"EU Agricultural Policy after 2013" - An uncertain future?

The year 2000 saw the introduction of Agenda 2000, an agricultural reform which gave rise to rural development policy – a face – albeit not a very striking one – as the second pillar of the CAP. Already by 2003, this reform had itself been reformed in the Mid-term Review. There were further changes, such as the decoupling of direct payments. In the Health Check, a further reform in 2008, the EU Commission made it clear that earlier reforms were not enough to meet new social challenges such as climate protection and the preservation of biodiversity. The Member States, however, failed to follow the proposals the Commission put forward at that time.

Last month, we here in the EESC started work on an opinion on agricultural policy after 2013. Astonishing as it may seem, we are on the brink of the fourth agricultural reform in ten years! This number alone shows that it has so far proved impossible to find a socially acceptable solution for what is such an important area of the European economy.

Our work will be about finally breathing life into the much lauded European agricultural model. By this we mean having a farming sector that does more than "just" produce raw materials for the food industry as cheaply as possible. It is about a farming sector from which the environment need not be protected, which plays its part in developing vital rural areas and creates attractive man-made landscapes, which is humane in its treatment of livestock and also has no damaging social or environmental impact beyond Europe. In short, agricultural sustainability already exists in name – but it still lacks sufficient political support.

The European agricultural model cannot be bought at world market prices – as the Committee has been pointing out for more than ten years. This is why this model – a conscious alternative to industrialised farming – needs the support of politicians and society as a whole. This will involve more than just making the appropriate dedicated funding available: agricultural policy is more than just allocating money. Stabilising markets, for example, is a CAP role that has remained unaltered in the treaties – including the new Lisbon Treaty – since 1958. But this cannot be done with money: it requires other instruments. These, however, have been progressively dismantled in recent years.

No shortage of things to discuss, then!

CEJA is the voice of Europe’s next generation of farmers to the European institutions. CEJA’s main objective is to promote a younger and innovative agricultural sector across the EU 27 and to create good working and living conditions for young people setting up in farming and those who are already “Young Farmers”. CEJA achieves this by acting as a forum for communication and dialogue between young farmers and European decision makers. Europe III asked its President to tell us more about CEJA.

EUROPE III – What will be the main activities in CEJA in the immediate future?

CEJA traditionally organises several seminars a year on different agricultural issues. Our next seminar will take place in Spain in February where we will continue our discussions on the CAP in the future. We have recently also set up a working group on this issue since it is one of our main priorities at the moment. Other working groups are dealing with climate change and risk management. Additionally, throughout 2009 and 2010, we are implementing a communication project with young farmers, including training sessions on issues such as communication, lobbying, project management, team building etc., an exchange programme between young farmers and European institutions, a photo exhibition and the realisation of two films on young farmers.

EUROPE III – Which agricultural model do young farmers want to defend? The agricultural model that provides society with safe food, maintains the landscape and delivers extra services like rural development and environmental protection schemes. All of these goods and services are produced by economic and environmental sustainable family farms. The agricultural model enables motivated young people to enter the sector and encourages them to implement innovative techniques to further develop their enterprises and to maintain a leading position in global agriculture.

EUROPE III – CEJA represents young farmers from the entire EU: what are the main problems that young farmers are facing nowadays? We are still in a situation where only 8% of farmers in Europe are under 35 years old while more than half of our farmers are older than 55. This means that many of Europe’s food producers will retire within the next 10 years. At CEJA, one of our most important tasks is to convince European policymakers that motivated young farmers, who want to start a career in agriculture, should be encouraged by special policies aimed at facilitating young entrepreneurs in the difficult start-up period. The raising of the installation aid ceiling in the Health Check was an important move in this direction but other tools such as tax advantages, low interest rates for loans, insurance schemes etc. should be used to guarantee support that is more focused on the long term development of the newly set up agri-businesses.

EUROPE III – What should the EU do to better support young farmers and keep them working on the land? I have already given some indications to this in my answer above. In CEJA, we also think that young farmers support should become obligatory and it would be great to agree on a common approach throughout Europe to avoid distortion of competition between young farmers from different countries. We should never forget that our “strategic food independence” in Europe depends on this. Or, more directly: No farmers, no food!

EUROPE III – What should be done to guarantee young farmers a better price for their produce and how can the role of the big supermarket chains in pricing be turned to the advantage of young farmers? We appreciate the initiatives that are finally being launched by the European Parliament and the Commission for more transparency in the food chain. Young farmers also have to play their part. In European agriculture we have “gold in our hands” if you look into the future. We have relatively good conditions for production, we have very high production standards and we produce safe food of the highest quality. With a predicted growing world population everybody needs us! We have to look at new possibilities for cooperation. We need to get back in touch with our markets and our consumers. This can be seen as a different approach but for young agri-entrepreneurs it is a step to take. We know the consumers of the future because we are of their age and we have them as friends, we met them in school etc. We understand their demands and we can answer their food and recreational needs in rural areas. Young farmers have to be in the middle of society and in close contact with the public, with our consumers and the food chain.

What is the European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA)?

Interview of the month

Interview with Joris BAECKE, President of CEJA
EUROPE III – Do you think that consumers understand what’s behind farming in Europe?

We often feel that society has a rather outdated image of agriculture. This is why we set up the communication project that I mentioned earlier. Organising a photo exhibition and making a film on young farmers at work might help to give a clearer idea on what farming is actually all about. We are also planning events in the future that will provide us with more direct contact with consumers such as a young farmers market, for example.

EUROPE III – In the past, the EESC and CEJA have worked closely together: what could the EESC do in order to improve and further deepen its collaboration with CEJA?

We very much appreciate that we regularly receive opinions and position papers from the EESC, that we are often asked for input to these documents and that we were invited to participate at different events of the EESC, such as a conference on mountain areas, a discussion on climate change or a seminar on least favoured regions, for example. We have also attempted to intensify our collaboration through the organisation of a joint conference. This last initiative unfortunately did not work because of different priorities on the place of the seminar but we will keep on trying and a new initiative, together with IPAF’s young farmers’ committee, is already on its way. I would also like to thank you for giving me the chance to do this interview for your newsletter and take it as a prelude to our future intensive collaboration.

EUROPE III – Will you continue farming until your retirement?

Farming is a lifestyle that I love, and I hope I will be able to live this lifestyle for many years to come,…

For more information about the CEJA, please visit their website: http://www.ceja.org/english/
Towards Sustainable European Infrastructures

I was part of an EESC delegation that attended the 17th annual conference of the European network of Environmental and Sustainable Development Advisory Council (EEAC) in Dubrovnik on 23 and 24 October. It poured with rain the whole time so there need be no sly comments about members sunning themselves on the Adriatic coast. And in fact the Conference kept us fully absorbed with a succession of significant papers and discussions. The most important discussion centered on the investment decisions that will need to be made in the near few decades about electricity supply bearing in mind that carbon emissions must be reduced by 80 to 95% by 2050. A paper from the German Scientific Council on the Environment went well beyond the usual simple call for more renewables, and analysed how both supply and demand would need to be managed to take account of the fluctuations and variability of most forms of renewable energy. It argued that having a large share of renewables in electricity production will not be compatible with nuclear and coal fired power plants providing base-load power. Wind and solar power are not constant and therefore they need to be balanced with rapidly reacting base load providers: gas turbines; small combined heat-and-power units; water storage pump and compressed air systems; and electric cars connected to the grid. This is an interesting analysis which the EESC may want to explore further in the future.

In the margins of the conference, participants spoke a lot about the new World Summit for Sustainable Development which is likely to be held in 2012 in Rio. The UN will probably take a decision on it in December. After our successful conference “Towards a world summit for SD” on 1st & 2nd October in the EESC, there is great interest among the members of the network to work closely together with us on how to give input to the preparations of such a summit. For more information on the above-mentioned conference at the EESC click here: http://www.eesc.europa.eu/sections/sd/index_en.asp?id=13100

To read more about the EEAC conference go to: http://www.eeac-net.org

Other news that matters

Skål Staffan!

Following a long tradition of cultural sharing and intercultural dialogue at the EESC, a Swedish Cultural evening was held at the Committee premises on Wednesday 4th November 2009. The event began with the opening of a photographic exhibition of the works of contemporary Swedish artists entitled: “Small parts of the world” and during the evening tasty Swedish delicacies and interesting and potent beverages were served to an enthusiastic crowd of around 400 Swedophiles!

Group III Members in the Spotlight playing a key role

This is an interesting analysis which the EESC may want to explore further in the future.

On 26-28 October, I attended the NGO Forum 09 organised in Örebro, Sweden, as part of an EESC delegation. There is a tradition within the EU to arrange a large NGO conference during each Presidency that is focused on Civil Society and Democracy. Following on from similar very successful conferences in La Rochelle, France and Brno in the Czech Republic, the Örebro Forum focused on three themes: The Democratic Deficit in the EU, Public health-Wellbeing and NGO-identity. Key note speakers introduced interesting topics, such as indicators of societal progress and well-being. Then in depth discussions were held in 12 workshops with the following topics: Active citizenship and the role of the civil society for mobilization and participation; Civil Society Organizations as Bridges, Multilevel Governance in the perspective of the Lisbon Treaty; Civil Dialogue Initiatives and code of good practice for civil participation, Indicators for Societal Progress: Taking Active Part in Society - Empowerment through volunteering and cooperation; Evidence and Added Value in public health issues; Role of volunteering and civil society in creating healthy regions; Social Measurement Methods - New Roles and Responsibilities of NGOs; Making entrepreneurship accessible to more actors through “Social Enterprises” and Financial Diversity - ways to enhance the capacity and independence of Civil Society Organisations. The final conference declaration, which contained key policy recommendations, based on conclusions from workshops, was approved by the assembly. More information including background papers and presentations can be found at www.ogeforum09.se.

Highlights of our Members’ Work in the EESC

At its plenary session on 4-5 November 2009 the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted the following opinions for which Group III members were Rapporteurs or Co-Rapporteurs.

**QUOTE OF THE MONTH**

“We must believe in luck. For how else can we explain the success of those we don’t like?”

Jean Cocteau

French poet, surrealist, novelist, dramatist, designer, boxing manager, playwright, artist and filmmaker

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**News from Group III**

Group III sends its warm congratulations to Maria Teresa Costa Macedo who has been reappointed as a Consultant to the Pontifical Council for the Family for a further five year term, by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI.

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EESC recognises the cultural, political, economic and social importance of internet-based social networking sites (SNS) and highlights the positive aspects of their growth, especially in guaranteeing and facilitating freedom of expression, creating and developing online communities, enabling people to meet or reconnect with friends and family members, etc. At the same time, however, the Committee wishes to add its voice to those of civil society organisations and associations, families and individuals who have expressed well-founded concerns as to the risks of the illegal and abusive use of SNS. In particular, the EESC wishes to draw attention to the risks linked to the use of SNS by minors and other vulnerable members of the public, especially people with poor digital literacy.

The EESC recommends that the Commission consider, in addition to good self-regulation practices, the possibility of establishing co-regulation mechanisms while, in the case of criminal activities, the EU could progressively move towards a better co-ordinated system of charges and penalties applied by the responsible national bodies. The Committee suggests to the Commission to draft a Green Paper on SNS, analysing in depth the implications of these sites and setting out the main options for future work. Civil society organisations and associations concerned should be involved in the drafting process. Lastly, the EESC recommends that Member States improve the coordination of their relevant national policies and calls on the Members of the European Parliament to place these issues at the top of their political agendas.

Lavinia ANDREI (RO)
TEN/394 “The Renewable Energy Progress Report” (EESC opinion 1160/09)

The EESC considers that climate change represents one of the most important environmental, social and economic threats facing the planet and only fast and responsible measures by all countries the Member States can mitigate its effects. However, the EU and Member States should be drivers for an ambitious climate policy. The use of renewable resources could represent one of the main tools for reducing greenhouse gases and also for ensuring energy independence and a better supply of energy for all citizens. The Committee is concerned that the EU is unlikely to reach the 2010 targets set by Directives 2001/77/EC and 2003/30/EC, and urges the Member States to take responsible measures and make every effort to achieve the agreed targets by 2010. The EESC highlights the need for a single long-term EU energy strategy. In order to fulfil their targets, Member States should diversify the technology used, ensure the supply of energy for all citizens, etc. The European Parliament has adopted a substantial adaptation strategy and an ambitious climate and energy programme which aims to reduce emissions by 20-30% by 2020. The Committee is concerned that these efforts do not address the need for a single long-term strategy that would be implemented in the whole of Europe.


NOTE: Complete texts of all EESC opinions are available in various language versions on the Committee’s website: http://eesc.europa.eu/documents/opinions/avis_en.asp?type=en

Eugene LUCAN (RO)
SOC/353 “Smoke-free environment” (EESC opinion 1715/09)

The EESC strongly maintains that effective protection from exposure to tobacco smoke should apply simply to workplaces regardless of whether they are indoor or outdoor and recommends that the wording “as appropriate, other public places” be amended to cover all public places frequented by children and young people up to eighteen years of age. The EESC considers that the emphasis in the ECJ case law has been wrongly put on the “inessential nature of public policy” which, in the case of smoking, is not justifiable. The Committee also considers that the text of the proposal should be extended to stress the importance at EU level of school-based educational and counselling strategies, to ensure that young children and young people under 18, and other such places, are properly informed of the realities of smoking and its harmful effects, and of the carcinogenic effects of exposure to environmental tobacco smoke (ETS). It also feels that reference should be made to “protection from tobacco smoke in public settings frequented by children and young people” (leisure venues, open-air and indoor discos, clubs, bars frequented by children or young people under 18, and other such places). Finally, the EESC recommends that the definition of national focal points for tobacco control should include the phrase “and for controlling/eliminating public ETS exposure”.

Soscha zu EULENBURG (DE)
SOC/366 “European Year of Volunteering 2011” (EESC opinion 1716/09)

In this additional opinion, the EESC welcomes the proposal for the European Year of Volunteering 2011, with the aim of recognising the valuable contribution made by those many citizens who, by volunteering in a variety of areas, place themselves at the service of society and social cohesion in Europe. The EESC considers that the Commission should do more to ensure that the Year is used to promote volunteering and to make it an important feature of the new Lisbon Strategy. The EESC also proposes the introduction of a new form of green euro in order to support the education of young people towards the all-electric vehicle.

Bernardo HÁRNANDEZ BATALIER (ES)
INT/881 “Delivering the benefits of the single market through enhanced administrative cooperation: progress Report on the Internal Market Information System (IMI)” (EESC opinion 1694/09)

The EESC supports the more decentralised, network-based approach for cross-border cooperation within the Internal Market Information System (IMI). The EESC believes that the system will help to guarantee effective compliance with single market rules and to adopt suitable solutions to the problems encountered by the public and businesses. In their respective Member States, civil society organisations can play an active, significant role in the implementation of the IMI and can help raise awareness about the system and how it works. As IMI will identify national obstacles preventing the Services and Professional Qualifications Directives from being properly implemented, and may extend its scope to other sectors, it would be helpful if the Commission were to define a specific warning and/or penalty system to remove these obstacles. Insofar as the transmission of data from the IMI system is subject to the scheme to protect the privacy of personal data established by Community law, the Committee recommends the notification of those concerned by the data processing and limits its scope to ensure that the data is correctly, fully and regularly informed of the procedures and its harmful effects, and that the carcinogenic effects of exposure to environmental tobacco smoke (ETS). It also feels that reference should be made to “protection from tobacco smoke in public settings frequented by children and young people” (leisure venues, open-air and indoor discos, clubs, bars frequented by children or young people under 18, and other such places). Finally, the EESC recommends that the definition of national focal points for tobacco control should include the phrase “and for controlling/eliminating public ETS exposure”.

Angelo GRASSO (IT)
ECO/265 “The European Regional Development Fund as regards the “eligibility of housing interventions in favour of marginalised communities”” (EESC opinion 1720/09)

In this opinion the EESC reiterates that for several years it has been stressing the need for less red tape and more realism in Community legislation. The EESC therefore approves the proposal. However, the EESC would make a number of comments: the “eligibility of housing interventions in favour of marginalised communities” in the EU and not only in the new Member States. Furthermore, the EESC points out that the provisions of the proposal should cover the construction of new buildings as well as the renovation of existing housing stock, and suggests that the changes to the existing regulations should be made in one go, at the same time, and that the relevant provisions are substantially facilitated. In any case, the EESC welcomes the establishment of lasting European-level structures.

The setting-up of a stakeholder platform for volunteering activities could help achieve this objective. The EESC feels that considerably more funding is urgently needed to meet the declared objectives and give due consideration to the local dimension. The stakeholders involved must be given time to prepare and implement the year effectively. The Council and the Commission should therefore take the necessary substantive and financial decisions as quickly as possible. On the basis of the evaluation report, a white paper should be drawn up indicating follow-up and future steps and measures to be taken at European level.