

Commissioner Hogan on CAP budget: decision lies now with co-legislators

EESC wants better protection of farmers in both FTAs and the food supply chain – calls for climate change to be factored into CAP policies

On 20 February, the **European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)** met with Commissioner Hogan to talk about the future CAP.

In his speech, Commissioner Hogan stressed that Europeans were strongly in favour of keeping agricultural policy at European level because they acknowledged that it added value to their lives by guaranteeing food security and ensuring a level playing field within the single market. However, it was also important that the CAP evolved; apart from food supply, the CAP should also provide other public goods in exchange for its special position in the EU budget.

This is why the Commission has issued a proposal for a future CAP which is more ambitious with regard to the environment and climate.

As regards the budget, the Commissioner defended the Commission's proposal for the CAP under the current circumstances, since 96 cents out of every euro paid to farmers for 2014-2020 is protected going forward towards 2027.

"Furthermore, Member States, working in co-decision with the European Parliament, have full freedom to increase their overall budget with a view to keeping the CAP at its current level," the Commissioner stressed. "I believe that it is important that it comes to a swift agreement on the MFF, because farmers need certainty and stability regarding policy and budget. It is now up to our co-legislators to deliver quickly, particularly with regard to developments like Brexit," the Commissioner said.

The Commissioner also mentioned the political agreement on a new rule to ban certain unfair trading practices in the food supply chain, to which the EESC has substantially contributed with its opinion and on which a vote will be held at the EP plenary in March.

Regarding trade agreements, Mr Hogan reported on substantial progress in negotiations with Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates which are delivering further trade benefits for Europe's exporting agri-food companies. For every 1 billion euro in agri-food exports, over 20 000 jobs in rural areas and agri-businesses are supported. In this regard, the EU-Japan agreement is an important step forward, since around 85% of tariff lines will enter Japan duty-free in future.

Last but not least, Phil Hogan gave a short outline of the Commission's relations with Africa. The intention is to build a true and fair partnership that focuses on mutual economic interest and is fully in line with Africa's Agenda 2063. The aim is to boost investments and create jobs – around 10

million jobs for young Africans in the next 5 years. However, the mobilisation of all EU Member States and all African partners is crucial to meet this goal.

During the debate with the Commissioner, **John Bryan**, member of the Diversity Europe Group and spokesperson for the farmers category, said: “We appreciate your close relationship with the EESC and support your work for a strong CAP, with a strong budget. Indeed, we see the CAP as one of the major success stories in the EU in terms of peace and cohesion. The EESC believes that the new delivery model will contribute positively.”

Maurizio Reale, member of the Employers Group and president of the NAT section, pointed out that a future CAP must focus more on climate change. He also referred to trade negotiations, saying: “We need to value the work of our farmers and entrepreneurs and therefore give greater attention to FTAs in order to protect our farmers.”

Peter Schmidt, member of the Workers Group and president of the SDO, admitted that the steps ahead are promising, but that much remains to be done. “We need to address unfair practices in the food chain more effectively, to include the Sustainable Development Goals in our food policy and to impose on food imports the high standards we demand of our producers. We believe that we need to invest in Africa’s own supply chain and in many more jobs to ensure sustainable development there.”