

Agenda 2000: financing of the common agricultural policy

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The Committee has adopted a position broadly endorsing the package of Agenda 2000 farm reforms, in the light of the deal struck at the Berlin Summit and with certain reservations. Although the committee, chaired by Juan Luis COLINO SALAMANCA (PES, E), is not entirely happy with the Berlin agreement, it finds it more acceptable than the original, more drastic, Commission proposals and does not want to hold up the CAP reforms. "In many areas my Group is not satisfied ... but we cannot open up Pandora's Box again", said German Socialist Klaus REHDER, echoed by Livio FILIPI (EPP, I) who said: "We must be realistic. We have done what we can. Public opinion thinks the results are the best that can be obtained." The MEPs' main reservations are set out in a dozen compromise amendments adopted at the committee's last meeting before the European elections. These amendments reflect compromises hammered out with the Commission and Council and will be tabled in plenary next month, as the committee's "last word", replacing the amendments on those points adopted in plenary in November and January. The Dutch MEPs, Jan SONNEVELD (EPP) and Jan MULDER (ELDR), reporting on aid for the applicant countries and the financing of the CAP respectively, did not table any compromise amendments with the Commission and Council. This means that the amendments adopted in plenary in November and January will be tabled again in May. Mr Sonneveld calls in particular for a consultative committee to be set up to examine the reforms planned by the CEECs with a view to joining the EU, and for tighter financial controls. Mr Mulder's amendments leave open the suggestion of co-financing, or shifting some CAP funding to the Member States, although this has been ruled out by the Council. He also calls for a reserve to mop up unspent Guarantee funds. MEPs will debate the entire package of Agenda 2000 reforms. The farm legislation will probably be passed by the Agriculture Council. Although, under the consultation procedure, the content of the EP's formal opinions on the CAP reforms is not legally binding, the proposals cannot become law without them. They will also be an important political statement and will provide a basis for the work of the new parliament which will be faced with the next round of discussions on CAP financing. After Parliament postponed delivering its formal opinions on the CAP proposals in November and January because the Commission could not accept its amendments, the EP held a series of informal 'conciliation' talks with the Council, in which it was able to bring some pressure to bear, resulting in the Council accepting many of Parliament's demands.