

Statement on CAP Reform

The Common Agricultural Policy is a crucial tool for improving the impact of farming on the environment. There is still a lot to do in this area – many problems remain with water quality and quantity, loss of biodiversity, climate change, soil erosion, etc. This is why, when the Commission made its legal proposals in 2011, I supported the continuation of direct payments to farmers, with the percentage of this money being allocated to environmental public goods justifying these payments.

Of course, the fact that we now have an agreement on the new CAP – subject to final endorsement by the Parliament - is positive. On greening, I welcome the 30% provision as a potential break-through to a more sustainable CAP. It is an important step in the right direction. But I have to add that I can only regret that the numerous exemptions, loopholes and thresholds have made the greening so complicated and at the same time have greatly lowered the level of environmental ambition. An approach that was designed to apply to almost all farms will now only be relevant for a much smaller number; and all the exceptions make it possible that very few farmers will have to change their practices to comply with greening. So if we are to avoid greenwash, the burden is now on Member States to ensure greening means what it says.

On rural development, the 30% that is earmarked for broadly environmental measures is really positive. But the possibility that Member states would move an important part of the money away from rural development to direct payments, and therefore weaken environmental progress, is real and worrying. Rural development is the main source of environmental funding in rural areas which are so important for the environment. If we value biodiversity, healthy soil and clean water, and reducing impacts on climate change, obtaining generous Rural Development funding is absolutely essential.

On cross-compliance, it makes no sense that farmers disregarding legal requirements with respect to water should receive support payments thus forcing the taxpayer into paying twice - once to support farmers for their economic activity and again to help remedy the side-effects of that activity. It is crucial that the Water Framework Directive and the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive are brought into cross compliance as fast as possible, and I count on the Council and the Parliament to live up to their commitments in this regard.

In conclusion, if I compare the final outcome of the CAP package to the Commission proposal there is a serious risk that an opportunity for the environment may have been missed. Weakening the greening part puts into question integration as an approach itself. We should now take stock of what is on the table and do all we can in the implementing measures and in the rural development measures.

Member States need to now demonstrate by their actions that the additional flexibility they asked for greening was indeed about achieving a more environmental outcome and not about avoiding environmental responsibilities. All eyes will now be on how they implement the new CAP on the ground. They shoulder great responsibility and if they choose not to deliver high levels of protection for water, soil, biodiversity, air, climate and landscape through rural funding, then the only alternative would be more legislation.

Finally, I would like to thank my colleague Dacian Cioloş for good cooperation. He worked hard and his job was far from easy.