Advancing African agriculture - Proposal for agricultural development and food security in Africa

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Luisa **MORGANTINI** (GUE/NGL, IT) welcoming the Commission's communication entitled "Advancing African Agriculture - Proposal for continental and regional level cooperation on agricultural development in Africa". The report pointed out that in Africa, up to 80% of the population live in rural areas and 73% of the rural population in Africa consists of smallholder subsistence farmers, dependent for a large part of their livelihood on food production through farming or livestock keeping.

Parliament agreed with the Commission's view that for growth to have a poverty reducing effect, it needs to be broad-based, smallholder oriented and result in enhanced labour opportunities, but regretted that this statement appeared only in the annexed Staff Working Document and not in the text of the Communication itself. It concurred that competitiveness on regional and international markets was a priority, underlining the importance of giving support to small producers. Parliament stressed the importance of **integrating regional markets in Africa** and of gradually lifting barriers between African countries in order to enlarge markets for producers. It emphasised the important role which the EU should play, in international institutions such as the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, defending vigorously the right of African States to protect national and regional markets on the African continent against imports threatening the survival of local producers of essential agricultural products. It hoped that such an approach would not remain an isolated case but would form part of a mechanism enabling civil society and democratic institutions in Europe and Africa to participate. The Commission was asked to set in motion a process of negotiation with parliaments and civil society actors regarding their roles in implementing and monitoring the Joint EU-Africa Strategy. It regretted the fact that in the EU-Africa Joint Strategy, the problems relating to rural development and food security in Africa are only briefly outlined, and hoped that this would be compensated by more substance in the Action Plan that is foreseen to accompany the Joint Strategy.

Members expressed concern at the lack of clarity as regards the Communication's decision-making process, both within the EU and outside (as it relates to negotiations with African governments). They called for **greater transparency** in the negotiations which the Commission was conducting with African governments for the purpose of establishing EU-AU cooperation in respect of agricultural development in Africa. The proposal to cooperate mainly with African continental and regional organisations, notably the AUC, NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development) and RECs (Regional Economic Communities), should also involve mechanisms to include interest groups, grassroots movements and civil society to enable poor rural farmers to influence policy processes in a meaningful way.

On food aid, Parliament called for international bodies to implement policies which would gradually take the place of **food aid** by promoting support for local agriculture. Should food aid be the sole alternative, it insisted that priority be given to local purchases, and/or purchases in areas adjacent to a country in difficulty or in the region.

It went on to stress that **EU policies in different fields should be coherent** as to their overall objectives. EU trade policy and the Common Agricultural Policy should be coherent with the EU development policy. Parliament therefore stressed the need to lift tariff barriers on all agricultural products - raw and processed goods - in order to open the European market for all agricultural products from the African continent.

There must be a timetable leading to the abolition of agricultural export policies which are damaging to vulnerable agricultural businesses in the developing countries.

The resolution recognised the opportunities afforded by **EPAs** in facilitating agricultural trade, but reminded the Commission, in this connection, that those agreements have not yet been signed and that there are still a number of contentious issues to be resolved. The EPAs could become an important tool for African trade and regional integration, but only on condition that they are "development-friendly", allowing for exemptions and long transition periods where needed in order for domestic producers and "infant" industries to adapt to new market situations. Parliament stressed the need for policies to counter imports of devastating agri-food products which are damaging to local production and which take into account the geographical, historical and cultural diversity of African countries. It regretted the fact that the Communication lumped together the market in **biofuels** with other niche markets, since the expansion of the emerging biofuels industry could also have a detrimental effect on foods supplies, given that the growing of biomass could take land, water and other resources away from agricultural production. Parliament insisted that the production of biofuels were of potentially high importance to the agriculture in African countries, but that the environmental benefits depend largely on the type of energy crop as well as on the energy absorbed in the whole production chain, whereas the real benefits in terms of CO2 reduction still need to be ascertained. The highest priority should be given to avoid the possible damage to nature and the environment of an uncontrolled increase of the production of biofuels.

Parliament drew attention to the inconsistency of the Communication, which highlights the importance of the **role played by women in African agricultural production**, but does not mention them in the chapter concerning areas of cooperation. Agricultural development measures in Africa should be directed first and foremost towards women, with specific policies being introduced to ensure access to and control over productive resources, particularly land rights, capacity building, funding for micro-enterprises, better living conditions, food and health welfare, education and more active involvement in social and political life. The Communication also misses a seemingly obvious point that aid should be directed, as a priority, to the less-favoured groups and less-favoured areas (remote rural areas - RRAs) first, where geographical isolation and physical constraints on agricultural productivity exacerbate the level of chronic poverty.

Parliament went on to stress the importance of promoting **micro-finance instruments**, particularly micro-credit programmes, as an essential component in economic development policies in the agricultural sector. It called on African governments to promote agrarian reform in their countries in order to allow the rural population secured **access to land** and to production resources, particularly in the case of country families who have no property title. The Action Plan accompanying the Joint EU-Africa Strategy should put a high priority on the establishment and improvement of land registries, and the strengthening of legal systems to allow tribunals to enforce property law.

Members called on the EU to promote a more effective integration of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) national plans into the national development strategies of African partners. They invited the Commission to build effective collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) based on the comparative advantages of these institutions in the field of agricultural and rural development. They supported efforts at national and regional level to involve rural stakeholders and their representative organisations in the consultation process on policy issues which affect them, noting that capacity building in people-centred advocacy for rural populations is essential to this process.

Lastly, the report emphasised the need for European countries to honour the commitment to achieving a lasting **peace as a precondition of food security** and thus to put a particular priority to the promotion of peace. It urged the governments of both North and South to seek peaceful solutions to conflicts.