

Hearing of the Petition 0187/2015

Preserving and managing land as our common wealth Before the Committee on Petitions of the European Parliament

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Statement before the Committee on Petitions:

> Action is urgent: farmland is rapidly disappearing throughout Europe; the EU is among the most unequal zones in terms of land distribution; half a million agricultural jobs are lost every year; a new generation is barred from entering farming, the food security of European residents is at stake³.

> Rising civil society mobilisation: many civil society organisations, experts and institutions are now calling the attention of EU institutions on farmland, as proven by the number and diversity of our signatories, the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee (2015) and other initiatives.

> Farmland falls under the responsibility of the EU: while land planning and allocation is the primary responsibility of member states, a range of EU policies strongly impact farmland⁴. Specifically, an indirect consequence of CAP direct payments is to bar entry into farming to many new entrants, with negative impacts on jobs, economic activity, rural areas and food security.

> Small-holder farming must be preserved as part of European agriculture: answering our Petition, the Commission states that “*the aim of the CAP is not to privilege one unique model of farming but rather to maintain the rich diversity of*

¹ Terre de liens is a civic organisation promoting land preservation and access to farmland for organic, peasant farmers in France. It engages citizens, advises farmers and local authorities and directly acquires farmland which is rented on the long term to organic farmers. In just 10 years, it has raised support from 14000 citizens, raised €50 millions, and facilitated access to land for over 200 farmers. www.terredeliens.org

² The European Coordination Via Campesina is a European organization which currently gathers 28 national and regional farmers, farm workers and rural organizations based in 18 European countries. Its main objective is the promotion of family and peasant farming, diversified and sustainable, based on the principles of food sovereignty. The European Coordination Via Campesina is recognized by the European institutions and international organizations as a stakeholder. It participates in advisory groups of the European Commission, is invited by the European Parliament to participate in public hearings, and is active in the Civil Society Mechanism in the Committee on World Food Security of the United Nations.

³ See Appendix 1

⁴ Notably: the Common Agricultural Policy, EU competition policy (movement of capital, investment regulation), regional policy and transport (large-scale infrastructures), environmental policies (e.g. water framework Directive and nitrates Directive), energy policy (renewable energy Directive)

farms and types of production in Europe". If so, given the fast disappearance of peasant and small-holder farming, urgent action is needed to support the maintenance of this form of agriculture which is not only the cornerstone of European food security but also embodies, in its lifestyles and crafts, an essential dimension of European culture.

> Our key requests are:

- The Council, the Commission and the Parliament adopt a new Directive on access to land, based on the Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land⁵, in the framework of food security.
- The Commission and the Parliament jointly study and monitor the land situation through the development of an observatory and statistical apparatus (land use and land use change, land concentration, land prices, tenancy regimes, soil fertility, spatial planning, etc.).
- The Council and Parliament should radically reform direct payments to suppress the direct link between subsidy and area, and instead use as criteria references to employment, greening and capping.

Our requests to the Parliament and Commission:

3 requests on data and impact studies:

> The Commission makes a specific annual presentation to the Parliament on the state of farmland in Europe (use and use change, allocation, price, accessibility for new entrants, soil fertility and biodiversity, etc.), in addition to the annual presentation on the state of agriculture.

> The Commission and the Parliament jointly study and monitor the land situation through the development of an observatory and statistical apparatus (land use and land use change, land concentration, land prices, tenancy regimes, soil fertility, spatial planning, etc.).

> The Parliament and the Commission review the impact of EU policies affecting land use and allocation, in light of the Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests, through a participatory process involving civil society.

2 requests on the Common Agricultural Policy:

> The direct link between subsidies and area has been dramatically impacting the land ownership landscape in Europe; it led to land price rise, unfair competition for access to land to the benefit of large farms and increasingly to non-agricultural investors capturing the land, creating insurmountable obstacles to new entrants into farming. Therefore the European Commission, the Council and the Parliament should radically reform direct payments to suppress the direct link between subsidy and area, and instead use as criteria reference to employment.

> Furthermore the criteria and implementation linked to the delivery for the environment, capping the subsidies a single enterprise can get, the payments for first hectares and the reference to active farmers should be much stricter and not voluntary, since this leads to limited results (as shown by the notifications on implementation from different member states: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/direct-support/direct-payments/docs/implementation-ms-notifications-slides_en.pdf).

> The Commission and Parliament act in favor of the diversity of European agriculture, thus paying active attention in supporting small and medium-size

⁵ The Guidelines are an unprecedented international instrument on the governance of land tenure, endorsed by the Committee on World Food Security in May 2012. See: <http://www.fao.org/nr/tenure/voluntary-guidelines/en/>

farms and agroecological farming, strengthening measures to insure access to land to smallholder new entrants and using all other available options in the current CAP and planning the next CAP to that end.

2 requests on new legislation and policy:

- > The Commission, the Parliament and the Council adopt a new Directive on access to land based on the Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land², in the framework of food security;
- > The Commission adopts a strong Communication and Strategy on Land as a Resource.

Our requests to the Committee on Petitions:

To that end, we specifically ask the Committee on Petitions to:

- > Inform Maria Noichl, *rapporteur* of the own-initiative report on access to land, decided by the Committee on Agriculture of the European Parliament, about the petition, so that she can take due account of the petition's analyses and requests in her report.
- > Ask an oral question, together with the Committee on Agriculture, to the Commission for presenting an annual state of EU farmland before the Parliament and start developing an observatory and adequate statistical apparatus.
- > Ask an oral question, together with the Committee on Agriculture, to the Commission for launching a review of the impact of EU policies on European farmland, in light of the Guidelines on the Tenure of Land.
- > Organise a fact-finding mission, together with the Committee on Agriculture, in Romania, the Czech Republic, France, Italy or Spain to explore the challenges of access to land (decline of farmland, land price increase, blockage of the land market, difficulties to enter farming) and issue a report with its observations and recommendations.

Preserving and managing farmland as our common wealth:

Did you know?

Many people see no concern in the way farmland is used and managed in Europe. Well, did you know that...

- **Since 1990, the EU 28 lost 8% of its agricultural area⁶ -i.e. twice the size of Ireland.**
- **85% of land used for urban and infrastructure development comes from farmland⁷.**
- **It takes 2000 years to create 10 cm of soil⁸.**
- **Erosion affects about a fifth of EU farmland; so does contamination by pesticides⁹.**
- **Only 7% of farm holders are under 35 (2010); the vast majority of EU farmers will retire by 2025. In many countries, over half do not know their successor.**
- **20 years of farm work are needed to pay back the acquisition of 1 hectare of land in the UK¹⁰. How can new entrants afford a farm?**
- **3% of EU farms are large farms (>100 ha). They control 50% of farmland.**
- **510,000 full time equivalent agricultural jobs are lost in the EU every year.**
- **4.3 million farms have disappeared in the EU between 2003 and 2013 - out of these 3.9 million (90%) are small farms (< 5ha).**
- **18% of German arable land is used for energy crop¹¹.**

⁶ Except specified otherwise, all data are from Eurostat.

⁷ European Environment Agency (EEA), The European Environment, State and Outlook 2010 (SOER), Land use.

⁸ FAO, <http://www.fao.org/soils-2015/faq/en/>

⁹ European Parliament, *Land Degradation and Desertification* (2008). See also EEA, *SOER 2015, European briefings*, Soil.

¹⁰ SAFER, Les marchés fonciers agricoles en Europe en 2014, in *Le prix des terres en 2015*, p.21 – based on Terres d'Europe-Scafr, Eurostat and national data.

¹¹ www.bioenergy.fnr.de

- **In 2015, land grabs have been registered in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and the UK¹².**
- **EU residents have 0,4 ha of land per person. But our consumption models mean that we're using 0,6 ha per person¹³. Do we want to threaten food security in other countries?**

¹² GRAIN, *The farmland grab in 2016: how big? how bad?*, June 2016.

¹³ Friends of the Earth Europe et al. (2013), *Hidden Impacts: How Europe's resource overconsumption promotes global land conflicts*, p.22.