

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3135/09
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to the Commission

Subject: Difficult situation for EU tobacco producers

The CAP review that was completed a few months ago provided a good opportunity to put forward suitable instruments to help the tobacco sector as a whole to overcome the problems it is currently experiencing. However, although Parliament put forward a number of solutions of benefit to producers, the Commission and a majority of the EU agriculture ministers decided not to change the provisions of the 2004 tobacco market reform. That reform has had an adverse social and economic impact on the tobacco sector in many EU regions. In Greece alone, production has fallen by 80%. Even a demonstration by thousands of producers and trade unionists in front of the Council building during the meeting of agriculture ministers failed to sway the EU decision-makers. The fact that some officials fail to understand the problems with which tobacco farms are struggling is a cause for concern.

The Commissioner responsible maintains that the tobacco issue is now closed and cannot be re-opened. Parliament does not share that view. If and when it comes into force, the Lisbon Treaty will give Parliament more powers. Codecision will extend to agricultural matters. Furthermore, during the next parliamentary term, the EP will be able to re-open discussions on the prospects for the Community tobacco sector. Such discussions are essential, in particular in the light of growing competition from non-Community countries and the current rules on support for tobacco producers.

In Poland, the average size of tobacco farms is no more than one hectare. They are therefore small family holdings and, what is more, are generally located in regions in which alternative sources of income are hard to find. In my meetings with representatives of producer associations and individual producers I have seen at first hand how determined they are to maintain tobacco production in their regions. It should be remembered that tobacco growing is a livelihood that is generally handed down from one generation to the next and, as such, forms part of a tradition. Tobacco growing is hard work requiring the involvement of the whole family, as I myself found out in my youth. It is an activity that cannot be allowed to die out in Europe. Although per-hectare yields have increased, the number of growers and the area under crop are shrinking. What is more, production costs – in particular energy and plant protection product prices – are rising.

What steps will the Commission take to maintain tobacco growing in the new Member States? How does it intend to go about regulating, monitoring and supporting the sector in such a way as to protect it against total collapse?