

General debate

Moderator:

We've heard a lot of good ideas, a lot of viewpoints, some of which you will be very enthusiastically in favour of, some of which you may be less enthusiastic about. This is your opportunity to have your say and to go into these points in more details. We are going to have a debate among our panellists who are here at the front row and I would like to invite you to come and present your questions, make your points to any or all of our presenters from this morning.

Angela Pöth-Mögele, CEMR:

I have a question to Tremouille. He did not say anything about modulation. MR Martinz said something the subject, representing Carinthia and Austria. But I would like to hear your view, what you think about modulation and the new proposals.

Claude Tremouille:

In Limousin, as I said in my presentation, we want to support rural areas via agriculture but also as I said, via the diversification of our activities. We do not just want to rely on agriculture activities but we also need to have new and innovative activities and here of course, modulation is very interesting from my point of view. Because this money enables us to support diversification of the economy in our Region. If some of the money coming from modulation can be invested in rural development in various areas that I am sure would be a very good thing.

Birgitta Sacredeus, Dalarna County Council (S):

To of the speakers have mentioned food security. I am a politician and I want that Mr Parish and Mr Martinz can develop their thinking about how we, politicians, should work for food security.

Neil Parish:

Food security is one of the key points we have no talked much about this morning. It is about the WTO¹, it is about tariffs, it is about making sure that Europe can maintain some of its tariffs in order to maintain a reasonable food price. And as we lower our tariffs, we have to make sure that we allow into Europe products from less developed countries. Otherwise, if you suddenly reduce the tariffs on beef for instance, immediately Brazil that is your great manufacture on it, not your African country. So in order to maintain food security, Europe has to maintain reasonable production. That is one of the things again, set aside, that is one where we can increase production. Set aside has never been meant to be an environmental programme but of course some people will argue that by reducing all set asides you are reducing some of the conservation measures, because in some Member states, some countries, quite a lot of people like some forms of set aside because it is better for animal population, birdlife and so on. So we have to get a balance between making sure that we are producing food and at the same time that we get food security. So it's right from tariffs down through to and it does link back to the single farm payment as well and the payment you are going to give to farmers. And that's where we might have to target some special payments towards – the sectors of agriculture that are going to

¹ World Trade Organisation

come under the biggest pressure in Europe are the beef, cattle, cows, and probably sheep more than cereals. That's where we can target money. That's where I must say I did not agree with Mr Martinz and he did not expect me to agree with the Austrian position because I actually think that the reforms of agriculture in the end will actually suit Austria. Indeed they are the least favoured areas with most difficult land, the farms, and that is in the end where the money will be targeted to. And, going further than your question, Austria, very wisely, has 10 to 14% of the overall rural development money that comes out of Europe. You have negotiated that very wisely so you already have a nice big part of rural development money. So now you say, well we do not want to allow further modulation. I think it is the wrong way to play it because you have got to look at 27 member states and a lot of member states do not have such an amount of rural development money as Austria has and so we have got to spread this money. There is no doubt about it and I think that putting it in pillar two will be a good way, I know it's further to your question but I wanted to use this opportunity just to have a slight disagreement with Dr Martinz.

Josef Martinz:

For me also, brings a question of quality with it. If we are talking about food supplies in Europe, then we don't really have this in our own hands. We are not capable of supplying us ourselves entirely with food. And given the various crises around world and the question of climate change, this is going to be increasingly a relevant issue. I think that in many areas, we can create a situation where small cycles can be boosted. This can also benefit the environment. If we can produce regionally, locally and offer these products locally, this has got a lot to do with environment. Because every unnecessary kilometre that a product has to travel has a negative impact on the environment. So it is a very relevant question.

The other point is the question of very high food standards that we have. First class standards we have in Europe. I think we have to look at the question of food security from this aspect as well. It is also a question of quality. I don't want to talk about genetic modifications, but I am of the opinion that Europe doesn't need in genetically modified organisms. I think here again, this could give a real opportunity for our local products.

With regard to the question of whether modulation is positive or negative for Austria, I agree that we have a strong position with regard to support for rural development in Austria. This is a result of hard and long negotiation. But I don't want to have people talking about moving away from the landscape and moving to other areas. People very often don't realise the possibilities that agriculture can offer for rural development. The question of small farmers is very relevant.

Soren Kissmeyer:

Regarding the funding for rural development, the funds is actually called the European agricultural fund for rural development, which perhaps makes a point in itself or at least it can be seen that way.

Neil Parish:

Mister Chairman, can I come back on one point as well? I also think, we demand very high welfare standards on our production, quite rightly so in my view in Europe. That is something we are really need to try and get recognised at WTO level, at least with labelling of food imported. Because our citizens are very keen on high welfare standards, as I am as a farmer and as many European farmers most are in fact.

What you cannot do is compete with food that necessarily doesn't need the standards as it is coming in. And that is something is going to get look at very strongly. And my final point, we do have to find a system where we can look at some GM crops in Europe. We've got a look at ways where people can have their choice as whether they want to grow them or not and we will probably have to look at regions, where they possibly could be grown as well.

If Austria, for instance want to keep herself GM free, well that is extremely possible. But if you have got a very big arable growing areas, possibly in France, the UK where GM crops are using less fertiliser, less fungicide, less pesticide, Europe may not be able to close its mind to them for ever. I just put that to you and I know, it is probably not a popular thing to say, but you will find out that at the moment, there are some GM crops out there and everybody is shaking their head, but I can tell, I can show them to you , an I can prove it to you, they have got less fertiliser, less fungicide and less pesticide.

We may not be able to close our mind forever. So Europe has got to look at the safety of these products and it has got to also look at ways where can allow perhaps some areas to grow them once they are licensed and some not. I think to close our minds and say that all countries cannot grow them, because some countries don't want them at all may not be the way forward. It is not going to happen for a year or two but I can assure, eventually, and do not forget, a lot of the feed that we are feeding, our poultry and all our pigs in Europe comes from GM sources, which we cannot grow at the moment. So this idea that we are GM free, we are not. And that is a fact, not fiction.

Josef Martinz:

I would like briefly to respond to that. Please, in Brussels give to regions the power to decide whether they want GMO products or not. Don't force us to introduce genetic technology for competitive reasons.

Monsieur Tremouille:

I just wanted to respond to this question of GMOS. We are also a part of the network of the GMOs free regions. But I think we have to listen to what the consumers are saying. The consumers are quite clearly against GMOs.

Neil Parish:

The consumers will remain against GMOS until they have to pay significantly more for their food. It will be interesting to see, if the prices carry on going up and up, whether there will be so anti. You will find it if you look at the surveys: people are starting to change their views quite a lot. I think, I accept at the end of day a matter of choice for the regions and consumers. But like I said, we may not be able to close our minds to it. That's the point I make.

Eliane Giraud, Rhône-Alpes (F):

I think, that this possibility of choosing is unacceptable. It is not enough to say we got a problem, but you decide for yourselves. One of the problems in Europe is the question of production. Production is kind of on a wrong basis. And that's why Brussels needs to have flanking measures to improve structures of production. So it is not a question of just reducing this to those who are favoured and those who are against.

That's over simplification. We need to have a coherent policy of production, with proper research into these matters. It is not just a question of research into GMOs. There are other ways of having agricultural production without genetic modification. People are just getting stuck on this question of genetic modification or not. I think we need in much more flexible approach. We cannot accept the situation where some people are being supported because they have new products, new methods, unfortunately all based on genetic modification. And producers and consumers who have no choice and have to consume this. Even the small organic producers, must have the same amount of support. And it is not just a European discussion. This is a global issue. Of course, we have to find our own answer in Europe, but currently everything is reduced to this question of GMOs or not.

And I can see this from your responses here today. And one cannot educate the consumer to prefer and to be more open towards GMOS and perhaps change their attitude, so the GMOS become positive. The consumer is not given the choice and nor is the farmer, it's always a question of support only for GMOS.

Soren Kissmeyer :

I am going into the debate on GMOs as such but just say that: do the member that we do have in internal market. So to start to have different rules for different regions in this context seems to be a little difficult, I would say.

Neil Parish:

Can I also say, I think it is a matter of labelling so that people know exactly what they are buying. But the idea that GMOs have been supported by Europe is totally wrong. There is not a support basically; it takes ages and a very long complicated process to get anything licensed. So, I mean, if you want to be an organic farmer, a conventional farmer, I support all these things. But I say to you, like I said we have got to look at all the choices in front of us and if we are going to see climate change, and we are going to see parts of Europe as well as a part of world actually drying up, then we might well have to look at somebody's GM crops. When I raised it this morning I can see in a lot of your faces "how dare you raise such an issue?" I think that is absolutely wrong. We have got to discuss these things, we've got to debate them, and Europe will have to come to a conclusion.

Because eventually it will also become another major WTO issue if we are not at all careful. And also, I could bet my last € note that some pigs in Austria are being fed on some feed that has comes from a GM source. There is no problem with that, there is no reason why they should not be.

Moderator:

Shall we move on to other aspects of rural policy.

Rolf Vorburger from Sankt Gallen (CH):

I've listened with great interest to what the speakers have been talking about today but sometimes I had the impression that we are sitting in the seminar on agricultural policy and not on rural development policy. I think from what the gentleman from Carinthia and Limousin said, I've got very little out of this with regard to what the difference is. For me these are two separate issues. On the one hand, the question of supporting rural regions via regional policy and on the other hand, agricultural policy."

In the country where I come from we have a very clear division between these two. Since 1st January of this year, there is a federal law on regional policy, and it has got nothing at all to do with agricultural policy. It is all about ensuring that disadvantages to rural areas are giving targeted support in order to help them find their own strength. In some regions their strength may be agriculture but it doesn't have to be the case. If I think of Carinthia, where Mr Martinz comes from, dislike my canton, is an area that has a very strong tourism sector. If one looks at Lillehammer for example, and the region here, tourism plays a more important role than agriculture. That is why, I think it is wrong to say, that two policies are merged. We need to have a much clearer division between these two areas of policy.

Moderator:

Each of our panellists in turn to address that: «Should we separate rural policy from agriculture policy?»

Mr Tremouille:

It would be ideal if there could be a differentiation between spatial policy and rural areas and the question of agriculture policy. People talk a lot about agriculture, and it is just been said that we are not talking enough about other aspects of the rural areas.

But if you look at other areas, for example, tourism, in our region there are some areas that are very tourism-friendly, who really offer themselves for tourists. Farmers have been open to this and have offered accommodation to tourists. They also invite their guests to eat with them meals in the evening and eat their own products. So, as I said, what in the past we have seen as handicap cannot be seen as an asset. The same goes for some services, for example, care services are difficult access for some areas. And here it would be good to open up a health centre.

And that has got nothing to do with agriculture, but it does have a lot to do with rural population, which is encouraged to remain in that area, because there is a proper health care. The question of getting doctors and dentists to settle in these areas, it would be good to find structures that would encourage people to settle in these disadvantaged regions. And then these regions would become attractive once again. This has got a lot to do with job creation, with availability of services, etc.

We have schools and post offices closing in rural areas and the people who remain living in these areas very often have to travel 20-30 km, in order to take their children to school or to go to the post office or to do their daily shopping.

So, of course, there are agriculture activities, and I say the two must not be played against each other. I did say very clearly that they should be regarded as complementary. But there are a lot of aspects that have a very little to do or only indirectly to do with agriculture. They need support.

Soren Kissmeyer:

It is true that today, we are talking about agriculture and about rural development. In a EU context, there are other instruments. We have a regional policy, social policy, that also intervened in rural areas, where, as I said in my intervention, there has to be a coordination at national level. The question you ask is of course very political. I am a civil servant and I should of course be careful about it.

I am pretty sure that if you ask this question to my Commissioner, she will not agree with you. Rural areas are so linked to the agricultural activities and what stems from agriculture that you need to have a policy that specifically looks at rural development

with a link to agriculture and we have the CAP with the first and second pillar. We need to have a coordination there, with a shifting from the first into the second pillar, but these things are connected. I don't think you get agreement from my Commissioner to disconnect totally rural development and regional policy from agriculture policy.

Josef Martinz:

Let me give you two pictures here. If you travel through Romania, through the countryside, you will see that there is no functioning agriculture. And that is the result of migration into the cities, which are becoming bigger and bigger.

Second picture, I think there is too close a link in the case of tourism. If you look at the first generation of tourism development, most of the tourist businesses have agricultural routes. I think that to have some sort of artificial differentiation with: on the one hand agriculture and on the other rural development – seems impossible to me. Because, there close links that closely interlink with each other. Tourism per se, does to large extent and live from the buy-product of agriculture. Whether we are talking about the landscape or the infrastructure, everything that is described into tourism brochures has to do with agriculture and the cultural landscape that has been produced by the farmers.

Neil Parish:

I think up until 2013, we will live roughly with the system we have got. We are going to argue how much money we going to move into rural development but you are not going to see any real change on that structure. After 2013, I think we really do have to look at how we are going to spent the money. Are we going to target the money towards farmers on what they were farming in 2001-2002. That is where we are getting their money from now. So as time goes on you would have moved it on. Are you going to give a general payment to all land, irrespectively if are high quality production land or not?

You might be able to say high quality flat land, that can grow 4 or 5 tons of weed will not necessarily be supported, not in the same way. And your upland areas, and your high landscape areas will be. Then you can start looking at: "can you then move more money."

You might see in 2013, I'm not saying you will, you might see it almost in reverse, you might actually see the amount of money going directly to agriculture, you might see the same amount of money going to rural development. I doubt, that we are going to be with as revolutionary as that. By 2013, that is what is going to be looked at. And it will be linked to the price of food, what the farmers are getting for their products because if by then there is a good strong food market, then there is an argument that you can shift more money. It is at the end of the day about the way you spend the budget. How much we argue in this room, I do not think the budget is going to be much bigger in 2013. It might well be smaller. It is really about, how we slice the cake up. And that's where I think we do have real opportunities. But again, it will be down to 27 countries, or 28 perhaps by then, if Croatia is a member, to actually work out, how it is going to happen. That's our real chance to change.

Angelika Poth-Mögele, CEMR:

I would like to come back to this question, and I forget previously to present my self. I work for the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, which is the European

umbrella organisation, representing national associations of local and regional governments. Quite a few of our members are national associations representing small and medium-sized cities and municipalities, which very often are in rural areas. We have organised a conference in 2006 in Brussels on the future of rural communities in Europe; last year we had one on the European agro-dynamics. This shows that our members are extremely interested in this question.

Taking these two conferences and the discussions we had there as a background, we think that it is much more important to link different policies, not to separate agriculture, rural development and regional development, but on the contrary really looking at all the different sector policies, like for instance transport has an big impact on the situation of municipalities and regional areas.

People on the panel have already mentioned the future of public services, the question of health services, how are they provided? What role can technology play? Especially, in the Northern European countries we have extremely interesting examples already on how you can provide health services, by a distance service, the help of ICT technology, etc?

So we, on the contrary, follow more integrated approach, saying it needs to discuss with other people from different sectors. This brings me back to the comment that was made this morning, looking into the different committees in the European Parliament. But it is reflected in national government, administration as well: we tend to look too separately at these questions.

It was mentioned this morning, that committee of Agriculture is mainly dominated by farmers and other committees with representatives of the specific areas. I still hope that it will still be possible to influence the decision-making process in Europe, in the European Parliament, by addressing of all members of the European Parliament, not only focusing when he discuss agriculture or future rural development, not only focusing on AGRI committee but also trying to mobilise all members of European Parliament.

Because, they are at least expected to represent all European citizens, not just being the lobbyist of the farmers, environmentalists etc. Thank you very much.

Lucien ADENET, Martinique (F):

I come from a long way away. I come from the Caribbean, from Martinique and I am the chair of the Committee for Rural development and livestock farming. The area of territory concerned is very small. We have 1500 km² territory, very very small indeed. The problem in Martinique is that the rural areas are shrinking, a thousand hectares every year are lost. And if we continue in this fashion, we will soon not have any rural area left. This is going to happen sooner rather than later.

So we are going to become one large urban area. As a region, what we have tried to do is find a mechanism that makes it possible for us to rescue what can be rescued. We have tried to ensure that we actually win back more agricultural areas, so that these areas can be retained and we try to encourage young farmers to resettle and to take up some sort of agricultural activity. I think this situation is a very special one.

We have heard this morning a lot of disadvantaged areas and the measures that can be taken for these.

This is special one OK, but it is not unique. Guadeloupe and other small islands, of roughly the same size, are all in this category of being disadvantaged. Criteria have been set up according to which one can define these disadvantages.

According to this criteria, it is not just that we are disadvantaged, we are super disadvantaged, because we are also very far from many centres, we are highly peripheral, we are far from France, we are far from Europe.

The costs of agricultural production are therefore enormous. I do not know to what extent the European Commission is going to continue to provide support for ultra peripheral regions.

I do not know whether the Commission continues to realise that we do have particular disadvantages and therefore require particular assistance. It would make a lot of sense if the European Commission in the case of our regions with their particular problems were to set up some source of support. Some sort of pot money that could help us because we are as I said super disadvantaged, if only because of our geographical location.

Horseman:

Rural policies stretches beyond even the confines of mainland in Europe. I do also find it is quite interesting that what we talked as less favoured areas, are almost exclusively those areas where all of us would love to go to on holidays. So I sometimes wonder why we turn the terminology the other way round in these cases. Any more panellist for a comment?

Neil Parish:

On the last question, I think I will let the Commission answer on how exactly they are going to deal with your areas in the future. But I think one of the points you made on how little land there is in Martinique, I think is very much showing that you cannot have one policy that suits all the European union on this issue. Because you have got parts of France, parts of Spain where you actually want more rural people, where you want more development in some areas, in order to keep people there on the land and in those areas. From your point of view, it is a bit like in part of Southern England, where you just are building more and more houses and land is just disappearing fast there, and you have got a problem there.

Those policies have got to be dealt with on a national and a regional basis. Like I said, as to where the pot of money comes from, because we always are looking for pots of money, we cannot always find the pots of money.

On the business of agriculture members being on the agriculture Committee, yes, they are, but don't forget that the reports go from AGRI committee and then go to the full Parliament. It is not always that the agriculture committee gets their way because they all are farmers.

But I just also want to comment: you are right in many ways that you want to keep the agriculture and rural development linked. The problem you have got is the politics of it. The agricultural lobby will always be stronger than the rural development lobby. And the trouble is if you do not try and find ways of splitting them, in the end you will find irrespective necessarily of whether agriculture needs all that money in 2013, it will still take it. And that is what the debate will be about.

Soren Kissmeyer:

I am afraid I am not going to be able to answer you precisely, because I do not know what the thoughts are in Brussels on the future of the schemes addressed to you. In the past, in 90's, when we introduced the schemes that are still applied, where considerable help were channelled to overseas department. So you have certainly not been forgotten until now, but I must admit I don't know anything about any thinking concerning the future of this specific issue.

Agnes Ciccarone:

We have talked a lot about coordinating or separating rural development policy from agricultural policy. You have said that there are lot of responsibility in the hand of the national governments to ensure that there is a proper coordination. As you can imagine, the AER has got a slightly different position on this and you can read this in our recommendations. We say that the regions are best placed to assess their situation. They are in the best position to carry out coordination of policy. This is something that has been incorporated into our final declaration. Rural development and agriculture as is the case of the ERDF, should be something that is coordinated by the regions , perhaps this is a utopian view to take but we would like to stress this fact. And this is something, as I have said, that you will find in our final declaration, which we are going to be discussing in the moment.

Soren Kissmeyer:

Taking the assembly here, I suppose it is not so surprising. I am not convinced that it is moving in that direction, I think that when you make a rural development program and so on, your counterpart will still be member states authorities. But nevertheless you have tools for regions in the rural development policy. You have the national networks, leaders approach and all that. I think, there is quite some support for bottom-up approach foreseen in framework as it exists today, but I don't see rural development packets of money being distributed out the regions.

Chris Horseman:

I think one quite striking feature of rural development policy is to look at how many different schemes there are per member states. In some member states, there is just one scheme for the whole country, in others there are 30-40. I think that is to a large extent a reflection on the different traditions, on the different focuses, latitudes on regionality that there are in different member states.

In my own member state, the UK, probably 10 years ago you would just have had one. Now, we have four, there was shift in the direction of devolution for England Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, just to take that as an example.

Mr Tremouille:

I would like to come back to what Mr Parish said earlier. In particular when it comes to the question of lobbying and the agricultural lobbying, how powerful they are. If they are so powerful, then this agricultural lobby should not be allowed to reduce the wide range of aspects of rural development. As I have said it before, the rural

development can base on a number of different pillars. As Mr Martinz said of course mainly on agriculture but not exclusively on agriculture. I think this lobbying needs to take into account other aspects so we can have the full diversity not being blocked by the agriculture lobby.

Neil Parish:

Well, you Sir come from France, where I would suggest the agriculture lobby is probably one of the strongest in Europe. I am coming from a country where it is probably not as strong. I am not making the point that it was right to have such a strong lobby but I am telling you that is where it is.

You only have to go to meetings on CAP reform, to find in the room you might have 60-70 people there. I reckon 50 of them came from COPA-COGEA which is the farming organisation. That is the way it is and that is what we are up against. That is why I say that you have to look at the reality of it.

Angelika Poth-Mögele:

I try to resist, but I can't because I think the Commission also can make a difference. You have mentioned a couple of minutes before, Mr Kissmeyer-Nielsen, the advisory committee of rural development to the European commission. We are fortunately one of the non-agriculture representatives but there is a huge imbalance. There is I think, I don't know exactly, a huge number of agri-industry representatives and very little other actors in rural development. We wrote a letter to the Director General one year ago, but never got a response. We asked for more balanced representation. May be we can take another effort and get this advisory committee in a bit more balanced composition. Thank you