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COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT
THE CHAIRMAN

ACCES RESERVE

CONFIDENTIAL

315324 02.10.2014

Jerzy BUZEK
Chair
Conference of Committee Chairs
ASP 08 B 046
Brussels

Ref.: IPOL-COM-AGRI D (2014) 44826

Dear Mr Buzek,

In accordance with Rule 118 of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament, the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee held a public hearing on Thursday 2 October 2014 with Mr Hogan, Commissioner-designate, who, subject to the positive outcome of the nomination procedure, will be responsible for Agriculture and Rural Development.

Prior to the hearing, Parliament had sent the Commissioner-designate a list of written questions. My committee noted that Mr Hogan answered those questions satisfactorily.

Mr Hogan opened the hearing by making a statement in which he referred to the challenges faced by European agriculture. Mr Hogan underlined that only with a stronger and more competitive agriculture, and stability for farmers, could the EU ensure food security and generate jobs and growth. He stated that, as world demand for food is rising, European agriculture is uniquely positioned to take advantage of that demand. He mentioned that the EU should open up business opportunities in international markets, to ensure that EU farmers maintain a decent income. As regards the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) with the United States, Mr Hogan stressed that this agreement should be reasonable and balanced, and should not result in a lowering of EU standards.

Setting out his priorities, the Commissioner-designate recognised the need to simplify the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and promised to support Member States as they implement the recently agreed CAP Reform.

Focussing on environment and sustainability, Mr Hogan stressed the need to improve soil quality and preserve water resources. He also referred to the abolition of quotas for sugar and dairy, which, he considered would put EU agriculture in a better position to respond to market signals and global challenges. As regards the Russian ban on EU agricultural

products, Mr Hogan promised to monitor closely how markets evolve and to take further appropriate measures, if necessary.

Members then asked questions on several subjects falling under the Commissioner-designates' portfolio. In particular, questions were asked on the mid-term review of the recent CAP reform and whether this could provide an opportunity to increase the competitiveness of EU agriculture, tackle Member States' difficulties in implementing the new CAP, and simplify the rules, especially as regards greening. In addition, Members raised the need to ensure an adequate budget for agriculture and for a fairer distribution of funds between Member States. Questions were also raised on the specific measures that could be used to protect small farmers, and for young and new farmers to prevent the depopulation of rural areas.

Other issues raised included the need to ensure equal and fair competition rules for EU farmers to protect the European farming model, and the need to have measures to foster innovation and promote research in European farming. On the on-going international trade negotiations, questions were raised on how to ensure that EU standards are not undermined in these negotiations and on the protection of EU geographical indications (especially in the wine sector). The possibility of having legal instruments to combat unfair trading practices in the food chain, should voluntary initiatives prove insufficient, was also raised.

Members also raised the use of possible measures (including regulatory measures) to protect sensitive agricultural sectors (such as the dairy sector) against market volatility and rising input costs, and the market measures (such as the crisis reserve) that could be used to respond to agricultural crises, such as that resulting from the Russian ban on EU agricultural products. In this context, the possibility of opening new markets to find additional outlet opportunities for farmers was also raised.

Members also mentioned the specificities of certain agricultural sectors, such as the dairy sector (especially for producers in disadvantaged areas such as mountain farming in view of the end of milk quotas), the fruit and vegetables sector (in the context of falling prices), the beef sector (concerns about increased liberalisation in the context of international agreements), and the sugar sector (in view of the end of quotas).

Other questions concerned specific issues such as protective measures for bees, soil erosion, plant patent rules, GMOs, biofuels, POSEI provisions, the electronic identification of sheep, irrigated land, the loss of agricultural land, African swine fever, corruption and fraud in the payments to beneficiaries, and problems with malnutrition in Europe.

During the debate, Mr Hogan committed himself to comprehensively screen the CAP legislation to see which areas could be simplified. In particular, he committed himself to presenting, in the first year of his mandate, a simplification and subsidiarity strategy for the CAP. This strategy would cover in particular direct payments (greening including ecological focus areas), rural development, the quality policy, and the fruit and vegetables scheme.

In addition, Mr. Hogan promised not to accept any lowering of EU standards in the context of international trade negotiations, such as the TTIP, to fully protect EU geographical indications, and to protect sensitive agricultural products, including beef and poultry.

Mr Hogan also confirmed that he would ensure that the use of Article 43(3) of the Treaty should be the exception and that the use of the ordinary legislative procedure, which puts Parliament and Council on an equal footing, should be the general rule, in particular as regards the proposal on school schemes.

Before the end of the hearing, the Commissioner-designate made a brief closing statement in which he reaffirmed that EU agriculture is strengthened by its diversity and offers limitless opportunities for jobs and growth. He stressed the need to preserve the high standards of EU production. He concluded that food security should go hand in hand with sustainability in terms of preserving natural resources and using energy with care, and made a commitment to build on tradition and foster innovation to ensure a prosperous future for EU agriculture.

On the basis of the responses of the Members present at the hearing, as well as the comments made by my committee's coordinators, who met after the hearing under my chairmanship, I hereby give the following assessment:

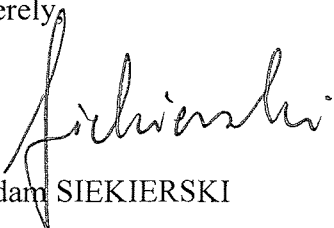
Mr Hogan came across as a committed European who has actively defended the EU throughout his political career. The Commissioner-designate also promised to maintain a regular, strong and constructive political dialogue with the European Parliament, and the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee in particular, based on openness and transparency.

In general, Mr Hogan demonstrated that he had a good understanding of the main issues within his portfolio. In particular, we appreciated his position on the need to simplify the CAP. However certain political groups considered that he only partly replied to certain questions addressed to him. Although he recognised the importance of the main issues, he did not always provide concrete solutions to address these.

Following the hearing, a full meeting of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee was convened at the request of two political groups. During this meeting, votes took place on the Commissioner-designate's aptitude and yielded the following results:

1. Aptitude to be a member of the College of Commissioners: for 32, against 10, abstentions 1
2. Aptitude to carry out the specific tasks assigned to him: for 31, against 11, abstentions 0.

Yours sincerely,



Czesław Adam SIEKIERSKI