

European Alliance Group



CAP negotiations a priority for all of Europe

■ *Mr Jerzy Zajacka, Chairman of the EA Group, Mayor of Lubianka*

The reform of the CAP (Common Agriculture Policy), due to take effect after 2013, represents one of the most important subjects of political debate today. The debate on its future is currently in full swing, with social consultations now entering into their final stages. The findings of the social consultations at the European Commission conference held in Brussels from 19 to 20 July and attended by Commissioner Dacian Cioloş were very constructive and deserve particular mention in this respect. The concise nature of both the plenary debate and the thematic group discussions marked an important contribution, and helped to identify a number of new opportunities for providing the CAP with a new structure. Agriculture clearly has a far-reaching and universal bearing on society at large. Equally universal is the expectation that the CAP's main objectives should address issues such as ensuring food safety and access to food, respect for the environment and the preservation of the rural landscape, as well as maintaining the high quality of the EU's agricultural produce. We need a strong rural policy and should protect the wealth of our local

and regional diversity. At the same time, the CAP must remain a common policy. The success and very identity of the European Union is founded on its territorial diversity, which should be seen as a vital part of its heritage. The European Union pursues an active rural development policy, seeking to achieve a number of important objectives benefiting people in rural areas, such as higher living standards or the protection and development of rural regions. We should build on the experiences of the years 2004 to 2011 in order to help speed up the process of evening out the differences in local development and the living conditions of people in rural areas, a fact of life in a number of Member States and regions. We expect solidarity and a fair distribution of CAP resources among farmers from across the whole European Union – without discriminating between “new” and “old” Member States – together with a stronger economic and productive role for farmers.

As I already emphasised, the EA Group believes that agriculture provides an important source of employment today, and that it can continue to do so in the future. We are in favour of maintaining the CAP's current structure, which earmarks funding for rural development as well. The funds allocated under the second pillar for rural development need to be increased as their current levels are insufficient to allow the necessary development projects to get off the ground. The lack of a second pillar with appropriate funding can only further deepen the developmental disparities which already exist between rural and urban regions today.

Rural areas represent more than just agriculture. At the same time, agriculture often provides the backbone for economic development in these regions. We should therefore talk about a cohesive and sustainable policy ensuring that people living in these areas have a higher standard of living and the security they need for their families to develop. We consider families to be the cornerstone of

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cohesion. We should therefore strive to provide them with the conditions they need to thrive. Rural areas have an increasingly ageing population. We must take this into account when creating mechanisms encouraging young people to stay and build a future in rural areas. There is a need to stimulate structural change in the agricultural sector by making it easier for young people with the right skills to acquire or set up their own farms.



“Adam Banaszak, EA group coordinator in the NAT commission in cooperation with the local and regional authority in Inowroclaw organized a seminar in Poland on: “The development of a sustainable food supply chain as a factor in the integrated development of urban and rural areas”

"We want to ensure that any decentralisation process undertaken by the candidate countries goes hand in hand with a greater inclusion of cities and regions in the EU integration process",

Chairperson of the JCC, Mrs. Linda Gillham



European Alliance Group stresses the importance of a coherent EU Strategy for the Danube, in Tulcea (Romania)



During the European Alliance meeting, held in Tulcea on the 18th June and which was hosted by the EA Member, Emil

Drăghici, Mayor of Vulvana Băi, discussion focussed on the importance of the EU Strategy on the Danube in order to tackle common challenges of the region in the field of transport, environment (protection of biodiversity in the Danube basin, common solutions on flood prevention, water

management and clean water), socio-economic dimension but also protection of culture and regional identity.

Member States and the regions bordering the Danube have to develop macro-regional strategies and provide them with content. EU Institutions and the Member States have to define the scope of the term 'macro-region', as well as its future role, its consistency with the EU's regional development policies and its compliance with common European interests.

Members of the EA group see huge potential for territorial cooperation, where projects and best practices are shared at the local level. The strategy is considered by members of the group effective if Member States, in close partnership with local and regional authorities, take actions to reduce vulnerability to climate change extreme events such as deforestation, floods, droughts, improve the water quality, reduce pollution and chemical contamination, protect natural habitats and species, consolidate social and cultural cohesion as well as contribute to create a clear European identity in the region.

On 17 June members took part in a study visit of the Danube Delta. This was particularly relevant for members as it gave clear examples of the rich biodiversity of the Danube and measures which need to be taken to preserve the natural and cultural heritage of the Danube Delta.

Rhodri Glyn Thomas meets EP Committee Chair to discuss future of CAP



Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM, Committee of the Regions representative from the National Assembly for Wales met the Chair of the European Parliament Agriculture Committee and Head of Commissioner

Cioloş' cabinet during a 2-day visit to Brussels (15-16 September), focusing on the future of the Common Agriculture Policy. Rhodri, as Chair of the Rural Development Sub-Committee at the Assembly - with fellow members from this committee - presented the key findings from the inquiry they undertook into the future of CAP earlier this year.

The Sub-Committee's report, which was launched at the Royal Welsh Show on 20 July, calls on the Welsh Government to ensure that reform of the European Union's agricultural support policy does

not lead to a loss of income for Welsh farmers, and to make protecting the CAP budget a priority for its negotiation strategy, so that Wales does not end up with a reduced sum of money after 2013.

"Evidence gathered during the inquiry highlighted the importance of the CAP to the Welsh agricultural industry and rural Wales more generally, so the committee felt a duty to get involved in the debate of its future post-2013," said Committee Chair Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM.

"Income from the CAP's Single Farm Payment currently accounts for 90 per cent of average farm income in Wales, so its importance for Welsh farmers must not be underestimated.

"This report seeks to set a marker for the Welsh Government regarding how it should be representing Wales' interests during the negotiation process.

"I hope that this report will provide a useful starting point for the debate in Wales on the future of CAP and that the Welsh Government will take the Committee's findings on board."

The report also recommends that the Welsh Government utilises the influence of Welsh MEPs and builds alliances with other EU regions with which it has a commonality of interest on CAP reform, to maximise its influence and bargaining power. It states that the provision of adequate income for farmers and ensuring food security should remain key objectives of the CAP, and that support for food production in less favoured areas such as the Welsh uplands should be protected. It recommends the introduction of environmental security as a new key objective, so that the CAP is relevant for current challenges and secures new sources of income for Welsh farmers through the provision of environmental services.



SECONDARY
SCHOOLS
COMPETITION
2010

EA/CoR Secondary Schools Competition – where young people express their views on major issues affecting the European Union



Young people with ages between 14-17 has been brought into focus in the first half of 2010, when members of the EA group decided to organize the “Secondary Schools Competition” in their regions. The competition has been launched in February in eight different member states of the European Union.

The aim of the project was to teach young generations more about the European Union, and to listen their opinion about different issues which are affecting their regions.

Since 2010 is the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, members of the EA group launched the essay competition on the topic: “In your view, how should the European Union act to combat poverty in the regions?” The EA group wants a European Union reflective of citizens needs. Members consider it important to listen the youngs’ opinion about the problems of society and to teach them on collective responsibility.

In 2000 through the Lisbon strategy the European Union committed itself to make a decisive eradication of poverty by 2010. Poverty does not affect just the well-being of people, but also the ability to take an active part in the life of the society.

Best essay writers from eight member states have been awarded with a visit to the Committee of the Regions in Brussels, meeting representatives of different regional and local authorities, giving them an inside view on the work of the European Institutions. During the two days visit in Brussels, the pupils and their guardian teachers had also the opportunity to learn more about Brussels, as headquarter of different EU institutions, as well as a capital city, its history and present. Members and participants considered the project of a huge success, committing themselves to future continuation of such events.



Mr Krochmal with his delegation in the Committee of the Regions



“My Region, My Christmas” – Drawing Competition designed by the EA Group

The Committee of the Regions’ European Alliance group is organizing a drawing competition for children between 7 – 14 years. The slogan of the competition is “My region, my Christmas”. The drawings must illustrate the Christmas period in the regions of European Union. Young artists should also write a short description of the Christmas traditions in their regions. The aim of the drawing competition is to engage children in a creative exercise to identify the role of Christmas traditions in their regions and support their creativity and innovative ideas expressed through art.

The nomination of participating primary schools belongs to members of the EA group, the secretariat of the group being the coordinator of the competition. Best drawings from each school need to be sent to the EA group’s secretariat, which will be exposed in the Committee of the Regions building in Brussels during the month of December 2010.

Further information about the competition can be read on the website of the EA group:

www.ea.cor.europa.eu

EA member undertakes CoR opinion on health strategy 2008-2013



Mr Adam Banaszak, Member of Pomorskie Region Council and EA group coordinator in the NAT commission, has been appointed rapporteur for the CoR opinion on the "The role of local and regional authorities in the implementation of the Health Strategy 2008-2013". His opinion will be adopted by the NAT Commission on 14 October

2010. The Strategy's key principle is that, "health is the greatest wealth", and it identifies the health of Europe's population as prerequisite for productivity and prosperity. Local and regional authorities are directly concerned by the implementation of the Health Strategy 2008-2013, since, in a number of Member States, they are responsible for both health promotion and healthcare. Regions and local health players are often responsible for the planning, management, operation and development of the health sector. Moreover, they also frequently bear financial responsibility for this area too; they are close to grassroots concerns and thus have a profound understanding and knowledge of the health field.

Brian Meaney appointed rapporteur on EU Wide Biomass Sustainability Requirements



European Alliance member Cllr Brian Meaney was appointed rapporteur on the opinion "Sustainability requirements for the use of solid and gaseous biomass sources in electricity, heating and cooling. The European Commission for the moment does not intend to set a binding harmonized scheme for biomass and is keener in

giving recommendations for national action instead. However, some Member States consider that binding sustainability criteria are necessary to ensure the environmental sustainability of biomass energy production. The ENVE commission will have an exchange of views on this matter on 22 September.

Dr Uno Silberg observes elections in Georgia



EA Vice President, Dr. Uno Silberg took part in a joint CoR-Council of Europe delegation to observe Georgia Municipal election on 30 May. From what the delegation could see, the elections "were conducted in a transparent, inclusive and professional manner", the delegation reported.

However, the delegation identified some shortcomings which need to be addressed ranging from the unclear distinction between government activity and political parties, media ownership and fair access to the opposition parties, to the significant presence of people in the vicinity of polling station seeming to undertake political activity.

Dr Uno Silberg said he welcomed the fact that the country has made a lot of improvements in the organisation of elections over the years and expressed his hope that feedbacks given by the CoR-CoE delegation to Georgian local authorities might be of help for the future elections to reach even higher standards.

Croatia comes closer to Clearing the final obstacles to EU membership



Chances for Croatia to close accession negotiations by the end of year are high,

provided if manages to successfully complete the reform of the judiciary sector and privatising state owned shipyards.

Croatia has been working hard in the last few years to fulfil the membership criteria. As of today 22 out of 35 chapters have been provisionally closed.

However, the EU will not to make any allowances and definitely wants to avoid any problems that premature accession might bring. The economic crisis and the support the EU has been giving recently to Greece is another reason for the EU to be even more cautious and to grant accession only when member states are fully ready.

The next CoR-Croatia JCC meeting in November will allow members of the committee to assess the state of play with negotiations and draw some conclusions.

However, as per its role, the CoR will mainly focus on the local and regional perspective without interfering in the national negotiation process.

"We want to ensure that any decentralisation process undertaken by the candidate countries goes hand in hand with a greater inclusion of cities and regions in the EU integration process", the Chairperson of the JCC, Mrs. Linda Gillham declared.

"The CoR role is to offer our experience to our Croatian counterparts and make sure we respond to their requests for assistance and advice, In particular, our eastern European colleagues who have gone through a similar process recently are best placed to help the Croatian local authority members be aware of the most common difficulties of this crucial stage and to share how they went about resolving them.", she added.

