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PRESS RELEASE

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Latest CAP reform proposals threaten CAP support for environment

On 19 December the Cyprus Presidency presented its “progress report” on the much debated Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) reform. This is another step on the long road towards a final position in the EU Agriculture Council, which is needed before negotiations with the European Parliament can start. However, many rural development and environmental NGOs consider that far from progress, this represents a retreat that fails to meet the original reform ambitions, and undermines the original idea of making this CAP greener, fairer and more simple.

After six months of discussions, negotiations and meetings, Cyprus concludes its Presidency with a CAP ‘reform’ that if approved, risks making the new policy more environmentally damaging than the current one” says **Faustine Defosse, agriculture policy officer in European Environment Bureau**. The European public, who pay for the CAP through their taxes, have clearly demanded a CAP that is less damaging to environment: the proposals released today in Brussels fail to answer this demand.

In addition, the new proposals are also weakening the intended reform of payment levels, to the disadvantage of New Member States. “CAP payments are not balanced between countries, and so are not fair to the new Member States of Central and Eastern Europe – and they are not balanced within countries, so that a few large farmers receive most of the payments even though they do not deliver the environmental services so important for future food security, while the small-scale farmers who do deliver environmental and social benefits, and desperately need support, receive little or no payments” said **Mátyás Prommer, General Secretary of CEEweb for Biodiversity**.

“Member States are trying hard to weaken the Commission’s greening proposals, while in times of austerity, we should try to get more not less delivery from public investments” adds **Trees Robijns, EU Agriculture and Bioenergy Policy Officer at BirdLife Europe**.

“There is a threat of disproportionate budget cuts to the Rural Development Programme, which is targeted to protect the environment and support rural communities. In addition, Agriculture Ministers are intending to make further cuts in the Rural Development Programme budget, to create a costly income stabilization tool, at the expense of environmental measures” concludes **Sebastien Godinot, Economist, WWF European Policy Office**.

It will be hard to justify the massive cost of the CAP, if the delivery of environmental and social benefits is even less than before. The Council proposals offer taxpayers little value for money.

The greening the CAP is not a luxury but a necessity. If we are to solve the urgent environmental problems that the EU faces, give a future to European farming and bring

much needed legitimacy back to this policy, a serious shift in the negotiations under the Irish Presidency is desperately needed.

Environmental and rural development NGOs are hoping for real progress in delivering a reform that works for the environment, farmers and politicians. The next 6 months will be a critical period in which this will be decided. The general public should be aware of the danger of their taxes being badly spent on destructive policies. We hope that they will take this threat seriously and press their governments and members of Parliament to support a real reform of the CAP, for the sake of a sustainable future for our food, nature and rural communities.

Explanatory notes:

1. **BirdLife Europe** - <http://europe.birdlife.org> - is a global Partnership of conservation organisations that strives to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity, working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources. The BirdLife Partnership operates in 117 countries and territories worldwide. BirdLife Europe is present in 45 countries and all EU Member States.
2. **CEEweb for Biodiversity** - www.ceeweb.org - is a network of several dozens of nature conservation organizations from Central and East European countries, working together to protect the biological heritage of the region. The mission of CEEweb is the conservation of biodiversity through the promotion of sustainable development.
3. **The European Environmental Bureau** - www.eeb.org - is Europe's largest federation of environmental organisations with more than 140 member organisations, representing 15 million European citizens, and acting as the ears and voice of our members towards the EU decision makers.
4. **WWF** - www.wwf.eu - is one of the world's largest and most respected independent conservation organizations, with over 5 million supporters and a global network active in over 100 countries. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the earth's natural environment by conserving the world's biological diversity, and ensuring sustainable use of natural resources.

Examples of how the Council is trying to scale back the reform:

- ⌚ the reduction of the rate at which payment levels are equalized between old member States and new Member states
- ⌚ the reduction of degressive payments and capping of payments, by which smaller-scale farmers will receive more per hectare and larger-scale farmers less per hectare
- ⌚ the proposal to exempt major sections of the farming sector from Pillar 1 (Direct Payments) greening requirements with little environmental justification
- ⌚ the proposal to make various crops exempt from greening measures, replacing valuable habitat with crops that have no proven environmental delivery
- ⌚ nothing has been done to ensure our most valuable grasslands are protected and those who look after them rewarded. The improvements proposed by the Commission are being reduced to current levels and protection could become even weaker
- ⌚ proposal to remove elementary water and pesticide legislation from the list of basic rules farmers receiving subsidies need to comply with
- ⌚ Rural Development policy (Pillar 2), despite representing real value for public money, is increasingly under threat within the EU Budget negotiations. Member States have shown little interest in maintaining the current minimum spending requirement for the environment, even though it represents one of the few environmental safety nets in the CAP. Together with the costly introduction of a multi-billion Income Stabilization Tool, much of the environmental performance and benefit for rural communities could be lost.

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