/21](#) + [ADD 1](#)).

Maximum residue levels for certain substances in or on certain products

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission regulation amending annexes II, III and V to regulation (EC) No [396/2005](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards maximum residue levels for clethodim, dazomet, hexythiazox, metam and sethoxydim in or on certain products ([8444/21](#), [7934/21](#) + [ADD 1](#) + [ADD 2](#)).

Use of polyols in energy-reduced confectionery products

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission regulation amending annex II to regulation (EC) No [1333/2008](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards the use of polyols in certain energy-reduced confectionery products ([8645/21](#), [8012/21](#) + [ADD 1](#)).