

**HUNGARIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE VISEGRÁD GROUP
JULY 2017 – JUNE 2018**

**JOINT DECLARATION OF THE MINISTERS OF AGRICULTURE OF
THE VISEGRAD GROUP (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia)
AND CROATIA
on the Commission Communication on The Future of Food and Farming**

Budapest, 25 January 2018

We, the Ministers of Agriculture of the Visegrad Group and Croatia met in Budapest on the 25th of January 2018 upon the invitation of Hungary currently holding the V4 Presidency and discussed and agreed our common position on the Commission Communication on The Future of Food and Farming.

In this regard we

- (1) WELCOME the Commission Communication on The Future of Food and Farming published on 29th November 2017, but HIGHLIGHT that further explanations and clarifications are needed from the Commission on what the proposed changes will exactly mean in practice.
- (2) STRESS that CAP guarantees the functioning of the Single Market in the EU agri-food sector and provides EU citizens with high-quality safe food, plays a key role in strengthening the vitality of rural areas and contributes to the preservation of natural resources and landscape.
- (3) EMPHASIZE that the CAP should remain a highly integrated and a truly common policy, for which the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) should provide appropriate financial resources for fulfilling its objectives.
- (4) AGREE with the Communication in preserving the two pillar structure of the Common Agriculture Policy and in considering that direct payments should remain an essential part of the CAP in line with its EU Treaty obligations.
- (5) SUPPORT the Commission's willingness to reach further simplification and modernisation of the CAP.
- (6) CALL ATTENTION to a common concern that the new delivery model which aims to provide Member States with higher flexibility in designing their policy choices and means of implementation could also run astray if strategic plans entail time-consuming

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planning procedures and generate more red tape. Furthermore, it may increase the financial risk to Member States, it could also be seen as a step in the direction of the gradual renationalisation of the CAP, while also possibly jeopardizing the proper functioning of the single market.

- (7) INVITE the Commission to provide, in a timely manner, explanation on the implementation of the new delivery model and in particular, how it will contribute to the simplification of the CAP.
- (8) STRESS that a late Commission approval of CAP strategic plans might jeopardise the continuity of granting direct payments and would result in a high political and economic risk. UNDERLINE that with respect to legal certainty there is a need to avoid contradictions between the enhanced flexibility for Member States and Commission approval along Commission-set objectives.
- (9) EMPHASIZE that the new proposed system of obligatory environmental measures should not increase the administrative burden of farmers and national authorities.
- (10) UNDERLINE the need to ensure smooth, transparent and efficient transition to the post 2020 rules, both for farmers and national administrations, without prejudicing the outcome of political discussion on the future of CAP.
- (11) REGRET that the Communication does not contain a reference to voluntary coupled support and HIGHLIGHT that these payments - in accordance with current WTO rules under the blue box - provide an essential contribution to maintaining economic activity in rural areas and bolster rural employment. UNDERLINE that these payments should be maintained even with a wider scope and more ambitious financial resources.
- (12) HIGHLIGHT that Member States should continue to have the possibility to choose the most appropriate payments scheme fit to their local specificities and needs from a menu of decoupled, coupled and simplified lump-sum payments. EMPHASIZE that the Single Area Payment Scheme (SAPS) proved to be efficient and popular among farmers, therefore it should be kept as an option for the future as well and made available to all Member States.
- (13) BELIEVE that the financially strong second pillar should focus on balancing development differences in the agricultural sector, strengthening the position of producers and processors on the global market by creating conditions which stimulate development of economic, social and environmental-oriented activities in rural areas,

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while ensuring the sustainable use and preservation of the natural resources and landscape.

- (14) AGREE with the importance of advisory services in rural development, but STRESS that it would be too strict to be a basic requirement for adopting the strategic plans.
- (15) SUPPORT Commission's opinion on an increasing role of innovations and new technologies and on a need to strengthen farm advisory services. CAP solutions addressing these issues should better consider the needs of small and medium farms, whose opportunities to participate in technological progress are much smaller than those of large farms.
- (16) UNDERLINE that the CAP Treaty objectives, particularly with regard to stabilising agricultural markets, must be implemented effectively so as to prevent crisis situations in agriculture. This requires a more active use of the instruments establishing common organisation of agricultural markets, as well as the introduction of new and more effective mechanisms for crisis prevention and management.
- (17) AGREE that helping farmers to benefit more from the market requires further boost of their cooperation in producer organisations, associations, producer groups and other organizations. BELIEVE that extension of support instruments for organizations and groups could strengthen the position of agricultural producers in the food chain.
- (18) SUGGEST that agricultural investments should continue to be important elements of the next CAP. UNDERLINE that predominance of non-refundable funds in rural development programmes should be retained, and financial instruments should only complement grant-based support. Member States should be able to continue prioritising between investment and other support measures.
- (19) BELIEVE that equal access to CAP funds should be ensured for all farms.
- (20) In addition to the above points shared by all delegations
 - Poland and Slovakia POINT OUT that differences in direct payments per hectare persist yet among Member States, therefore CALL to complete the process of their full convergence. UNDERLINE that all EU farmers have to meet the same standards and requirements and face the same challenges.
- (21) CALL UPON the Commission, the European Parliament and the Member States to take this declaration into consideration when designing the new Common Agriculture Policy.

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Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of
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Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech
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Ministry of Agriculture of Hungary

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural
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