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Regional Forum  
for the Future of Agriculture:  
Where is the CAP reform going?

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## Regional Forum for the Future of Agriculture: Where is the CAP reform going?

*Ahead of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU, the Regional Forum for the Future of Agriculture (FFA) took place in Sofia in November and discussed how the Sustainable Development Goals address global competitiveness, the future of the CAP and the coexistence of competitiveness and environmental protection in agricultural processes.*

Emmanuelle MIKOSZ, ELO



The FFA regional conference was opened by a few introductory speeches, with a special address by Verginiya KRASTEVA, Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Food and Forestry. All speakers agreed that a growing global population and a changing climate, combined with continued pressure on the environment, calls for increased food production using more sustainable methods.

The first panel was kicked off by Robert FLIES, former Advisor to the Director in the DG Environment, European Commission, who noted that the main global agricultural challenges: feeding the world in the future; eradicating food losses and waste; increased competition for natural resources and the deterioration of the environment; and climate change are issues that we have already been aware of for a few decades. He pointed out that *“Now we need to have a society debate not with the narrow views focused on European agriculture but to the worldwide challenge for providing enough food to everybody.”* He underlined that only people whose basic needs for food and en-

ergy have been met can start worrying about the environment, and that in Europe, we have a huge moral obligation to develop in a sustainable way, which is also in our own interest. If we want to get a grip on mass migration, we should be aware that poverty, food insecurity, unemployment, climate change and environmental degradation are among the root causes of mass migration, along with conflict and political instability.

According to the panel, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement are certainly a great step forward in the framework of achieving sustainable development, and they need to be supported seriously, even though they may be quite complex and highly ambitious. The world is changing and we need to have new solutions to address those challenges.

Where the Common Agricultural Policy reform is going was the topic of the 2<sup>nd</sup> panel. Opening the panel, Emeritus Prof. Allan BUCKWELL commented on the leaked EC Communication “The Future of Food and Farming”, of which the final and offi-

cial version was released in the afternoon of the same day. He emphasised that the *status quo* is unacceptable and how important it is to think outside the box. Speaking about the communication chapter ‘Smarter and modern CAP’, he made reference to two points: fair income support for farmers, and bolstering environmental care and climate action. He shared his disappointment that when acknowledging that “CAP should do more”, the paper doesn’t convey the strong feeling of the necessity, scale and urgency of required change. He said that the Bulgarian Presidency can stimulate discussion and debate on these ideas, and that the CAP Legislative proposals are due in autumn 2018.

MEP Vladimir URUTCHEV stressed that preservation of worldwide ecosystems must be a top priority. Agriculture should adopt climate-smart practices in producing, transporting, processing & consuming food, and here the EU can be an example through a forward-looking CAP which boldly faces environmental and climatic challenges.



How can we support farmers and land managers to take new directions? How can we ensure that young people stay in the countryside and take over the farms and continue with the stewardship of the land? Answering these and many other questions, the panel agreed that rural jobs have to be attractive and that farming has to be profitable, with access to relevant technologies. Cities have to recognise the value of these efforts. Last but not least, education from primary school level - both concerning agriculture and forestry - has to be properly organised to explain the rural reality and rural economies if we want to keep today's children interested in the countryside, ensuring that the next generation will be willing to take over the farms and land management activities.

Michael zu SALM-SALM, FCS President, suggested that more power should be given to the countryside and regions, as freedom brings more engagement and pas-

sion, and that the protection of property rights ensure having a long-term perspective. Konstantin KOSTOPOULOS, ELO Adviser and Wildlife Estates CEO, added that it took a long time and a lot of effort but finally today the role of landowners is recognised by various EU institutions, as in the case of the recent conclusions of the EU Environment Council.

The final panel, focusing on how can competitiveness and environmental protection can coexist within the Bulgarian agriculture landscape, was opened by Virginya KRASTEVA, Deputy Minister of Agriculture, and Krasimir ZHIVKOV, Deputy Minister of Environment. Galina PEYTCHEVA-MITEVA, BAALO Deputy Chairman, underlined that land is a unique asset and as we are only holding it to pass it on to future generations, economic, environmental and social sustainability are a must. The panel agreed that without significant changes at global, European and local level, future

generations could face not only reduced production, but also biodiversity losses. Low agricultural prices and nature preservation are interrelated challenges to which finding solutions is not easy. Europe, in particular, is facing serious challenges in finding its new generation of farming entrepreneurs that are willing to take on these challenges. As underlined by some of the participants of the FFA during a very lively debate, the daily relations between Bulgarian stakeholders and authorities are very complicated. Often the opinion of urban people is more important than of those that are the stewards of the landscape, especially concerning the Natura 2000 areas.

Pierre-Olivier DRÈGE, ELO President summarized the day's event saying that *"Climate change is already affecting agriculture & food security. We need to produce more and better, reconciling the productivity of soils and plants with high technology and health standards and with a minimal ecological footprint. Farmers, foresters and land managers are aware of their responsibilities and therefore we suggest a support system structured around the concept of land management for food and environmental security that focuses on objectives rather than being driven by pure compliance considerations that are often too bureaucratic."*

*This regional FFA Bulgaria was co-organised by ELO, Syngenta, BAALO, NABBS, with the support of Deutz-Fahr and under the auspices of Vladimir URUTCHEV MEP.*

**These discussions will continue at the FFA2018 in Brussels on March 27th. For more information and free registration, please check [www.forumforagriculture.com](http://www.forumforagriculture.com), and follow @ForumforAg. Use #FFA2018 to share your thoughts and join us on the day.**



FFA Bulgaria Team and Speakers