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MINUTES

Stock taking of Civil Dialogue Groups

Hybrid meeting

23 September 2022

Chair: Michael NIEJAHR

Delegations present: 36 CDG member organisations (cf. list of participants).

The meeting was convened in the context of the ongoing review of the agricultural Civil Dialogue Groups. The main objective was to present the new legal framework, namely Commission Decision (EU) 2022/1368 adopted on 3 August 2022 which sets up Civil Dialogue Groups in matters covered by the common agricultural policy and repeals Decision 2013/767/EU.

Some elements of the future organisation of the agricultural Civil Dialogue Groups were discussed in the light of the above-mentioned Decision.

1. Commission Decision (EU) 2022/1368 – the underlying principles and its implementation

The new legal framework will apply **as from 2023**. To render it operational, the new members - stakeholders' organisations - will be appointed following a **call for applications**, to be launched in autumn this year, most likely in the first half of October.

The new framework for agricultural civil dialogue is meant to be **open, transparent and inclusive**, with aim at **improving the overall governance** of the groups and their administrative organisation.

At this occasion, Commission **aligns the groups to the outcome of the recent CAP reform** and the Commission **horizontal rules on expert groups** (dating from 2016). On the administrative side, Commission aims at increasing efficiency of meetings organisation, while incorporating the guidance on external experts' travel in the framework of greening the Commission.

The Commission decided to set up **seven expert groups**:

1. Civil Dialogue Group on the CAP Strategic Plans and Horizontal Matters
2. Civil Dialogue Group on Agricultural Markets
3. Civil Dialogue Group on Animal Production
4. Civil Dialogue Group on International Aspects of Agriculture
5. Civil Dialogue Group on Organic Farming

6. Civil Dialogue Group on Quality and Promotion
7. Civil Dialogue Group on Environment and Climate Change.

Consequently, the Commission decreases the fragmentation of the existing groups (from 13 to 7), which led in the past to a certain repetition of presentations and points to discuss at various meetings. Nevertheless, **the same range of subjects will be covered** by the future meetings agendas. Any of the seven groups should be able to **meet in different thematic configurations, according to the agenda set by the Chair**, and considering the real needs of the Commission to benefit from expertise at a given moment.

In the present CDGs review, the Commission focuses on the **relevance and timeliness of the civil dialogue** with stakeholders and the **type of expertise needed**, rather than a pre-determined distribution of physical seats among the new members. Commission aims at creating an open and agile consultation environment for all, with lots of flexibility for the Commission to convene the meetings when the real needs to harness expertise arise, and for the stakeholders, to provide advice in a flexible manner on the subject they know best.

One of the main principles of the present revision consists in granting a **single membership per organisation** with all organisations being equal. It presumes non-differentiation of physical seats between organisations, as compared to the current seats' allocations.

The invitations to CDGs meetings will be distributed evenly between the various relevant interests, namely the member organisations who demonstrate sufficient experience and capacity to advise and to share their expertise, according to the agenda set by the Commission.

A single membership does not imply, however, that only one expert can be delegated to attend the meeting. **If the agenda requires** so, and the **logistics of the meeting's organisation allow**, the Chair will be able to determine the overall number of participants, which can be raised, in particular, if the online and hybrid meeting formats are privileged.

In addition, if a larger participation should be beneficial for both, the Commission and stakeholders, a **webstreaming** service could be provided upon request, alternatively, a separate link to online meetings for experts who wish to attend in a **listening mode only**.

At first, Commission has **no intention to set up formal subgroups** which are considered not needed to achieve the same objective of a structured dialogue and to be able to exchange expertise on given subjects, which can take place within the main groups.

As regards the **format of the future CDG meetings**, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown all of us that **online meetings** can be effective and efficient. The virtual format also allows to **increase the frequency** of meetings, aligning them to the Commission's agenda and needs, and to **involve more experts** compared to physical meetings, thus allowing for a **more extended and inclusive** participation of stakeholders in the consultation process.

Moreover, virtual meetings help **reducing** our **environmental footprint** and, thus, can make a small contribution to achieving climate neutrality by 2050. At the same time, Commission fully recognises the importance of physical meetings to allow stakeholders and Commission representatives to engage in a more personal manner.

2. The upcoming call for applications

The intention of the Commission is to open the call by mid-October.

A four weeks deadline to apply will be set.

One call will be published covering seven CDGs but the applications have to be submitted per CDG – in fact the assessment of the applications will be carried out on per subject. An applicant should therefore fill in one form per CDG. One organization may submit several applications.

Commission is going to select private organisations (no MS authorities, no public entities)

For further requirements and detailed criteria, the organisations are invited to refer to the exact terms and conditions of the call for applications once it is published on the Commission's websites.

As Commission's goal is to maintain and even to enhance a regular and transparent dialogue with the civil society in a broader sense, an important consideration will be given to **representativeness and significance** of the applicants at Union level (in a meaning of several of the EU Member States), in relation to the thematic area of the group(s).

3. Questions / Answers

Why Commission does not re-appoint automatically the present organisations which express interest to continue their membership, without having to apply?

The guiding principle of this CDGs review is to guarantee a balanced representation of the wide range of economic and non-economic interest groups, which should represent, as broadly as possible, different stakes and viewpoints regarding developments in DG AGRI policy area. Besides being a legal requirement (the call for application is foreseen in the Commission Decision (EU) 2022/1368) and a procedural requirement, according to the Commission horizontal rules on expert groups, a new call raises credibility of DG AGRI on holding an open and transparent dialogue with the civil society.

In fact, the Commission, and DG AGRI in particular, relies heavily on the advice of many expert groups to draw up legislation and policy initiatives. It is of utmost importance for these groups to be balanced and to work as transparently as possible so that the public can trust and scrutinise their work.

Why Commission does not intend to set up straightforward CDGs subgroups?

Any CDG in the future should be able to meet in different thematic configurations according to the agenda set by the chair and the real needs of the Commission to harness expertise at a given moment. Such organisational flexibility, without having to setup thematic subgroups, which are by definition closed up (and in addition have to report to the main group), guarantees that the member organisations, which demonstrate interest, will be able to share their advice, in response to Commission's call for expertise, rather than following a pre-fixed schedule of meetings multiplied per subgroup, set one year in advance.

Will the registration of experts be compulsory in the future?

Just as for the meetings organised physically in the Commission's premises, the online meetings require the attendees to be duly registered, each time prior to accessing the

virtual platform where the actual meeting takes place. This registration is handled exclusively via the dedicated system - Advanced Gateway to your Meetings (AGM).

The Chair reminded that the agricultural expert groups' meetings organized via online tools are not public events and hence, only the experts registered via AGM system, in due time before the meeting, are authorised to join the meeting remotely.

The participation to physical meetings, as in the past, remains framed by the rules on reimbursements of experts' expenses and the capacity of the Commission meetings rooms. Only those persons whom the member organisations have designated as their representatives for the meeting, and who were duly registered in AGM, should attend the meeting, including by videoconference. They should also clearly identify themselves when connecting online.

The AGM correspondents of the CDG member organisations shall register the representatives (experts who will attend the meeting) at the latest 3 days prior to the meeting day.

If the agenda of the meeting does not require confidentiality and if a larger participation is possible and beneficial to the Commission, a webstreaming service can be offered. In agreement with the Chair, the webstreaming link can be freely disseminated as webstreaming viewers (online observers) do not need to register via AGM.

Planning of CDGs meetings and timing of consultations

Regarding the timeliness of CDGs meetings, it is also of Commission's concern that the new system remains agile and flexible enough allowing to place the consultations at the moment the expertise is needed, in response to dynamic policy developments. Sometimes it might imply convening a CDG meeting at a relatively short notice, as opposite to a long-term planning of the meetings, which we know under the current setup.

Chairing by the Commission

Commission, in its capacity of Chair, will continue to act as a facilitator of the consultation process, ensuring that all voices are heard and various opinions can be expressed.

The chairing of the meetings was identified as important element of alignment with the Commission horizontal framework for expert groups, also corresponding to standards practices within European Commission. The new practice of chairing was meant to improve the efficiency of the meeting administration, while the Commission's priority is to maintain, and even improve, the inclusiveness of the process. The new Chair in no way changes the role of the CDGs which remain a privileged forum to exchange information and knowledge among organisations and with the Commission's services.

The Commission welcomes the input of all organisations when it comes to setting meetings' agenda, recognising that their active contribution is key to the functioning of the CDGs and the quality of the civil dialogue.

Interpretation

The multilingual character of the CDG deliberations in the future should be supported and preserved. While providing a full interpretation remains often impossible,

Commission services try to alternate the languages, to allow national experts to provide their expertise in an exhaustive and eloquent manner.

Having said this, Commission might need to harvest a specific expertise or an opinion on an ad hoc basis. In the agile CDGs setup, a timely consultation of stakeholders implies ad hoc meetings, which, in principle, would have to be held in EN only. In fact, the interpretation arrangements have to be planned and undertaken several weeks prior to the meeting, the timing which does not always match the policy and decision-making agenda.

Yet, the chair reiterated that whenever possible, and within resources available, a multilingual language regime will be Commission's preferred choice.

What about the CDG on Forestry and Cork, will the civil dialogue be discontinued?

As regards the CDG on Forestry and Cork, there is no intention to discontinue civil dialogue in this domain. On the contrary, a dedicated group is going to be set up, in parallel to other CDGs, covering this important policy area, under governance shared by DG AGRI, DG ENV and DG CLIMA.

What about the status of observers and ad hoc experts (ex. from academia)?

As until now, the attendance of both, observers and ad hoc experts, if duly justified by the agenda (as per agreement by the Chair), will be possible.

Will Commission ensure a large dissemination of information on the publication of the call?

Indeed, Commission will publish the call on public website and, in addition, inform thereof the present members of CDGs via the usual communication channel, namely CircaBC platform.

Final notice:

The main elements of the upcoming call have been outlined for explanatory purposes only and without prejudice to the final version of the provisions of the call once open for applications. Please refer strictly to the terms and conditions of the call as published.

e-signed

Michael NIEJAHR

List of participants– Minutes
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Date: 23/09/2022

ORGANISATION
AnimalhealthEurope (formerly known as IFAH-Europe)
Association des régions européennes des produits d'origine (AREPO)
Bee Life-European Beekeeping Coordination (Bee Life)
Stichting BirdLife Europe (BirdLife Europe)
European Liaison Committee for Agriculture and agri-food trade (CELCAA)
Confédération Européenne des Propriétaires Forestiers (CEPF)
Confédération Européenne de la Production de Maïs (C.E.P.M)
Confédération européenne des vignerons indépendants (CEVI)
European agri-cooperatives (COGECA)
Confédération Européenne des Entrepreneurs de Travaux Techniques Agricoles, Ruraux et Forestiers/European Organisation of Agricultural, Rural and Forestry Contractors (CEETTAR)
European farmers (COPA)
European Biodiesel Board (EBB)
European Federation of Origin Wines (EFOW)
European Landowners' Organization asbl (ELO asbl)
European Agroforestry Federation (EURAF)
EuroCommerce
Euromontana (Euromontana)
European Confederation of Woodworking Industries (CEI-Bois)
European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC)
European Council of Young farmers (CEJA)

European Environmental Bureau (EEB)
European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism (EFNCP)
European Milk Board (EMB)
European State Forest Association (EUSTAFOR)
Farmhouse and Artisan Cheese and dairy producers' European network (FACEnetwork)
EU Association of Specialty Feed Ingredients and their Mixtures (FEFANA)
Fédération Européenne pour la Santé Animale et la Sécurité Sanitaire (FESASS)
FoodDrinkEurope (FoodDrinkEurope)
International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements EU Regional Group (IFOAM EU Group)
Organisation pour un réseau international d'indications géographiques (oriGIn)
Ruralité-Environnement-Développement (RED)
European Federation of Rural Tourism (Eurogites)
SACAR - Secrétariat des Associations du Commerce Agricole Réunies / Joint Secretariat of Agricultural Trade Associations (SACAR)
Union européenne de l'Artisanat et des petites et moyennes entreprises, asbl (UEAPME)
Union of European Foresters (UEF)
WWF European Policy Programme (WWF EPO)