Informal Agriculture Council

"Climate Change and Water Resources in the EU: Emerging Challenges for Agriculture"

On May 23rd, the EU Commissioner for Agriculture & Rural Development, Phil HOGAN, and the EU Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs & Fisheries, Karmenu VELLA, participate in the Informal meeting of EU Agriculture Ministers in Valetta, Malta.

The meeting, which is being held under the Maltese Presidency, discusses a paper which the Presidency has prepared under the title "Climate Change and Water Resources in the EU: Emerging Challenges for Agriculture". Ministers are asked to focus their interventions in response to four specific questions which are posed in the Presidency's paper.

The joint participation of the EU Commissioners for Agriculture and Environment at such an informal meeting of Agriculture Ministers is a new departure and reflects the shared concern that Commissioners VELLA and HOGAN have in relation to the issues of agriculture, sustainable water management and food security.

Both Commissioners welcomed the opportunity to participate in the meeting and acknowledged the work done by the Maltese Presidency in highlighting such an important issue through the preparation of the paper and the organisation of the discussion.

The joint appearance of the two Commissioners follows-on from a considerable amount of work that they and their respective services have been doing to collaborate on such an important issue, which includes the development of a Joint Action Plan to Help Transition Towards A More Sustainable Agriculture and Protection of Water in December 2016 and the publication in April 2017 of a Commission Staff Working Document on Agriculture and Sustainable Water Management in the EU.

In the Commission Staff Working Document, the two Commissioners agreed that "current EU agricultural and water legislation provides a wide variety of policy tools which could substantially help to achieve good water status" and concluded that "a wider reflection and discussion exercise with the different stakeholders to identify possible ways forward will be important." In its discussion paper, the Maltese Presidency identified the importance of the "food and water nexus", given the "inherent dependency that the agricultural sector has in freshwater resources."

Ahead of the informal meeting of ministers in Malta, Commissioner HOGAN recalled his opening speech to at the GFFA High Level Panel on "Food Security and Water Management" in Berlin in January, in which he said "our ambition must place sustainable water management at the very top of the agenda. Farming and food production are water-intensive industries, so if we want to meet the
global demand for more and better food, we need to continue to develop production systems and technologies to make agriculture more productive and efficient, but also greener and more resource-efficient.”

Commissioner VELLA reiterated what he said at the EU Agricultural Outlook Conference on Climate Change in Brussels: "Agriculture directly depends on an abundance of natural resources and we need to pay much more attention to the interactions between agriculture and water. It's a two-way process, with benefits for both. We need to ensure that agriculture doesn't cause water quality or quantity to fall, and that it actually helps improve the quality of our waters."

The two Commissioners committed themselves to continuing to forge ahead with their collaboration, in order to progress on all areas such as improving policy implementation, enhancing governance, boosting necessary investments and better support for knowledge and innovation.