

Questions to Neil Paris and Soeren Kissmeyer:

Juan Diego Iranzo Alfayte, Andalucia (E):

«It is about the less favoured areas, you were talking about. There were no going to be socio-economic criteria in order to choose these less favoured areas, you were talking about the climate indicator, climate conditions, and soil productivity. I didn't understand, is this about high soil productivity the less favoured areas have ? »

Soren Kissmeyer:

The less favoured areas will be on the physical production conditions, rather than on socio-economic factors. Of course, when I say soil productivity, it is of course to be less favoured areas it has to be low productivity. Obviously, you can have high level of sandiness, you can have high level of stoniness. You can have for instance in some our member states ideal weeds for instance in Estonia, you have in part of the North, you have limestone, just 20 cm below the soil, and it's factors like that, apart from real mountains also slopes can be a factor. And then you have the climate conditions, you can have the number of growing days, you can have water, too little water, droughts, and heat problems. (Which is probably more the case where you come from) Those are the kind of parameters which would be looked at for delimitating less favoured areas.

But as I said, it is under discussion for the time being, we are seeing all member states to talk with them about it and to be sure that we get all elements into the discussion before a final proposal is put on the table.

Lesley Williams from Somerset County Council (Question):

«You mentioned earlier, I think in the past rural development policy was developed separate from other policies. And I know in the current round of funding, they have tried to address this and there was a willingness to address this by saying that the competitiveness funding of the structural funds has to be compatible. But to a large extent, the responsibility for doing that has now been given to the member states.

When we are looking at the future development policy, to what extent is the development of the rural policy, being cross fertilized with other things that are going to impact environmental policies, climate change policies, that are being developed in Brussels?

It strikes me that there is a danger, that if they still continue to be developed in separate DGs, we could land up with situations where one is proposing something which is exactly in direct opposition to something that has just been proposed in another other department.»

Moderator:

So who like to go first one to answer?

Soren Kissmeyer:

«I understand your question and your worry, that we are sitting in Brussels in each of our boxes and we don't necessarily talk so much together. But I think, I can reassure you, that is exactly something that has been addressed inside the "raccourci" of the Commission effort. Whenever a proposal is made, the whole system is designed exactly to ensure that all views are represented (As I told you, for these less favoured areas, for example, we are making what we call - in our jargon - an impact

assessment, so an economic analysis of things). Every time a major proposal put on the table by Commission - it also goes now for the health-check proposal - this impact assessment must be made and that must be with representatives from all policy areas concerned by what is on the table. So this is better ensured than it was in the past.

So, is that sufficient? I would of course tend to say yes, that is sufficient. But other people may not find this sufficient. But also remember that the commission – we have 27 commissioners, each covering a certain policy area but also the Commission, as a body sits together, and decides together. Each commissioner has a body called cabinet and they look very much into each other's portfolio, and the final decision whenever a proposal is put on the table is not the proposal for Ms Boel, it is the proposal of the Commission. I can assure you that the commissioner is challenged by his colleagues before the proposals go to the table. And that is a big internal process.

Neil Parish:

I think, the barriers are being broken down but they are not broken down as quickly as you would like to see or probably I would like to see.

And it is not just a barrier within Commission, it is when they get back to DEFRA¹, when they get back member states as well.

I would love to be able to give you the simple answer it's all going to be wonderful : it is not but I think it is getting better. In a way, I suspect until we move to 2013, where are going to actually look at whether it is only going to be one policy overall.

Then I think, hopefully you are going to see improvement before you get there, but that's when you will see the major improvements, when we will be dealing with an entirety.

In the meantime, it is like in all politics and bureaucracies, there is a certain amount of jealousies going on. But I now for certain that you'll do your best trying break it down but each commissioner does like to some degree keep his or her portfolio together.

It happens on councils, it happens wherever you are.

Juan Diego Iranzo Alfayte, Andalucia (E):

My question regards the extra money that will come out of the increased modulation. How is this money going to be distributed among the different countries? Because this might affect very much the countries where the agriculture sector is very important, such as Andalusia. And how is this money going to be distributed between the different axes of the rural development measures? It seems to me that the first and second axes are very much related to the agriculture, whereas the third and especially the fourth deliver a methodology, an approach a lot different. I would think that this money goes far beyond in terms of rural development measures. Thank you very much.

Andrew Mitchell from Cornwall (South West England-UK)

I was very interested in what Mr Parish had to say and he's absolutely right with the change of attitude in the last 12 months in food-security coming back on the agenda, you would have most probably been left out of the room before... and also the fact that you have a sort of a far Eastern and Asian population that are becoming

¹ DEFRA : British Agricultural Department

wealthier and they're going to spend a lot more money on food. So maybe farmers in the near future can make a living and profit from food production. But what has been working up until now has been the diversity and diversification of farming and actually not considering them just as food productive units, but rural businesses and that certainly helped the farming industry in Cornwall, it certainly help the rural communities that those farms are based in. So I was a little concerned to hear what the chairman believes the view of his Committee is? Is that when you actually pass money to economic development for rural areas, they consider it to be a waste of money. And I was wondering if he could help us with the way into his Committee actually trying to change that view, or are we hitting our head against a brick wall because there's too many farmers on Rural Committee? Thank you.

Moderator:

So first of all Soren, how is this money will be going to be allocated, assuming it's forthcoming?

Soren Kissmeyer:

First of all, I believe that the extra-modulation money will be staying within the member States that it comes from, but it will trigger a corresponding national co-financing, so it will not just be UE money moved from first to second pillar, it will trigger a co-financing. So it will increase the overall envelop in total. And where will the money go? The idea is that they will be earmarked the new challenges so measures on climate change, on biodiversity, on water management and so on. And where it stands at this moment now all these things are being developed internally in DG AGRI for the time being but our analysis so far, is that we don't need actually to change the rural development framework, as we have it now. All the measures which are available within the framework offer what is needed for climate change and so on. It is a question of using them and using them more. The money will go mainly to axis 2, the environment side, but you could also see some of the money going to for example farm investment, in manual storage facilities where you will reduce emissions, things like that, but mainly only the second axis. The idea is also that Member States shall keep a kind of accounting for the new money, and in the end of period be able to say, yes we did use the new money for the things that we, in 2009, decided they should go to hopefully without becoming to bureaucratic (this is a personal remark). I hope I answered your question.

Neil Parish:

On the first question as well, I think you said was there going to be some kind of redistribution between the money in rural development. As far as I can see, it will just be a percentage of the payment to Spain for instance, it will be 5 or 6% -8% extra, and then that money is moved into rural development. Then Spain, between your regions, decides how you're going to spend it. Because, rural development money as you know, is separate. I don't think the Commission is going to revisit the way those are allocated. So I think basically you've got the sum of money that you get for Spain, you get it top sliced and then you use that and decide which region is going to get what. I think that's how it works.

As far as the Agriculture committee is concerned, yes, there are a lot of farmers on there. Like on the Environment committee, there are a lot of environmentalists: that's how the way the system works, how people are attracted into the various

committees. How do you break them down? I mean, in many ways, it is not so much just being farmers. They will take the attitude of their individual member states basically, so I would suggest that I'm a farmer, but on another hand I know that tourism and all those other things that come into rural development policy and agricultural policy all fit nicely together. And so, what I would say to you: if you want to get your views into the Committee, then we have done, what is called an Own Initiative Report of the Agricultural Committee on the Health Check. Now, we are waiting for the Commission's legislative proposal in May, and then there will be some more reports going through the Parliament. So I am very happy to receive any comments any of you might have, then I will bring them to what we call the Rapporteur, the person who has the Report and say 'these are the views, can they be incorporated in some of the ideas we are putting forward?'. So, in that respect we are opened, but I don't necessarily apologize – like I said - for the number of farmers in the Committee: that's the way it works.