NOTE

from : Romanian delegation

to : Council

Subject : The small farm scale - still an important role to play in the future European agriculture

Delegations will find attached a note from the Romanian delegation concerning small-scale agriculture.
The international debates indicate that the demand for food will double in the next three decades due to the demographic growth, to the increase of the request within the emerging economies (mainly in China and India) and to the development of the biofuels sector.

Under these circumstances and considering the climate changes that strongly affect the world agricultural production, the food prices have registered in the last year a significant increase that affect the consumers with low income, even in the EU.

As a result, there is a high concern regarding the food security within EU and the CAP’s objective of supplying the market at affordable prices for the consumers makes proof of its perpetual validity.

Furthermore, bearing in mind the European agricultural great potential the EU has to contribute significantly to the global balance between supply and demand and to preserve its position as a big agro-food exporter.

That is why we think that the EU should reconsider and re-evaluate its agricultural potential and has to take into account all the producers that can contribute to the sustainable development of the European food production. We have in mind especially the re-evaluation of the role that small farms actually could and should play in the future agro-food production.

We have to mention that the small-scale agriculture still plays an important role within the Member States such as Poland, Romania, Spain, Italy, Slovakia etc., but for the time being this type of agriculture is not seriously considered by the CAP measures.

Regarding the role of small-scale agriculture we would like to recall that the Commission’s experts pointed out in one of its annual report the social importance these holdings played in the new member states, alleviating the Governments’ difficult task of supporting the un-employed people within the rural areas.
Therefore, we think that the EU should reconsider the role of the small agricultural farms, especially the semi-subsistence ones producing for the market and playing a specific role in the agriculture of proximity.

The small holdings still present a number of advantages, of which it has to be mentioned in particular the followings:

- Practice an extensive agriculture, that although is not of high performance, has a very low impact or even environmentally friendly (a number of small farms continue to use the animals for the agricultural works); in this way, they ensure the environmental protection and the conservation of rural heritage;
- Use varieties and species with peculiar value contributing to the diversity preservation and conservation of rare breeds and varieties;
- Play quite an important role in supplying the local markets, ensuring largely the self-sufficiency of local communities, and thus alleviating the role of the large scale trade that can better focus on supplying the large urban communities and the international markets;
- Produce fresh and good quality products, many of them made by traditional methods, highly appreciated by the local communities, but not only.
- Local distribution of the fresh products that reduces the impact on the environment due to the:
  - small distances for products transport;
  - reduction of the need for preservation/storage.

Despite all these advantages, during the last decades the small-scale agriculture has been systematically ignored and the agricultural policies mainly focused on supporting the intensive agricultural production, highly efficient, certainly playing a decisive role in market supplying, but which presents a number of disadvantages compared to the small scale one of which we mention: the major impact on the environment, unsustainable exploitation of the resources etc.

We do consider that taking into account the increasing of the:

- world population and risk of the food shortage;
- tax payers concern regarding the role of agriculture in protecting and preserving the environment;
- consumers interest for:
  - fresh and specific organoleptic qualities of products;
  - a wider diversity of agro-food products that preserve the specificity of the local varieties or valuable recipes and which have a reduced impact on the market due to the small production;
EU should review and reconsider the role played by this category of agriculture on the EU local markets that could significantly contribute to the general balance of supply and demand. The EU should develop and support alternative ways to the industrial type of agricultural production that certainly has to continue to play an important role, but should not become the only way of agriculture that is encouraged by the CAP. We have to go beyond the logic of agricultural productivity as the only solution for answering the increasing of food demand on the world market and which might be an additional argument for the European taxpayer in supporting the future CAP.

In this regard, we would like to ask the Commission to analyze the possibility of better encouraging the production and marketing of the agricultural products produced by the small farms that mainly address the local market.

Taking into consideration the increase of the food demand on the European and world markets, we think that the production of small farms is not enough considered and supported by the current CAP, and some agricultural products have limited access to the market due to the certain food standards, often unreasonably restrictive or not enough adapted to the specificity of this small-scale production.

Therefore, in the context of the huge concerns regarding the supply of the agro-food markets and the increase of the food prices, we do believe that it would be most welcomed a Commission evaluation of this issue. The evaluation has to take into consideration the real potential and benefits of this type of agriculture at the European level and eventually to draw up specific measures that could better support the production (and its marketing) of these farms, especially on the local markets.