

The integration of new Member States in the Common agricultural policy CAP

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Csaba Sándor TABAJDI (PSE, HU) on the integration of the new Member States into the CAP. Without minimising the positive effects of enlargement on the agricultural sector in both the old and new Member States, MEPs underlined that the integration of the new Member States into the CAP had not always been easy and called, therefore, for a substantial revision of the "scope, objectives, goals and principles of the CAP".

The report noted that adapting to the conditions and rules required in application of the CAP - especially the veterinary, phytosanitary, food safety, common market organisation and other horizontal rules - had required considerable efforts from farmers and administrations in the new Member States. Although the EU-financed pre-accession programmes and twinning programmes had proved to be useful in preparing for integration into the CAP, "the original goals were only partially achieved and the efficiency of the Community measures was limited".

Moreover, the low level of direct payments in the first years of the phasing-in period had not only hindered the necessary adaptation of the agricultural sector of new Member States but also created unequal conditions for competition on the internal market, which many operators were economically unable to cope with. In several new Member States the producers had lost ground even on their domestic markets, largely as a result of competition resulting from an increase in imports and exports from third countries due to the changed customs regime.

MEPs pointed out that the new Member States were forced to apply complementary national direct payments (CNDP, top-up), which amount to a form of co-financing and a quasi-renationalisation of Community direct payments. This had imposed a burden on national finances and led to serious political and economic difficulties in various new Member States. The report called on the Commission, in the context of simplifying and rationalising the implementation of the CAP, the direct payment schemes and the rural development programmes, to take account of the problems faced primarily by the new Member States and to propose appropriate solutions.

Looking at the future of the CAP in the enlarged EU, the committee said that "the present CAP is unsuitable to manage a substantial part of agricultural and agriculture-related problems" and that the decoupling of the direct payments, forced by the WTO, would not contribute fully to the establishment of a suitable agricultural sector and rural society. It said that "either additional measures or tailor-made application of the direct payments are necessary". MEPs stressed that the CAP "must be kept on the Community level in the framework of a reformed CAP and any renationalisation of the CAP should be avoided". And they emphasised that "all possible factors", including the experiences of the new Member States and the diversity and variety of European agriculture, should be duly taken into account in the future reform of the CAP.

Among its other recommendations, the report called for appropriate EU funding to promote the production of biomass and bioenergy on land no longer required for growing food and feed. It also underlined that fulfilment of the specific needs of the Member States and regions should be maintained on the basis of subsidiarity, through measures such as: a revised system of direct payments, including the introduction of new measures such as voluntary recoupling options, to be used only by those States which consider this

necessary to meet social and employment objectives; introduction of an efficient agricultural crisis management system with Community financial assistance, paid from the national envelopes; and increased flexibility of the state aid rules.