



Commissioner Dacian Cioloș
 European Commission
 B-1049 Brussels
 Belgium

Ref: 14/012

Subject: Reform of DG Agriculture advisory group system

Cc: Commissioner Šefčovič, Secretary General Catherine Day, EU Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly, MEP Dennis De Jong

Dear Commissioner Cioloș,

We are writing to you regarding the reform of the DG Agriculture advisory groups, now referred to as civil society groups.

We welcome the decision¹ by the European Commission on the reform of the functioning and composition of advisory groups. We are particularly pleased by the commitment to open calls for application to all groups and wish to stress the importance of having a balance between the different civil society groups focused on economic, social and environmental issues (in the text this concept is referred to as balance between -and within- non-economic and economic groups). Only by implementing these essential features correctly will DG Agriculture's reform of the advisory groups match the Commission decision and be fully in line with the commitment made by Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič to MEPs².

Nevertheless, the undersigned organisations (together representing millions of citizens, consumers and farmers across Europe) believe that this decision will only be successful if the Commission lives up to the spirit of its reform and puts into place all necessary elements to create a well-functioning, balanced and transparent civil society dialogue system. The share of seats in the groups should be calculated as follows:

- 50 percent of the seats should be reserved for groups representing societal interests without direct economic interests (50/50 balance between economic and non-economic groups).
- Within the two categories of stakeholders, no organization should have more than 30% of the seats.

This will allow broad and inclusive discussions taking into account all views. It will also make their opinions more representative. Minority opinions should be included when consensus is not reached.

¹ COMMISSION DECISION of 16 December 2013 setting up a framework for civil dialogue in matters covered by the common agricultural policy and repealing Decision 2004/391/EC (2013/767/EU)

² There was an agreement between MEPs and the Commission during a meeting on 5/9/2012

We are also pleased that the topic of the groups will be made more relevant vis-à-vis the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. For us this means that current groups -on Rural Development, Agriculture and Environment, Organic Farming, Forestry and Cork, Common Agricultural Policy and International Aspects of the CAP- should be maintained and be complemented by other groups directly relevant for this reform. The new policy is also supposed to be about both societal and environmental challenges: i.e. recognizing the great diversity of European agrifood systems, renewing agricultural generations and ensuring public money for public goods. It is of paramount importance that the new civil society groups reflect this orientation by being more representative and open.

Unfortunately until now, the unbalanced composition of the advisory groups has given the impression of a two-tier system of stakeholders, with economic interests being the more important tier. Favouring one organization through privileged access directly contradicts the Commission's own commitment to making the EU a participative democracy and ensuring equal representation of all relevant stakeholders. This is particularly important in advisory groups where a diversity of expertise is needed.

Since the rest of the Commission will be taking this DG Agriculture reform as an example, you have an even greater responsibility of striking a real balance and showing that the Commission is open to input from all stakeholders. This would also benefit the entire Commission, given that its reform will be subject to an EU Ombudsman's Own Initiative Inquiry this year.

The undersigned organizations are also happy to meet with you and your services to engage in further discussions regarding this reform.

Yours sincerely,



Ariel Brunner
Head of Policy – Stichting BirdLife Europe

on behalf of:

ARC2020
Stichting BirdLife Europe
Euro Coop
Eurogroup for Animals
EUROPARC Federation
European Environmental Bureau

European Public Health Alliance
Friends of the Earth Europe
Greenpeace
IFOAM EU
Pesticide Action Network Europe
Slow Food

This letter is supported by: Corporate Europe Observatory and Transport & Environment.