Title

On the 20th of November, the European Parliament rubber–stamped the agreement on the Common Agriculture Policy and the Council of Agriculture ministers will likely do the same on the 16th of December. The new CAP deal, a result of two years of negotiations among the European Commission, Parliament and Member States, is far from fulfilling the promises of greening, simplicity and fairness made by the three institutions. On the contrary, it risks being a set-back for the environment, farming and citizens. All eyes are now on the elaboration of the implementation rules of the new policy which can either guarantee or completely exterminate the remaining green shadows within the policy.

BirdLife Europe has been involved in this round of agriculture reform since the very beginning. Already, in the end of 2009, a vision document was published by BirdLife and other NGOs pushing the principle of “public money for public goods.” By the time the European Commission put forward its legislative proposal, this principle had become (at least on paper) one of the key elements of the reform. Unfortunately, even in the first Commission text, the much talked about “green reform” was a mere shadow of the ambition needed on the ground. NGOs call it greenwash.

Hopes then shifted to the European Parliament who had a historic first time opportunity to put its stamp on the first round of an agricultural reform. NGOs presumed that a publicly elected body bringing together over 700 Members from all corners of Europe would be willing to take a serious look at this policy and push forward reform. Unfortunately, hopes were quickly torn to pieces when it became apparent that the group of people responsible for the file, the agriculture committee, was dominated by farm interests and old farm ministers. The result was an almost mirror image of the very conservative council of agriculture ministers.

The final outcome on the table became a complex framework that allows for 28 different agriculture policies where the environment and biodiversity will just be lost in regional and sectoral fights over money. The outcome lacks European vision and denies Europeans a guarantee of a strong agricultural ecosystem that has space not only for production but also for wildlife and people. The big loser of this reform is the environment: half of EU farmland is exempted from making space for nature and one quarter of the land doesn’t require basic practices, such as crop rotation, to receive subsidies. These basic practices are the minimum that should be done to secure a long term potential for farmers to produce.

Now, all we are left with is the implementation of this policy. This can still go in a lot of different directions depending on further rules and guidelines that will be put down by the European Commission, and then interpreted by Member States and regions. Unfortunately, the hopes are minimal as Member States have expressed strong concerns of “too ambitious interpretations” by the Commission of the agreed text.

BirdLife Europe calls upon the European Commission to save what is left to be salvaged of its reform and guarantee at least *something* for the environment. BirdLife Europe also calls upon all Member States to put in place a reform that properly integrates the environment in the agriculture sector. Ignoring the environment is not a long term option as it will undermine the economic basis of farming itself.

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