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European Union

Agricultural Situation

Role of EU Parliament

2003

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Report Highlights:

This report is to serve as a primer on the role of European Parliament on issues affecting agriculture. The report includes a sketch of Parliamentary procedure and a list of members of the Environment Committee.

Includes PSD changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
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INTRODUCTION

This report is a follow-up to the FAS/APHIS European Agricultural Trade Policy Workshop in Barcelona. The result of that meeting was an agreement for closer coordination with FAS and APHIS posts in the European Union in order to better advance interests of U.S. agriculture in Europe. This report provides background on the structure of the Parliament, their role in the legislative process, a list of Members of Parliament (MEPs) who serve on Parliamentary committees of interest to agriculture. The European Parliament Website: <http://www.europarl.eu.int> is an excellent site to gather more information on individual members, committees and parliamentary decisions.

Under the Amsterdam Treaty the European Parliament (EP) wields more influence over EU legislation than ever before through the expansion of co-decision authority. Co-decision essentially grants veto power equal to that of the Council on most Community legislation. Concerning agriculture, the Parliament does not have co-decision on CAP issues, but can only give opinions. However, their real influence on agriculture is their co-decision authority on food-safety issues. As more and more trade barriers from Europe are in the form of regulatory requirements for food and feed imports it is necessary for FAS staff in member states to work directly with the MEPs or their staff.

STRUCTURE OF PARLIAMENT

Since 1979, MEPs are elected directly by EU citizens every five years under a system of proportional representation, according to various national election procedures (regional basis, national basis, or mixed system.) Currently there are 626 members. However the revised allocation of seats post enlargement will increase the overall total of MEPs to 732. The current Parliament's term runs through May 2004.

MEPs do not sit in their member state party delegations; instead they sit in multi-member state political groups which reflect the main trends in European political thinking (Socialist, Christian-Democrats/Conservative, Liberals, Greens, etc.). The current Parliament has seven political groups, plus some "non-attached" members.

Parliament holds committee meetings in Brussels, but the Plenary, where decisions are made is held once a month in Strasbourg. Also, at least one week a month MEPs are in their home districts.

ROLE OF PARLIAMENT IN THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

Once the Commission approves a proposal for a directive or regulations, they then move to the European Council and the Parliament. An EP Committee will do background research and write a draft report on the Commission's ideas. For issues of concern to agriculture, the Environmental Committee has the most power, as they are assigned most of the dossiers that concern food safety. They also have been assigned the biotech dossiers on Food and Feed and Traceability and Labeling. Since Parliament can only give opinions and does not have co-decision authority on issues related to CAP, including the mid-term review, the Agricultural

Committee holds less sway but can influence the thinking of both the Council and Commission.

Once a committee drafts a report on the Commission's proposal, the Parliament can offer amendments under a procedure known as "First Reading". All Parliamentary amendments must be included in the Commission's report to the Council and must be considered but not necessarily adopted. The Council then sends its "common position" to the Parliament for "Second Reading." If after the second reading, there is no agreement with the Council, the proposal will go to a conciliation committee. If after six weeks, there has been no agreement, the proposal will die.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE COMMITTEES

With the role of European Parliament expanded to many highly technical issues within the European Union, including veto power under co-decision, only a few members of Parliament, those on the Committees responsible for the issue, will have in-depth knowledge of the issue. Also, since it is the Committee that drafts the report to the whole of the Parliament, they wield considerable power.

When the Commission directive or regulation moves to the Parliament, it is assigned to an appropriate committee, like Environment, Agriculture or Fisheries. Committee members represent the full range of political groups and have varying expertise regarding their committee's area of specialty. Each committee is headed by a chairperson or president who can exert considerable authority. (At each committee meeting, the chairman submits to the committee a list of proposals which in his/her opinion should be approved without report. Unless one-fifth of the committee object, the proposal is approved.)

However, when the President of Chairperson requests more technical analysis on a Commission proposal, the committee's political group coordinators appoint a rapporteur from the committee to be the expert on the issue and to draft the report on the legislation. This is the case in the vast majority of Commission proposals that deal with food safety and concerns such as GMO's, Animal Bi-Products and the Food and Feed Control proposal. The rapporteur will help present the report once it goes to a full vote of the Parliament in plenary. Rapporteurs are powerful because they are singularly responsible for the draft legislation and wield influence in the full parliament as the "expert" on the issue.

As mentioned earlier, by far and away the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy plays a key role in issues of concern to U.S. agricultural exporters. This Committee takes the lead on environmental policy, public health issues and consumer policy. Other committees that can impact agricultural issue are the Committee on Legal Affairs and the Internal Market which is responsible for intellectual property rights, civil liability and ethical questions concerning new technology and the Fisheries Committee. Since the CAP does not come under co-decision, the Committee on Agriculture holds less legislative power. However their "opinion" on important agricultural issues, such as the Mid-term review, can influence both Commission and Council's position. Committees meet two weeks out of the month in Brussels and meetings are open to the public.

ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Once entering EP politics, MEPs who belong to national political parties band together to form umbrella political coalitions. Each group nominates a chairperson who is instrumental in helping to reach compromises with other political groups and with the Council. As a result of the June 1999 election the center-right European People's party (EPP) became the largest group followed by the Party of the European Socialists (PES). The Green Party increased the number of MEPs in the 1999 election. The new Parliament will begin in May 2004 and will include MEPs from the candidate countries. The current parties are:

- Group of European People's Party/European Democrats (EPP/ED)
- Group of the Party of European Socialists (PES)
- Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA)
- Confederal Group of European United Left/Nordic Green Left (EUL/NGL)
- Union for a Europe of Nations Group (UEN)
- Group of European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR)
- The Technical Group of Independents (TGI)
- Non-Attached (NI)

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Information on the Parliament, including agendas and committee members can be at www.europarl.eu.int. In order to assist Post in contacting key Parliamentarians, below is a list of the Environmental Committee. Note: a new parliament will be sworn in June 2004. Therefore, this list is only up-to-date until then.

1. Committee on Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policies: Responsible for **EU environmental policy** and protection measures at regional and international; **Public Health** including food content, safety and labeling of foodstuffs, pharmaceutical products, medical research, public health checks, cosmetic products, civil protection; **Consumer Protection** including the protection of consumers' economic interest of better information:

Mrs JACKSON, Caroline F. , Chairman
Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats
United Kingdom

NOBILIA, Mauro , Vice-Chairman
Union for Europe of the Nations Group
Italy

De Heer de ROO, Alexander , Vice-Chairman
Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
Netherlands

On. SACCONI, Guido , Vice-Chairman

Group of the Party of European Socialists
Italy

Sra. AYUSO GONZÁLEZ, María del Pilar , Member
Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European
Democrats
Spain

M. BERNIÉ, Jean-Louis , Member
Group for a Europe of Democracies and Diversities
France

De Heer BLOKLAND, Johannes (Hans) , Member
Group for a Europe of Democracies and Diversities
Netherlands

Mr BOWE, David Robert , Member
Group of the Party of European Socialists
United Kingdom

Mr BOWIS, John , Member
Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European
Democrats
United Kingdom

Frau BREYER, Hiltrud , Member
Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
Federal Republic of Germany

Mr CALLANAN, Martin , Member
Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European
Democrats
United Kingdom

Mevr. CORBEY, Dorette , Member
Group of the Party of European Socialists
Netherlands

On. COSTA, Raffaele , Member
Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European
Democrats
Italy

Mr DAVIES, Chris , Member
Group of the European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party
United Kingdom

Mrs DOYLE, Avril , Member
Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats
Ireland

Mme FERREIRA, Anne , Member
Group of the Party of European Socialists
France

Mr FITZSIMONS, James (Jim) , Member
Union for Europe of the Nations Group
Ireland

Frau FLEMMING, Marialiese , Member
Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats
Austria

Herr FLORENZ, Karl-Heinz , Member
Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats
Federal Republic of Germany

Fru FRAHM, Pernille , Member
Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left
Denmark

Sra. GARCÍA• A-ORCOYEN TORMO, Cristina , Member
Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats
Spain

Sra. GONZÁ• LEZ Á• LVAREZ, Laura , Member
Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left
Spain

Mr GOODWILL, Robert , Member
Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats
United Kingdom

Mme GROSSETÁŠTE, FranÁšoise , Member
Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats
France

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Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European
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Spain

Mme ISLER B  GUIN, Marie Anne , Member
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France

Frau KLASS, Christa , Member
Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European
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Federal Republic of Germany

KORHOLA, Eija-Riitta Anneli , Member
Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European
Democrats
Finland

Herr KRONBERGER, Hans , Member
Non-attached
Austria

Herr LANGE, Bernd , Member
Group of the Party of European Socialists
Federal Republic of Germany

Herr LIESE, Peter , Member
Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European
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Hr. LUND, Torben , Member
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Denmark

De Heer MAATEN, Jules , Member
Group of the European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party
Netherlands

Mrs McKENNA, Patricia , Member
Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
Ireland

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Group of the Party of European Socialists

Greece

Sr. MOREIRA DA SILVA, Jorge , Member
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Portugal

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Group of the Party of European Socialists
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Fru PAULSEN, Marit , Member (**Rapporteur for Food and Feed Controls**)
Group of the European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party
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Group of the Party of European Socialists
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