



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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**AGRI 114**

**NOTE**

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from :            Presidency  
to :                Council

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Subject :        High Level Conference on Agricultural Product Quality held in Prague,  
                      12-13 March 2009  
                      – Information from the Presidency

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Delegations will find attached a note from the Presidency on the abovementioned subject, which has been entered under "Any Other Business" on the agenda for the Council (Agriculture and Fisheries) meeting on 23 March 2009.

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**CZECH PRESIDENCY HIGH LEVEL CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF  
AGRICULTURAL PRODUCT QUALITY POLICY**

The Czech Presidency held a high-level ministerial Conference in Prague on 12-13 March 2009<sup>1</sup>. The Conference served as a follow-up to the Commission consultation initiative on the Green Paper on Agricultural Product Quality published in October 2008.

Under the common auspices of the President of the Council and the Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, and with the participation of the President of the European Parliament AGRI Committee, the Ministers from Slovenia, Slovakia, Greece, Portugal, Sweden, Spain, Lithuania as well as high representatives from all EU Member States, the Commission and a broad scope of stakeholders representing farmers, producers, manufacturers, traders and consumers and other interested parties, a serious debate was held on the future shape and direction of the EU Quality Policy.

The Conference was organised in order to exchange views on the main issues relating to the Commission Green Paper while providing the participants and the Commission a first opportunity to discuss these issues with a view to prepare the forthcoming Communication.

From the Presidency point of view the Conference served as a stimulating and valuable contribution to the upcoming discussions in the Council under the Czech Presidency.

To this end the European Commission presented a summary of more than 560 contributions submitted in response to the Green Paper. This amount illustrates the considerable interest in quality products, labelling and certification schemes.

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<sup>1</sup> Detailed information on the Conference can be found on the website: [www.qpc.cz](http://www.qpc.cz).

At the Conference discussions were divided into three Workshops (*'Farming Requirements and Marketing Standards'*, the *'EU Quality Schemes'* and *'Certification Schemes and Organic Farming'*). The main conclusions of the discussions could be broadly summarized as follows:

#### General observations

- § Quality is a key and unique tool ensuring long-term competitiveness of EU farming and food processing by ensuring that farmers can communicate to consumers about product characteristics and farming attributes.
- § Existing EU quality schemes fulfil the basic objectives of Community interests. Their positive effects should be further strengthened while at the same time the system needs some improvements, clarification and simplification.
- § Common approach on quality is essential for promoting the Community interests towards third countries, in particular with regard to recognition of GIs.

#### Farming requirements and marketing standards

- § Currently available information on **farming requirements and marketing standards** is comprehensive; however producers within the EU do not always receive full recognition and wider benefits for the added value of the production.
- § The development of an **obligatory EU logo** indicating compliance with the EU farming requirements has been discussed as an option; however the possible benefit of the introduction of a new logo seemed to be relatively small.
- § The complex issue of **mandatory indication of the place of farming for food** needs to be further elaborated to address basic questions of the stakeholders' interests (not to mislead consumers/not to create obstacles for the free movement of goods/competitiveness).
- § It would be preferable to maintain the current system of specifying product identities in **marketing standards** in the EU legislation, as a guarantee of a certain level of stable environment for producers, retailers and consumers; however, further possible simplification was welcomed.
- § Self-regulation in the field of marketing standards was not supported, as it would not fully guarantee the necessary level of implementation and control of adherence to marketing standards.

#### EU quality schemes

- § Clarification and harmonisation of the **Geographical Indication schemes** (including food, wine and spirits) and enhancement of protection both at EU and at international level were required. Common views were shared in terms of centralized EU approach in the management of the GIs system to ensure consistency and credibility of the system, while at the same time focusing on simplification of the registration procedure.

- § **PDOs and PGIs** were recognized as key instruments of the Agricultural Product Quality Policy for producers, consumers, Member States and the regions.
- § The enlargement of the scope of products, eligible for PDOs and PGIs protection should be explored and the issue of generic names further discussed.
- § Doubts were expressed on introducing new criteria for GIs, merging the PDOs and PGIs into one scheme as well as on limiting the number of GI products to be protected at the European and/or International levels.
- § GIs were deemed to be complementary to trademarks, while at the same time a sound call for clarification of the relationship between GIs and trademarks was expressed. There was no support for replacing GI schemes by trademarks. In addition the need to watch and refuse the registration of trademarks that includes GI names by non authorized entities was recalled.
- § Support for improvements to the EU quality scheme for **traditional specialties guaranteed**, since they play an important role, different from application of GIs, towards improving quality and production systems, ensuring quality reference to consumers and providing authentic products of agricultural areas in the EU. Strong interest for Member States, particularly EU-12, due to historical consequences was underlined. There was a wide understanding on the necessity to improve the TSG scheme, in particular mandatory reservation of the name, simplification of the control procedure and better communication of the concept towards consumers including mandatory Community symbol use and targeted promotion campaigns of a whole system.
- § The conference noted that a number of EU schemes are currently being developed and called for coherence to be ensured.

#### On certification schemes & organic farming

- § Improvements in the operation of private and national **certification schemes** and guidelines should be sufficient, while these efforts should be aimed at clarification of the schemes for the benefit of producers keeping tradition while at the same time improving the market value inherent in the products.
- § The importance of defending the principles of the single EU market, for example for **organic products**, was underlined.

The responses to consultation as well as the results of the Conference will now be reflected in the preparation of the Communication on Quality Policy. The Commission Communication is expected to be adopted on 27 May 2009.

It will lay down strategic orientations and will be an opportunity for the Council to advance the debate and eventually prepare Council Conclusions under the Czech Presidency. Any legislative proposals will be tabled by the Commission not earlier than 2010.