



Slovensko predsedstvo EU 2008
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Speaking points on Agriculture and Rural Development (UN-ECE RIM 28-29 January 2008)

The EU believes that agriculture and rural development has an important role to play in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) and in the commitments of the enlarged European Union's to achieve internationally agreed development goals. There are a number of important objectives, which in fact are at same time requirements, for sustainable development, such as:

- Sustainable growth,
- poverty eradication,
- change of certain patterns of production and consumption,
- protecting, and managing of natural resources.

The EU tries to make progress internally as well as internationally, addressing complex, unfolding issues such as climate change, encouraging sustainable agricultural practices and promoting sustainable growth in developing countries by liberalising trade.

Our JPOI commitments in the field of agriculture and rural development imply two major challenges:

- To look more closely to the objectives *of poverty eradication, food security and sustainable natural resource management from a perspective of policy coherence.*
- *Social, cultural and environmental impacts must be taken into account throughout the lifecycle of food production.* Basic standards of sustainable agricultural production are needed and we must put more emphasis on sustainable agricultural practices, such as organic farming.

Internally, the EU has begun to address these issues:

In fostering sustainable agricultural practices, the EU has developed a number of initiatives, for example:

- **Cross compliance:** As a counterpart to EU payments, farmers must meet certain standards in the areas of the environment, public, animal and plant health, and animal welfare, and must keep land in good agricultural and environmental conditions. In case of non respect, farmers may be subject to reduction or withdrawal of those payments.
- **Agri-environmental measures:** Multi-annual agricultural environmental commitments encourage farmers to manage the land with the aim of protecting natural landscapes, preserving indigenous breeds and reducing agricultural pollution. These measures are designed and implemented on a national/regional basis within rural development programmes.

- **Natura 2000:** To counter large-scale destruction and fragmentation of wildlife habitats, the EU has developed Natura 2000, a Community-wide network of nature protection areas. The aim of this important network is to ensure the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats.
- **Conservation of genetic resources in agriculture:** The EU has launched a new Community Programme on the conservation, characterisation, collection and utilisation of genetic resources in agriculture. This has given rise to 17 actions started in 2007, involving 178 partners located in 25 Member States and 12 non-EU states.
- **Soil protection measures:** The EU has adopted a Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection to ensure the sustainable use of soil in the long term and protect its vital functions, also considering climate change aspects and Integrated Water Resource Management principles.
- The **Leader initiative**, one of the four axes of the European and national rural development strategies supported by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development together with national funds, helps rural actors improve the long-term potential of their local regions. It encourages integrated, multi-sectoral and innovative strategies for sustainable development in local areas. These strategies are drawn up and implemented by public-private local partnerships (Local Action Groups).
- **Organic agriculture** has become one of the most dynamic sectors in EU agriculture. We endorse organic farming as part of a sustainable farming system. To benefit consumers and to ensure well defined product properties for organic products, some regulation of product and production techniques were adopted (such as labelling, processing, certification and marketing of organic products).
- The EU promotes **quality label systems** especially geographical indications and designations of origin for agricultural products and foodstuffs. Certification schemes provide a means by which producers can inform their ultimate customers about their products. This is consistent with European emphasis on quality and specialisation. Both producers and consumers know and care about production and processing techniques, ingredients, and the origin of raw materials.

Also, internationally, the EU is addressing these challenges:

- The Commission's 2002 Communication on "**Fighting Rural Poverty**" presents the EC policy and approach to rural development in developing countries. This policy integrates the objectives of poverty reduction, food security and sustainable natural resource management.
- The EC's 2007 Communication on '**Advancing African Agriculture**' reflects the African priorities identified in the **Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP)** and the Paris Declaration. The Communication identifies cooperation in seven areas: (i) agriculture in development strategies; (ii) sector governance; (iii) research, knowledge systems and dissemination; (iv) trade facilitation; (v) natural resource management; (vi) livestock development and disease control; and (vii) risk management.
- In line with the EU's 2004 '**Action Plan on Agricultural Commodity Chains, Dependence and Poverty**', we support the improved competitiveness of commodity chains and primary production. This involves linking producers and rural businesses to competitive international, regional and national markets, helping partner countries implement commodity chain and diversification strategies and develop regional support services.

- In trade negotiations we promote respect for **better environmental and social standards** and seek new collaborative ways to help EU trading partners to adhere to multilateral environmental agreements and core ILO labour standards. The EU's Generalised System of Preferences is a further incentive for EU partners to meet social and environmental objectives.
- Finally, we support implementation of the "**International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture**". Given the threats to biodiversity through climate change, the Treaty is an important contribution to the sustainable management of plant genetic resources and indirectly to food security. In this sense we also welcome the process established on animal genetic resources.