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NOTE

From: Presidency
On: 24 July 2023
To: Delegations

Subject: Joint letter of Ministers of Agriculture on maintaining the essential competence of the Special Committee on Agriculture (SCA) to prepare decisions of the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council

Delegations will find in Annex a joint letter from the Ministers of Agriculture, received today by the President of the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council, Mr Luis Planas Puchades, on maintaining the essential competence of the Special Committee on Agriculture (SCA) to prepare decisions of the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council.

 **Federal Ministry**
Republic of Austria
Agriculture, Forestry, Regions
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Joint letter of Ministers of Agriculture on maintaining the essential competence of the Special Committee on Agriculture (SCA) to prepare decisions of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council

Vienna, 24 July 2023

Dear President, dear Luis,

The common agricultural policy (CAP), as one of the longest standing and fully integrated EU policies, has never been more relevant than it is today. The current global geopolitical circumstances, as well as the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic placed the issue of food security right back to the top of the European and global political agenda.

Throughout its existence, the CAP proved to be the best tool that the EU has at its disposal to ensure an adequate level of high quality and affordable food for its citizens, thus significantly contributing to the social cohesion of the EU, as well as to its goal of open strategic autonomy.

The policy goals of the CAP as enshrined in the treaties have only gained in importance. At the same time, the CAP also happens to be one of the most effective tools in the process of transformation towards a more sustainable Union. The biggest challenge for the agricultural sector today is to continuously ensure sufficient supply of food within the EU and beyond, whilst also contributing towards the fulfilment of environment and climate related goals, as set out in the European Green Deal. As a result of demanding and long lasting, but ultimately successful negotiations, this challenging balance is well reflected in the political agreement on the last CAP reform.

Throughout this negotiation process, just like in numerous other important political and technical discussions, the role of the Special Committee on Agriculture (SCA) was indispensable.

The SCA was established by a decision of the Council of 20 July 1960. With this act, the Council confirmed its mandate as formulated in the Decision of the representatives of the governments of the Member States of 12 May 1960, namely to prepare decisions of the Agriculture Council. Over its 63-year-old history this Committee has continuously shown its relevance and worth, not only as a political body, but also as the group of the first-rate technical experts capable of taking quick and informed decisions when needed. This was for example the case during the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's war on Ukraine.

It is exactly for the reasons listed above that the Member States have repeatedly confirmed their decision to retain the essential role and competence of the SCA, whenever the working methods of the Council and its preparatory bodies were discussed. Most recently, this happened on 4 June 2021 when the Permanent Representatives Committee approved the mandates of the Council working parties to align them with the new framework and structures. In its decision, the COREPER confirmed that the working party on Horizontal Agricultural Questions - dealing with issues related to the CAP - reports to the SCA. Before that, during a similar process on the revision of the Council working methods, finalized on 16 July 2020, Member States confirmed that the SCA should remain the sole competent body for the preparations of the Council discussions when dealing with the CAP.

With all this in mind, the co-signing Ministers consider that it is timely to underline again their insistence that the essential competence and role of the SCA in preparation of CAP-related matters for Agriculture and Fisheries Council continues to be respected. Particularly in the current context of various transformations and shifting geopolitical circumstances, we must focus on ensuring global food security and dedicate our full and undivided attention to strengthening the CAP's ability to deliver on its Treaty defined goals. An essential element of this is to continue to use the appropriate means to taking swift and necessary decisions.

The system that was designed by the founders of the European Union and that has appropriately and successfully served the Member States and the Union at large for the past 63 years should thus remain stable, with the SCA as its cornerstone.

Norbert Totschnig

Austrian Federal Minister of Agriculture,
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