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P R E S S

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- Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
- Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
- Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

ITEMS DEBATED

AGRICULTURE

Organic farming

The Council held an orientation debate on the proposal on organic production ([6975/1/15 REV 1](#)).

For the presence of non authorised substances in organic agricultural products (article 20 of the proposal), members states broadly considered that an harmonised EU approach would be the best option. However, they expressed diverging views on how to achieve this. Some countries would support imposing legal threshold limits as initially proposed by the Commission, while others would prefer to rely instead on the existing system of control in the production process.

As regards the import system, most of the member states were in favour of a gradual shift from the existing equivalence system to a compliance regime as proposed by the Presidency (article 31 of the proposal). Third countries would then have to apply the EU standards but some derogations and an appropriate transition period would allow a smooth adaptation.

Concerning the control system for organic agriculture, delegations were divided on the mechanism governing the frequency of the controls. Many EU countries would like to keep mandatory annual physical inspections but a risk-based approach could be used to set further controls if necessary. However, others were in favour of setting the frequency of controls according only to a risk basis. In addition, many delegations supported the Presidency to have all specific provisions on controls included into the regulation on organic farming and not in the ongoing official control regulation (currently under examination by the Council).

On the basis of this debate and the work in the Council's preparatory bodies, the Presidency expects to reach a general approach on this issue at the Council in May before launching negotiations with the European Parliament.

The proposal on organic farming aims to review the existing legislation on organic production and labelling of organic products and amend the regulation on official controls (not yet adopted) with the objective of removing obstacles to the development of organic production in the EU, guaranteeing fair competition for farmers and operators and improving consumer confidence in organic products.

Milk market

The Commission briefed ministers on the dairy market situation and trends, and on current and future EU measures in the context of the abolition of the milk quota system on first April ([6774/15](#)).

Many member states expressed concerns that the end of the milk quota system could trigger a crisis in the milk sector, which is still impacted by the Russian ban, and that instruments available under the reformed Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) could prove insufficient. Others regarded that the market-oriented approach currently pursued as an opportunity and considered that the sector should be able to adapt to the change by using the available instruments within the framework of direct payments and rural development.

Some countries pointed out that price volatility could have a significant effect on milk producers, and that the Commission would therefore have to monitor the situation very closely through the Milk Market Observatory (MMO) and put forward appropriate proposals to address the issue if necessary.

Since 1984, the EU dairy sector has been governed by the milk quota system, which imposes quantitative limits on EU milk production. The decision to abolish the quota system was taken by the Council back in 2003, as part of the market-orientated approach.

The issues of increasing the resilience of the sector and of better preparing for the end of milk quotas have been a matter of deep interest and debate in the Council and its preparatory bodies. A series of discussions were held throughout 2014 and, more recently, in January, in relation to the market effects of the Russian ban on EU food imports. On those occasions, delegations expressed concerns about the further decline of dairy prices already subject to downward pressure.

The favourable market situation, with record high prices in the first half of 2014 due to a strong global demand, led to a strong increase in milk production. A slowdown in global demand, exacerbated by the Russian ban on food imports in August 2014, led to a decrease in prices, which was particularly marked in certain member states and regions. At present, prices of dairy products seem to be starting to bottom out. Raw milk prices in a handful of member states seem to be stabilising, although in other member states they are still on a downward trend.

In order to improve the monitoring of market developments and to respond to the possible worsening of market conditions, the Commission has recently taken a series of additional measures, such as strengthening the activities of the MMO and adopting an implementing act allowing farmers to pay the surplus-levy due under the milk quota regime in interest-free instalments over three years.

Implementation and simplification of the CAP

The Council held a policy debate on the implementation and the simplification of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) ([6809/15](#)).

In the debate, ministers identified practices arising from the recent implementation of the recently reformed CAP which could be shared with other member states.

The most important issues highlighted by member states as needing simplification in the area of direct payments were the 'greening' measures and the controls. Also noted were requirements for producer organisations in the fruit and vegetable sector, reporting requirements and, for rural development, the programming, approval and state aid procedures.

The Commission indicated in January of this year that the simplification of the CAP would be one of its priorities, and asked ministers to provide ideas and proposals on how to address the issue in the coming months.

As implementation and simplification are also key issues for the Council, the presidency has asked the member states to carry out two complementary tasks: to take stock of the implementation of the reformed CAP on their territory and to complete a questionnaire on the main CAP regulations with a view to listing member states' priorities for simplification.

On the basis of this debate, the Presidency will suggest to the member states that Council conclusions on CAP simplification be adopted in May.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Greening controls

The Council took note of the Portuguese delegation's request regarding the greening controls under crop diversification ([7045/15](#)).

In the framework of the reformed CAP, there is currently provision for a single monitoring period to check crop diversification in the context of 'greening'. Several member states supported Portugal, which argues that more than one monitoring period should be allowed in order to account for the traditional cultivation of autumn/winter crops.

Animal welfare for angora rabbits and furred animals

The Netherlands delegation briefed the Council on the mistreatment of angora rabbits and furred animals in some third countries ([6693/15](#)) and called for concerted actions to prevent products involving such mistreatment from entering the EU. Many member states supported the Netherlands delegation's request.

Following a broadcast on Dutch television and the publication of a report by an animal rights organisation, the Netherlands would like to address the issue at Council level to prevent products involving animal welfare malpractices from entering the EU market.

Xylella fastidiosa

The Commission briefed the Council on an outbreak of *Xylella fastidiosa* affecting trees in the south of Italy ([6939/1/15 REV 1](#)).

Xylella fastidiosa is a plant bacterium that can cause serious losses to EU agriculture and the entire agri-food chain. In October 2013 Italy reported an outbreak of this disease in the Apulia region, where olive trees were highly affected. This is still the only confirmed presence of this pest in the EU. However a spread outside the demarcated area in Apulia cannot be excluded.

In this context, the Commission is currently reviewing the EU emergency measures in place. Potential concerns may arise with respect to grapevine and citrus production. Italy has decided to implement stronger sanitary measures. Many member states expressed concerns about the spread of the disease and highlighted the need for strong prevention and control measures to be implemented.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

AGRICULTURE

Detoxification of products for animal feed - definition of acceptability criteria

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission regulation defining acceptability criteria for detoxification processes applied to products intended for animal feed as provided for in directive 2002/32/EC ([5668/15](#)).

Directive 2002/32/EC provides that the use of products intended for animal feed which contain levels of undesirable substances exceeding the maximum levels laid down in annex I to the directive is prohibited. The same directive also obliges member states to take measures to guarantee the correct application of any acceptable detoxification process to products intended for animal feed and the conformity of the detoxified products with the provisions of annex I to the directive. EU acceptability criteria for detoxification processes are established to ensure uniform assessment across the European Union of the acceptability of detoxification processes.

The Commission regulation is subject to what is known as the regulatory procedure with scrutiny. This means that now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt the regulation, unless the European Parliament objects.

Pesticides - maximum residue levels

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a regulation amending annexes II, III and V to regulation 396/2005 as regards maximum residue levels (MRLs) for 2-naphthoxyacetic acid, acetochlor, chloropicrin, diflufenican, flurprimidol, flutolanil and spinosad in or on certain products ([5686/15](#)).

Regulation 396/2005 establishes the maximum quantities of pesticide residues or MRLs permitted in products of animal or vegetable origin intended for human or animal consumption. These MRLs include, on the one hand, levels which are specific to particular foodstuffs intended for human or animal consumption and, on the other, a general limit which applies where no specific level has been set. MRL applications are communicated to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), which issues a scientific opinion on each intended new MRL. Based on the EFSA's opinion, the Commission proposes a regulation to establish a new MRL or to amend or remove an existing MRL and modify the annexes to regulation 396/2005 accordingly.

The Commission regulation is subject to the regulatory procedure with scrutiny. This means that now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt the regulation, unless the European Parliament objects.

Animal health - specified risk material for spongiform encephalopathies

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission regulation amending the definition of specified risk material (SRM) set out in annex V to regulation 999/2001 laying down rules for the prevention, control and eradication of certain transmissible spongiform encephalopathies ([5625/15](#)).

Regulation 999/2001 lays down rules for the prevention, control and eradication of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs) in bovine, ovine and caprine animals. It applies to the production and placing on the market of live animals and products of animal origin and in certain specific cases to exports. It also provides that SRM is to be removed and disposed of in accordance with annex V to the regulation.

This amendment excludes parts of the bovine intestines (duodenum, colon and part of the small intestine) from the list of SRM on the basis of a scientific opinion issued by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

The Commission regulation is subject to the regulatory procedure with scrutiny. This means that now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt the regulation, unless the European Parliament objects.

EMPLOYMENT

Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund for Greece and Ireland

The Council adopted the following three decisions mobilising a total amount of €11.3 million under the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF), providing support for workers made redundant in Greece and Ireland:

- €5.05 million is to be paid out of the EGF following the dismissal of 928 workers in 16 enterprises operating in the Greek programming and broadcasting sector
- an amount of €3.75 million is to be mobilised after 705 workers in 46 enterprises operating in the Greek publishing activities sector were dismissed as a result of the continuing economic crisis
- €2.49 million is to be deployed following 424 redundancies in three enterprises operating in Ireland that repair and install machinery and equipment

The EGF helps workers to find new jobs and develop new skills when they have lost their jobs as a result of changing global trade patterns, e.g. when a large company shuts down or a factory is moved outside the EU, or as a result of the global financial and economic crisis. The help of the EGF consists in co-financing measures such as job-search assistance, careers advice, tailor-made training and re-training, mentoring and promoting entrepreneurship. It also provides one-off, time-limited individual support, such as job-search allowances, mobility allowances and allowances for participating in lifelong learning and training activities.

ENVIRONMENT

Noise assessment methods

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission directive establishing common noise assessment methods ([5159/15](#)) according to Directive 2002/49/EC ¹.

The aim of the directive is to define a common approach intended to avoid, prevent or reduce the harmful effects, including annoyance, due to exposure to environmental noise.

The Commission directive is subject to what is known as the regulatory procedure with scrutiny². This means that now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt the directive, unless the European Parliament objects.

Community eco-management and audit scheme

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission decision on reference documents on best environmental management practice, sector environmental performance indicators and benchmarks of excellence for the retail trade sector ([6557/15](#)) under regulation 1221/2009 on the voluntary participation by organisations in a Community eco-management and audit scheme (EMAS)³.

According to the regulation, the Commission has to develop sectoral reference documents in consultation with member states and other stakeholders. These documents are necessary to help organisations to focus better on the most important environmental aspects in a specific sector.

¹ OJ L 189, 18.7.2002

² Council decision 1999/468/EC of 28 June 1999 laying down the procedures for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission (OJ L 184, 17.7.1999, p. 23), as amended by decision 2006/512/EC (OJ L 200, 22.7.2006, p. 11)

³ OJ C 358, 8.12.2011

The Commission decision is subject to what is known as the regulatory procedure with scrutiny¹. This means that now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt the decision, unless the European Parliament objects.

Hazardous substances in electrical and electronic equipment

The Council confirmed that it had no intention of objecting to the following Commission delegated acts amending, for the purposes of adapting to technical progress, Annex IV to directive 2011/65/EU on the restriction of the use of certain hazardous substances in electrical and electronic equipment²:

- as regards an exemption for lead in polyvinyl chloride sensors in in-vitro diagnostic medical devices ([5848/15](#))
- as regards an exemption for **mercury in intravascular ultrasound imaging systems**

The Commission and the European Parliament will be informed of the Council's intention. This implies that, unless the European Parliament objects, the delegated acts will be published and enter into force on the 20th day following their publication in the Official Journal of the European Union.

¹ Council decision 1999/468/EC of 28 June 1999 laying down the procedures for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission (OJ L 184, 17.7.1999, p. 23), as amended by decision 2006/512/EC (OJ L 200, 22.7.2006, p. 11)

² OJ L 174, 1.7.2011