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OUTCOME OF THE COUNCIL MEETING

3809th Council meeting

Agriculture and Fisheries

Brussels, 19 July 2021

President **Jože Podgoršek**
Slovenian Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Food

P R E S S

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10952/21

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CONTENTS¹**ITEMS DEBATED**

AGRICULTURE	4
Slovenian presidency priorities	4
Organic action plan	4
Trade-related agricultural issues	4
ANY OTHER BUSINESS	5
High price of feed	5
Supporting the health conditions of bee colonies	5
Recent wildfires in Cyprus.....	5
Frost damage to olive trees	6
Catastrophic floods following extreme rainfall	6
End the Cage Age	6
Animal welfare in turkey husbandry.....	7
Prohibition of the systematic killing of male chicks in the laying hens sector.....	7
Recent occurrence of African swine fever in domestic pigs in Germany.....	7

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED*FISHERIES*

– EU tariff quotas for fish products	8
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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.

GENERAL AFFAIRS

- Countering Hybrid Threats: Conclusions on disinformation 8

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

- Council decision appointing the Chairman of the Military Committee of the European Union 8
- Council decision and implementing regulation on restrictive measures to combat terrorism 8
- Council decisions appointing the European Union Special Representatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo 9

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

- Interpol - negotiations for a cooperation agreement 9
- Schengen evaluation 9

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

- Guidelines for managing the assets of the European Coal and Steel Community in liquidation 10
- Council position on draft amending budget No 1/2021: Brexit Adjustment Reserve 10

RESEARCH

- ECSC Treaty and the Research Fund for Coal and Steel 10

EU POSITIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATIONS

- Reply to ICAO State Letter 11
- ICAO High-level conference on COVID-19 11

ENVIRONMENT

- Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission 11

TRANSPARENCY

- Transparency - Public access to documents 11

ITEMS DEBATED

AGRICULTURE

Slovenian presidency priorities

The Slovenian Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Food, Jože Podgoršek, presented the presidency's priorities in the area of agriculture and fisheries. These priorities will include the EU forestry strategy, sustainable agriculture and rural development (digitalisation, demographic challenges and the role of women), improving the position of farmers in the food supply chain, biodiversity, and food labelling (including honey blends). The presidency will also aim to conclude key ongoing legislative files, including the fisheries control regulation and the common agricultural policy reform.

Organic action plan

Ministers expressed their support both for the Commission's action plan for the development of organic production and for the Council's conclusions on this plan. Many delegations took the floor to highlight a number of aspects of the plan, including the need to boost demand for organic products by raising awareness among consumers and encouraging public institutions such as schools to supply organic food in their canteens. A number of member states also highlighted the different starting points of the member states and the need to take account of these differences.

Under the European Green Deal's 'Farm to Fork' strategy, the European Commission has set a target of 'at least 25% of the EU's agricultural land under organic farming and a significant increase in organic aquaculture by 2030'. To achieve this target and to help the organic sector reach its full potential, the Commission has put forward an action plan for organic production in the EU.

Trade-related agricultural issues

Ministers received information from the Commission regarding trade-related agricultural issues, including the effects of the COVID-19 crisis and Brexit, recent developments in EU trade relations with the US, and ongoing negotiations for new free trade agreements with Australia, Chile and New Zealand. The latest developments in WTO agriculture negotiations were also discussed, in view of the upcoming WTO ministerial conference. A number of delegations took the floor to discuss issues such as the need to ensure that agricultural imports from non-EU countries respect the same standards as EU products in terms of animal welfare and environmental measures, the importance of boosting transparency in agricultural trade, and the need for the EU to set the standard at a global level in terms of farming that is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

High price of feed

The Croatian delegation took the floor to discuss the serious situation faced by member states as a result of high feed prices, and received support from a large number of member states. The livestock sector has been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic due to the closure of hotels, restaurants and bars and the resulting impact on products destined for the hospitality industry. This already challenging financial situation has been exacerbated by the high cost of feed for livestock, which accounts for up to 80% of total costs for livestock farmers. In Croatia, prices have reached their highest levels in seven years. The Croatian delegation therefore called on the European Commission to examine all available options for stabilising the sector, either in the form of financial support or via other effective mechanisms. The European Commissioner for Agriculture, Janusz Wojciechowski, took the concerns on board and referred to a number of EU tools that were in place to support the livestock sector.

Supporting the health conditions of bee colonies

Ministers received information from the Hungarian delegation on behalf of Croatia, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy and Romania on the importance of introducing measures to support apiculture in member states. Bees provide an essential service to human populations by pollinating many of the plants they need to survive, yet their numbers are dropping at alarming rates. The delegations argued that incentives were needed to make beekeeping a more attractive profession and thus help reverse the decline in bee populations.

Recent wildfires in Cyprus

The Cyprus delegation updated ministers on the recent wildfire that caused serious damage to the environment and the agricultural sector of the island. The fire, which broke out on 3 July, led to the deaths of four agricultural workers and burned an area of around 55 km². The Republic of Cyprus requested financial assistance via the Solidarity Fund and other EU funding instruments to address this situation. Member states expressed their solidarity with Cyprus, with many noting that climate change and the resulting extreme weather was likely to have played a role in the incident.

Frost damage to olive trees

Ministers received information from the Greek delegation on the situation of its olive oil sector and in particular on the significant reduction in the fruiting of olive trees due to extreme weather conditions. Between February and April 2021, Greece was hit by several periods of frosty weather, which had had a particularly severe impact on olive trees. This led to a dramatic reduction in the production of olives and olive oil in the worst affected olive-growing areas. The delegation therefore requested the approval of financial aid for Greece to support the olive and olive-oil producers of the regions affected.

Catastrophic floods following extreme rainfall

The German delegation provided ministers with information about the recent floods in north-west Europe and their impact on agriculture in the region. Several days of heavy rain had caused severe flooding in parts of Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, leading to nearly two hundred fatalities across the region, with many more people still missing. The impact on the agricultural sector, while yet to be determined, was likely to be severe. The delegations therefore expressed their intention to make use of the EU Solidarity Fund. A number of member states expressed their sympathy with the countries concerned and noted the likely role of climate change in these and other extreme weather events.

End the Cage Age

Ministers discussed the EU's response to the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) to 'End the Cage Age'. The aim of this campaign, which received 1.4 million signatures from across the EU, is to ban the caging of farm animals such as hens, rabbits, geese, ducks, female pigs and calves. While many delegations took the floor to express their support for this initiative, they also pointed out that such a move could potentially have a negative impact on farmers, both in terms of the costs of the transition and a loss of competitiveness vis-à-vis non-EU countries. They therefore called on the Commission to carry out a full impact assessment of the initiative, as well as to provide funding for farmers transitioning away from cage systems. Finally, they pointed out the need to apply the same animal welfare standards to agricultural products imported from non-EU countries.

During the same session, ministers also discussed two other AOB points relating to animal welfare: the killing of male chicks in the egg industry and a move to standardise rules for the welfare of turkeys across all member states. Many delegations expressed their support for these initiatives, while also emphasising the need to base all measures on the latest scientific data and ensure that imports from non-EU countries abide by the same standards.

Animal welfare in turkey husbandry

The Austrian delegation provided ministers with information about the importance of improving welfare for farmed turkeys. Although turkeys are among the most commonly farmed animals in the EU, there are no mandatory welfare requirements for turkey farming at EU level, and requirements vary across member states. The delegation argued that new legislation should reflect the latest scientific findings and member states' own experiences. In particular, a study commissioned by the Austrian government found that the maximum stocking density for turkeys should not exceed 40 kilograms per square metre of usable area. The delegation therefore called for EU-wide minimum standards for the maximum stocking density, as well as awareness-raising campaigns to improve consumers' understanding of animal welfare issues. A number of delegations took the floor to express their support for this proposal, while also emphasising the need for all measures to be grounded in the latest scientific research.

Prohibition of the systematic killing of male chicks in the laying hens sector

Ministers received information provided by the French and German delegations, with the support of the Austrian, Irish, Luxembourg, Portuguese and Spanish delegations, on the need to ban the systematic killing of male chicks in the laying hens sector. Every year in the EU around 260 million male chicks are disposed of after hatching as they represent no economic value for farmers. The delegations argued that this practice, although permitted under current EU law, was ethically unacceptable. They called on the Commission to carry out an impact assessment with a view to ending the practice as part of its upcoming review of animal welfare legislation. Ministers took the floor to express their support for this proposal, while acknowledging that support would be needed for farmers to implement any new measures (both in terms of training and funding).

Recent occurrence of African swine fever in domestic pigs in Germany

The German delegation provided ministers with information about a recent outbreak of African swine fever in Brandenburg and Saxony, and outlined the German authorities' response to this incident. The Estonian delegation also took the floor to note that African swine fever had been detected on two farms near Tallinn.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

FISHERIES

EU tariff quotas for fish products

The Council adopted a regulation amending Council Regulation (EU) 2020/1706 on the inclusion of autonomous Union tariff quotas for certain fisheries products (10275/21, [10240/21](#)).

GENERAL AFFAIRS

Countering Hybrid Threats: Conclusions on disinformation

The Council has approved conclusions on Special Report No 09/2021 of the European Court of Auditors, ‘Disinformation affecting the EU: tackled but not tamed’.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

Council decision appointing the Chairman of the Military Committee of the European Union

The Council adopted a decision extending the term of office of the current chairman of the EU Military Committee from 6 to 31 May 2022, and appointing General Robert Brieger as the next Chairman of the European Union Military Committee from 1 June 2022 for a period of three years ([10335/21](#)).

Council decision and implementing regulation on restrictive measures to combat terrorism

The Council renewed the so-called EU terrorist list, which sets out persons, groups and entities subject to restrictive measures with a view to combating terrorism. The 14 persons and 21 groups and entities on the list are subject to the freezing of their funds and other financial assets in the EU. It is also prohibited for EU operators to make funds and economic resources available to them.

For more details, see the [press release](#).

Council decisions appointing the European Union Special Representatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo*

The Council extended the mandates of the EU special representatives (EUSRs) for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Johann Sattler, and Kosovo*, Tomáš Szunyog, for two years, until 31 August 2023.

For more details, see the [press release](#).

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

Interpol - negotiations for a cooperation agreement

The Council adopted two decisions authorising the opening of negotiations for a cooperation agreement between the EU and Interpol ([10263/21](#), [10264/21](#), [10407/21](#)). It has three main objectives:

- to provide the safeguards and guarantees needed to give controlled access by member states and EU agencies to Interpol databases via the European search portal,
- to regulate cooperation between Europol and Interpol (since the current cooperation agreement dates from 2001),
- to provide access to Interpol databases to Frontex and the EPPO and to allow Eurojust to exchange operational information with Interpol.

Schengen evaluation

The Council adopted an implementing decision setting out a recommendation on addressing the deficiencies identified in the 2020 evaluation of Belgium on the application of the Schengen acquis in the field of management of the external borders ([10963/21](#)).

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

Guidelines for managing the assets of the European Coal and Steel Community in liquidation

The Council adopted its decision amending Decision 2003/77/EC laying down multiannual financial guidelines for managing the assets of the ECSC (European Coal and Steel Community) in liquidation and, on completion of the liquidation, the assets of the research fund for coal and steel (10419/21 + ADD 1, 9391/21).

Council position on draft amending budget No 1/2021: Brexit Adjustment Reserve

The Council adopted its position on draft amending budget No 1/2021. The Council position makes available nearly EUR 1.7 billion (in current prices) for the Brexit adjustment reserve (BAR) in 2021. BAR foresees additional funding from the EU budget to mitigate the adverse effects of Brexit on member states and sectors that are worst affected by it.

RESEARCH

ECSC Treaty and the Research Fund for Coal and Steel

The Council adopted a Council decision amending Decision 2003/76/EC establishing the measures necessary for the implementation of the Protocol, annexed to the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the financial consequences of the expiry of the ECSC Treaty and on the Research Fund for Coal and Steel (RFCS).

The aim of the Decision is to allow the sale of a share of the assets of the ECSC in liquidation for the period 2021-2027 in order to provide an annual RFCS allocation of EUR 111 million (10310/21, 9399/21 REV 1).

EU POSITIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATIONS

Reply to ICAO State Letter

The Council endorsed the EU position on the reply to the ICAO State Letter on CORSIA periodic review (10420/21).

ICAO High-level conference on COVID-19

The Council endorsed the EU position on the ICAO High-level conference on COVID-19 (10326/21 + ADD 1-5).

ENVIRONMENT

Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

The Council authorises the Commission to enter into discussions under the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission ('HELCOM') on the endorsement of the revised Baltic Sea Action Plan and a Ministerial Statement on the occasion of the next Ministerial meeting of HELCOM, to be held on 20 October 2021 in Lübeck, Germany.

Following this authorisation, the Commission will enter into discussions on these two non-binding instruments (10552/21).

TRANSPARENCY

Transparency - Public access to documents

On 19 July 2021, the Council approved the reply to confirmatory applications:

- No 22/c/01/21 (8802/21)
- No 23/c/02/21 (8882/21)
- No 27/c/01/21 (9712/21)