

Remarks by Commissioner Phil Hogan
at the Official Opening of the Ettelbruck Agricultural Fair

3 July 2015

Introduction

Minister Etgen, Mr Mayor, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great pleasure for me to be here in Ettelbruck this afternoon on the occasion of the official opening of the Ettelbruck Agricultural Fair.

This agricultural exhibition has, for many years, been the showcase of the Luxembourgish farming industry and is very much a fixture in the social and farming calendar during the first week-end in July every year.

I am pleased also to be here on the occasion of Luxembourg assuming the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of the EU. The rotating six-month presidency of the Council comes at a challenging time for Europe and, though Luxembourg is one of the smallest Member States, it is also one of the most experienced.

Luxembourg will have to deal with many pressing issues, including the Greek debt crisis, an increase in irregular migration and the preparation for the climate change conference in Paris in December.

Coming from another small member state which held the Presidency just two years ago, I have no doubt that the Luxembourg team is more than well equipped to ensure a successful President.

Luxembourg Presidency

In terms of the Agriculture, the Council will be in the very capable hands of Fernand Etgen, with whom I have worked very closely since my appointment as Commissioner. I was very pleased to accept Fernand's invitation to visit Luxembourg in March and I enjoyed a very stimulating and constructive engagement with members of parliament and stakeholders in your industry.

I read the priorities of the Luxembourg Presidency with great interest, but also with great satisfaction. I could not agree more with the Presidency's statement that *"sustainability must also be the fundamental principle for the future development of European agriculture."* Without sustainability, we won't have a European agricultural sector in years to come.

I warmly welcome the commitment of the Luxembourg Presidency to focus on simplifying rules and procedures. I have identified this as my political priority for 2015 and it is crucially important I have the strong support of the other Institutions and I know that have a strong supporter in that respect in Minister Etgen.

I note also the priority given to reaching an agreement on a new regulatory framework on organic farming. The debate on this proposal has been a protracted one, but significant progress has been made in both the Council and the European Parliament. I know we can rely on the Luxembourg Presidency to play a constructive role in progressing towards a final agreement.

Of course, the impact of the extended Russian embargo on certain EU agricultural products and the expiry of milk quotas are also issues with which we will have to deal.

We will have a first opportunity to discuss and further consider these issues in the first meeting of the Agriculture Council under the Luxembourg Presidency.

The CAP

Since my appointment, I have attended a number of agricultural fairs over the past eight months and I have become increasingly aware of their value. The Common Agricultural Policy accounts for nearly 40 per cent of the EU budget and we all have a responsibility to EU taxpayers to explain why such a commitment to Europe's agri-food sector is the right thing to do. Events such as this are critically important in explaining to non-CAP beneficiaries why it is important that we invest in our agri-food sector.

Over the next seven years, the new CAP is going to invest more than €337 million in Luxembourg's farming sector and rural areas. I have just come from a meeting with young farmers and it is refreshing to hear the views of the next generation of European food producers. I am particularly pleased therefore that the new CAP will encourage young farmers to set up in business, through the new 25 per cent aid supplement during the first five years, in addition to already existing measures.

Luxembourg RDP

I was also very pleased to be able to tell Minister Etgen that the Commission has now formally adopted the Rural Development Programme for Luxembourg.

I understand that there may have been some frustration at the time taken to conclude the process, but I want to acknowledge the role played by Fernand and his officials in ensuring that all of the questions asked were answered comprehensively and in a way that ensured that we have got to this point today.

Your RDP will ensure that €368 million of public money will be available over the period 2014-2020. I welcome the emphasis that Luxembourg has placed on actions related to restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems.

This is important in a country in which over 80 per cent of the territory is classified as rural. I am confident that the new Rural Development Programme will enable Luxembourg's rural areas to prosper and contribute to the objectives of the EU's rural development policy.

Ladies and gentlemen, in Europe we set and maintain the highest standards of food production in the world and that is something about which we ought to be very proud and something that we should be prepared to defend. I am conscious that the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is an issue of considerable debate in Luxembourg.

As part of the negotiation team, let me assure you that we in the Commission are very well aware of the strong attention which TTIP is generating among public opinion and I want to confirm that, while we want a balanced and reasonable deal, my focus is on ensuring that standards are not lowered, particularly in the area of food safety, while also preserving sustainable agriculture.

Conclusion

I want to conclude by congratulating the organisers of this excellent event on such an outstanding display of all that is good about agriculture and food production in Luxembourg.

I want to repeat my best wishes to the Luxembourg Presidency, in whom I have great faith and to assure them of the Commission's commitment, led by my boss and your former Prime Minister, Jean Claude Juncker, to work closely and constructively with them for the benefit of all our citizens – rural and urban.

And, finally, I hope that the wonderful sunshine of the last few days continues for at least the duration of the Fair and that it is the tremendous success that it deserves to be.

Ends.