Greens have strongly criticised the European Commission for what they say is a lack of concern for the environment in its proposals for the post-2020 Common Agricultural Policy.

The Commission’s proposals on climate change are too weak, environmentalists say, arguing that stronger decision-making powers for EU member states risk sinking environmental objectives.

Five Green MEPs recently wrote an op-ed on EURACTIV.com, saying that new CAP will be worse for the climate and farmers than the current one.

Moreover, a revised General Food law has been in place with an aim to increase transparency, especially regarding the authorisation of pesticides and their environmental impact.

The urgent need for innovation in agriculture, combined with the need for environmental protection, will be the big challenge facing EU policymakers.
Farmers hope EU Commission will block Austria's glyphosate ban

French MEP: When it comes to the environment, the future CAP is regressive

MEP: Green agriculture movement in Germany is growing fast

EU ministers struggle to find a 'practical' roadmap for a greener CAP

'Environmentalist' von der Leyen forgot farming in her speech, MEPs say
Austrian farmers hope that the European Commission will not approve a ban on weedkiller glyphosate that the government in Vienna proposed in March.

“There is big hope within the farming community in Austria that the European Commission will say the total ban of glyphosate is unlawful,” the pan-European farmer and cooperatives union Copa-Cogeca told EURACTIV in an emailed statement.

On 2 March, Austria became the first EU member state to propose a total ban on glyphosate, the world’s most commonly used and controversial weedkiller. Its lower chamber of parliament passed the bill on 2 July. It still needs the approval of the upper chamber before the country’s president, Alexander Van der Bellen, signs it into law.

Following intense debates, the EU decided to allow the use of glyphosate until 2022, and, consequently, the Austrian government will need to get the EU Commission’s green light for its proposed ban.

Contacted by EURACTIV, a European Commission spokesperson declined to comment on draft laws of member states that have not been communicated to the EU executive. [EPA/ARMANDO BABANI]

Farmers hope EU Commission will block Austria’s glyphosate ban

By Sarantis Michalopoulos | EURACTIV.com
Continued from Page 4

“This is a preventive, technical mechanism providing the Commission and the member states with the opportunity to react,” the EU spokesperson said.

The Friends of the Earth Europe have warned about the environmental impact of glyphosate, saying it might contaminate soils in and around treated areas as well as biodiversity.

“It is our responsibility to ban this poison from our environment,” Pamela Rendi-Wagner, who leads the Austrian Social Democrats, said.

An assessment by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) concluded in 2015 that the herbicide solution was “probably carcinogenic to humans”.

On the other hand, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has approved the chemical, saying it is “unlikely to pose a carcinogenic risk to humans from exposure through the diet”. The same opinion was shared by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) as well as the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA).

WHAT IS THE ALTERNATIVE?

Copa-Cogeca said a big problem for farmers was that they need glyphosate for measures such as greening and direct sowing in order to avoid erosion (there are in addition problems with strong rains which sponges the soil in cities), humus degradation and to eliminate problem-weeds.

“Due to all of these big problems farmers ask what the alternative is and what the solution for measures against climate change will be,” Copa said.

The EU farmers association added that the issue was that such answer will come the earliest after the election in September and the big question is which government will be elected and how they will proceed.

Copa said a solution could be to reduce the private use of glyphosate, as the Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP, EPP) has requested, or before the harvest season.

Copa added that an important study conducted by the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU) in Vienna suggests two more examples of how to reduce glyphosate in agriculture: specifically for grassland, and in wine and fruit production.

“This could be a legal way to reduce glyphosate until 2022,” concluded Copa.
In an interview with EURACTIV France, French MEP and vice-chair of the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) group, Eric Andrieu, spoke about the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), highlighting its lack of environmental provisions.

Eric Andrieu has been an MEP since 2012. The French socialist was elected vice-chair of the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) group following the European elections.

In the past legislature, Andrieu has been an active member in the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development and the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety.

In your previous term as MEP, you were a member of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development. Does the CAP reform you have been working on envisage a ‘greener’ Common Agricultural Policy for the Union?

Continued on Page 7
Continued from Page 6

The problem with greening is that we are now in the middle of the process.

With the current CAP, 30% of the second pillar is reserved for greening. In the proposal for the future CAP on which we worked before the European elections, the strategic plants that will be presented by the EU member states, mainly contain ‘greening’ provisions.

Thus, subsidies for so-called ‘eco-schemes’ need to set up by the states for farmers who commit to environmentally-friendly practices. However, this tool remains unclear as no real definition or minimum threshold have yet been decided. And each country will decide how to allocate funds...

There is also the issue of areas that are of ecological interest. For farmers to benefit from support to go ‘green’, they had to set aside 5% of their hectares on which they had not used chemical inputs, to be used for ponds, hedgerows, fallows, etc.

Unfortunately, the eligibility criterion has now been deleted, which is nonsense.

Currently, when it comes to the environment and biodiversity, the project for a future CAP project is regressive in comparison to the CAP presently in force.

What changes are needed to ensure the CAP genuinely benefits the environment?

We need more funds to support so-called ‘eco-schemes’. Today, only 20% of the budget goes towards these schemes according to the last compromises, which is very insufficient. Instead, it should represent between 30 and 50%.

There is also a lack of animal welfare measures or standards when it comes to factory farming practices. I do not agree with downplaying animal welfare standards, which are fundamental!

We also need to set clear targets for reducing pesticide use, something which is not currently in the CAP report.

On the issue of pesticides, will the new CAP reduce their use?

When it comes to pesticides, the CAP’s requirements are not sufficiently precise to reduce the use of chemical inputs in agricultural activities, which is necessary!

We are now working with the four pro-European political groups in the European Parliament. We aim to find a political agreement so that we can work together with the newly-elected MEPs. We have discussed the issue of pesticides again, and there seems to be an agreement between the different political families, who support reducing the use of chemical inputs.

The Socialists & Democrats group (S&D) supports the abolishment of agricultural inputs by 2030.

Today, we no longer question the need to abolish plant protection products. And it seems that members of the European Peoples’ Party (EPP) are highly aware of the need to remove synthetic pesticides from the market.

Perhaps it was the result of the European elections that have increased this awareness.

Will these negotiations between the different groups result in a request from the European Parliament to review the reform proposal of the CAP?

In these negotiations, the different groups all have their positions.

The liberal group Renew Europe is reluctant to request the European Commission to table a new proposal or to start work in the Parliament’s Agriculture Committee from scratch.

The Greens and the S&D group would agree to request a new proposal.

Finally, the EPP appears to support continuing the work already started.

In parallel with the CAP reform, the European Commission continues to negotiate free trade agreements that will have a definite impact on the agricultural sector. How can the two be reconciled?

The candidate to head the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, will have to answer this question as a priority when she requests the European Parliament for its support. We will ask her about the issue of the ‘exception of European agriculture’, which is a subject that needs to be central to the next European executive.

On this issue, we will address the question of what civilisation model we need to adopt. Agriculture cannot be linked to other sectors of economic activity. In Europe, we need to have a real debate on this issue. When negotiating free trade agreements, agriculture has always been a variable to be adjusted, but this is no longer possible.

Today, with a few exceptions, Europeans eat meat from herds fed with GMOs, which are nonetheless banned in Europe!

You are the only French MEP to have participated in negotiations about the new CAP during the Parliament’s previous mandate. Could this have an impact on the points defended by France?

The French voiced their concerns in the European elections. In the new Parliament, four French MEPs will be sitting on the AGRI committee, and two others from Le Pen’s Rassemblement National, which I am setting aside.

I think that France will have less influence. I don’t think we will have any positions as vice-presidents or coordinators.

Although we will lose some de facto influence, we will still try to hold our ground.
The movement pushing for a more environmentally friendly agricultural sector is increasingly gaining ground in Germany, Green MEP Martin Häusling told EURACTIV Germany in an interview.

"We have a strong agricultural alliance in Germany that is promoting a transition to a climate- and environmentally resilient agriculture," Häusling said. "It is still small as it represents about 10% of the whole trade but the movement is gaining momentum," he added.

Häusling, who is a spokesperson of the Greens/EFA in the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, said there were two sides emerging in Germany when it comes to agricultural matters: the proponents of small-scale, regional, organic farming, and the backers of large-scaled, industrial-based farming.

Häusling said organic and regional products are on the rise, upon consumers’ demand. He added the pricing situation for organic farmers is “way better” than that of conventional farmers, which also explains the growth of organic farming in Germany.

"Growth for organic farming
hovers at between 8 and 10% a year. But that’s not only a German trend, it is a European trend,” he said.

Conventional farming in the country is represented by organisations like the Deutsche Bauernverband (Farmers’ Union).

“The Farmers’ Union also says it wants the CAP to become greener, but it does not walk the talk. It wants the first pillar to stay as it is. But in our view, the direct payment system cannot be beneficial to the environment,” he said.

The first pillar of the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy represents direct payments to farmers, while the second pillar is funds related to rural development.

OUTCOME ON CAP’S REFORM UNKNOWN

Häusling also said that at the EU level, Germany could be “influential enough” when it comes to adopting initiatives in favour of fighting global warming and biodiversity losses in the future CAP.

But up until now, it “hasn’t work that well” with current Agriculture Minister Julia Klöckner, even though there are some astute initiatives coming from Germany that could be picked up at the European level, like the recent anchoring of the protection of biodiversity in the Bavarian constitution, the German MEP said.

Häusling said his group expects from the new European Commission to present a revised proposal of the CAP reform.

“It will then need to find a majority in the new European Parliament and this will be a bit of suspense as the two main parties no longer have the majority. Yes, the Greens/EFA group gained more members but I cannot say what the outcome will be like,” he said.

The Greens/EFA Group has now five representatives in the Agriculture Committee, the new liberal group “Renew Europe” sends seven parliamentarians, while the Progressive Alliance of Social Democrats (S&D) is represented with ten members.

The European People’s Party (EPP) will have twelve members, making it the largest group of the 48 committee members, of whom the German Norbert Lins will be the agricultural policy coordinator for the CDU. Lins grew up on a dairy farm near Ravensburg (southern State of Baden-Württemberg).

The new members of the Environmental Committee have also been appointed. While the Agriculture Committee is primarily concerned with EU agricultural policy and rural issues, the Environment Committee is in charge of food safety and the use of pesticides.

With 76 members, the Environment Committee is the largest committee of the European Parliament. The EPP will send 18 MEPs, the S&D 16 members and the Liberals of Renew Europe will be represented by eleven parliamentarians.

The Green/EFA group now has eight members while the GUE/NGL Group is represented by five MEPs. Five members of the Committee on the Environment do not belong to any political group. Frenchman Pascal Canfin (Renew Europe) has been elected chair of the Committee.
EU ministers struggle to find a ‘practical’ roadmap for a greener CAP

By Gerardo Fortuna | EURACTIV.com

Although all EU ministers agree on higher climate objectives in the post-2020 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), they still do not know how to put this environmental ambition into practice.

The green architecture of next CAP was at the core of the debate at the first meeting of EU agriculture ministers under Finland’s EU presidency, which took place this week in Brussels (15 July).

Member states’ representatives do not appear to be making much progress since last April’s Agrifish Council, where they already had a similar exchange of views on climate-related aspects of the CAP reform package.

The concept of green architecture contained in the CAP strategic plans proposal is still a divisive issue among member states and, in particular, the enhanced conditionality and the additional environmental actions provided through the so-called eco-scheme.

Member states have not found yet an agreement on the green requirements and standards farmers must fulfil in order to receive direct payments, which constitute the broader concept of the aid ‘conditionality’.

In addition, the eco-scheme concept divides EU member states. The eco-scheme interventions represent

Continued on Page 11
the main new feature of the proposed CAP first pillar, replacing the green direct payments introduced in the past programme.

The source of the dispute on eco-scheme is whether to introduce them as voluntary or mandatory, as the Commission proposed.

“A compulsory eco-scheme is essential if we want the reform to take place,” French Agriculture minister Didier Guillaume told his EU peers, calling for a “simple tool” focusing on annual basis incentives for as many farmers as possible willing to adopt environmentally friendly practices.

This crucial new incentive system requires a CAP budget adequate to its environmental ambition. “Our farmers are ensuring the agro-environmental transition and they’re doing a lot to change agricultural practices, but they have the feeling they get nothing in return,” said Guillaume.

ITALY’S OBJECTION

Germany and Spain also support the French line, which was however contested by the Italian government.

“We believe that the simplification of the overall CAP system is the priority and that a mandatory nature of eco-scheme would be without environmental effectiveness,” said Italy’s Agriculture Minister Gian Marco Centinaio.

For Greece, it would be preferable to have the optional implementation of the measures, taking into account the specificities of each member states, while the Czech Republic proposed to opt for a more flexible approach of an eco-scheme that has sufficiently balanced elements.

Miroslav Toman, Czech minister of agriculture, also stressed the importance to have right parameters in place during the transitional phase, in order to ensure continuity when it comes to multiannual commitments.

Italy is leading the front of member states that want to exclude small farmers from the enhanced conditionality, as a way to incentivise agriculture activities in rural and deprived areas.

“Small farmers are already subjected to sectoral controls in receiving direct payments, so why to make it more complicated?” Polish Minister Jan Krzysztof Ardanowski said in support of Italy’s line.

FINLAND’S CHALLENGE

The Finnish presidency is more cautious compared to the Romanian EU Presidency on the chances to reach a common position, suggesting that their real objective is to make as much progress as possible in the CAP negotiations.

“We intend to come up with at least an updated version of the regulation texts and, if possible, we will seek to have a Council general approach,” said Jari Leppä, Finnish minister for agriculture and forestry.

As president of the rotating Agriculture Council, he also recognised how crucial an agreement on the EU’s long-term budget would also be for the CAP discussions.

“There are still many uncertainties on the MFF negotiations and therefore we prefer not to commit to any precise results,” Leppä said. “But if the multiannual financial framework (MFF) will advance, this will also allow the CAP to move forward,” he added.

All EU countries seem, however, to agree on the need to support a higher environmental ambition within the CAP and maintain the same budget like in the past period in order to allow farmers to put into practice this ambition.

“An ambitious green architecture is a basis for the acceptance of new agricultural policies in the general public and taxpayers,” said German Agriculture Minister Julia Klöckner.
‘Environmentalist’ von der Leyen forgot farming in her speech, MEPs say

By Gerardo Fortuna | EURACTIV.com reporting from Strasbourg

Ursula von der Leyen’s slip-up on agriculture did not pass unnoticed by lawmakers, who voiced regret that the Commission president-elect did not mention at all the farming sector in the first speech she addressed to the plenary in Strasbourg last Tuesday (16 July).

Von der Leyen did not even come back to the subject in her two replies during the debate with MEPs, although she was prodded by Green MEPs to say something on climate ambition in the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) proposal.

EURACTIV caught a bit of the disappointment from the MEPs longer interested in agriculture while they were walking down halls and corridors of the Strasbourg parliamentary’s building on the way to their offices.

It was recognised as a flaw in her speech even by lawmakers of her own European People’s Party (EPP).

“It is unacceptable to discuss exclusively environment and climate and not to mention agriculture, since these three concepts are interdependent,” said centre-right Romanian MEP Daniel Buda, who was recently voted as vice-chair of the Agriculture committee (AGRI).

He told EURACTIV that the common goal is a clean environment, but to achieve this, we have to ensure that farmers do not become the most vulnerable link of the ecosystem.

“Farmers should not be overburdened with extra environmental conditionalities,” he added.

Experienced MEP Paolo De Castro, elected as the new coordinator for the socialists (S&D) in AGRI committee, said he did not expect a mention of the CAP, though he would have enjoyed it

Continued on Page 13
very much.

“Generally speaking, I thought it was a good speech, particularly for the fact that it was addressed to pro-European forces, leaving on the margins Eurosceptic groups,” he said.

In the meeting with the socialist group, however, von der Leyen did mention the importance of farmers’ role, the Italian MEP confirmed, adding that the choice she will make on the next Agriculture Commissioner will provide more hints about her ambition.

According to Spanish MEP Mazaly Aguilar, who sits with conservatives of the ECR, von der Leyen used the environment as a “sexy topic” to make “new friends” in the European Parliament.

“Very soon we will make her understand that the best way to protect the environment is through farming and a strong CAP,” she told EURACTIV, adding that top politicians should speak up for agriculture, one of the main EU policies.

Aguilar is a candidate for the third vice-presidency of AGRI but her election is not completely sure as she’s affiliated to right-wing populist VOX party, which is also considered worthy of a cordon sanitaire by other political groups.

**GREENS HARSH OPPOSITION**

During the debate in Strasbourg, Green MEPs were the most vocal critics of von der Leyen’s omission, as they don’t want farming to fall by the wayside as the next Commission raises its efforts in dealing with the climate crisis.

EURACTIV contacted the Greens coordinator in the AGRI committee, German MEP Martin Häusling, who regretted very much that von der Leyen didn’t commit herself to the so-called ‘green architecture’ for the next CAP.

Häusling said he could only guess why she was not answering the raised questions on strengthening biodiversity, environment, climate and animal welfare.

“It might be that von der Leyen was under political pressure as the former rapporteur of the European Parliament on the Strategic Plan, Mrs Esther Herranz-Garcia, was EPP,” he said.

Although Herranz-Garcia was not re-elected, she was backed in her positioning on the CAP report by her political group, the Greens MEP pointed out.

According to the Greens, EPP’s AGRI members in the past legislative terms were preventing the creation of a sustainable CAP and, therefore, von der Leyen might have feared losing votes from her own political group if she raised her climate ambition in the agricultural policy in her speech.

“Another option, a very alarming and quite difficult one, would be that von der Leyen might share the EPP’s point of view,” Häusling added.

On the sidelines of the debate, vice-chair of Environment Committee (ENVI), Bas Eickhout, told EURACTIV the new President-elect was vague when it comes to the future of EU agriculture, and consequently also about a third of the entire EU budget.

“Not only in her speech yesterday, but also when she visited our group, and in the document with political priorities that she circulated only hours before the vote, and for the Greens, it was one of the reasons to vote against her nomination,” he said.

However, the Greens/EFA group will be at von der Leyen’s disposal to give all explanations needed for a better understanding of its view on the current agriculture-supporting system.

“The EU is wasting billions of taxpayers money to subsidise agricultural practices that are harmful to the climate and for biodiversity,” Eickout said.

He added that the CAP reform proposed by the previous Commission, which is currently being discussed, does not do anything to change the status quo and that the Greens will demand a new proposal from von der Leyen’s Commission.