

**Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions on promotion measures and information provision for agricultural products: a reinforced value-added European strategy for promoting the tastes of Europe'**

COM(2012) 148 final

(2012/C 299/25)

Rapporteur: **Mr KRAUZE**

On 30 March 2012, the European Commission decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, on the

*Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions on promotion measures and information provision for agricultural products: a reinforced value-added European strategy for promoting the tastes of Europe*

COM(2012) 148 final.

The Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 26 June 2012.

At its 482nd plenary session held on 11 and 12 July 2012 (meeting of 11 July), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 136 votes to 1 with 10 abstentions:

## **1. Conclusions and recommendations**

1.1 EU information and promotional programmes have an essential role to play in helping European producers and workers meet the challenges of an increasingly competitive world and ensure a good market position by explaining the high-quality, animal-welfare and production standards of EU agricultural products to consumers and stimulating exports.

1.2 As stated in its previous opinion on COM (2011) 436 final<sup>(1)</sup>, the EESC supports the two fundamental aims of the new promotion policy, geared to the target market: consumer information and awareness on the EU market, and export promotion on the external market.

1.3 New, additional resources need to be identified as part of the 2014-2020 financial framework in order to address new crises and emergency situations that could hit the sector and which the appropriations for promotion and information policy under the CAP would not be able to cover. The EESC considers it absolutely crucial to increase the budget for information provision and promotion measures for agricultural products on the internal market and in third countries.

1.4 The EESC feels that the Commission should draw up clear guidelines for national, multi-country and third country

programme applicants in the Member States. The evaluation of programmes should be improved, using a strict evaluation system with specific indicators. Greater transparency is needed in the selection and prioritising of programmes at national and EU levels. To simplify the procedure, multi-country programmes could be submitted by applicants directly to the Commission. Multi-country programmes that cover a number of products should be given priority through a more favourable financing scheme, providing up to 60 % EU co-financing

1.5 Greater flexibility should be introduced to allow programmes to be adapted to changing market conditions during the implementation phase. The EESC supports the proposal to present a multiannual framework programme, with detailed information for the first year only, in cases where the programmes in question are preceded by market analyses and impact assessments, thus making it possible to re-adjust the plans for subsequent years.

1.6 The EESC emphasises that promotion legislation should clarify the role of brands and the balance between generic promotion and the promotion of private brands. The basic idea of promoting EU products by means of specific brands should be examined. Product origin indication should be permitted, including for products that have not been granted a denomination of origin or a protected geographical indication. The concept of EU origin could be conveyed through umbrella slogans that do not jeopardise the consumer's right to be properly informed.

<sup>(1)</sup> CESE, OJ C 43, 15.02.2012, p. 59-64.

1.7 As regards the common European slogan for external marketing measures, it makes sense to convey a unified message, which groups together and covers all European products under the same umbrella. It is vital to send the consumer a clear message that is easy to identify.

1.8 The EESC advocates a single list of eligible products, with a view to simplifying procedures. The list should be extended to allow for the promotion of products within other quality schemes that deliver the European quality production message, for example national, regional and organic schemes.

1.9 The EESC feels it is essential to set up a network for the exchange of good practices between professionals, in order to implement well-structured, coordinated multi-country promotional programmes and campaigns, including by means of new technologies. Moreover, use of new technologies to put consumers and producers in contact should be examined. It will be necessary to prevent these mechanisms causing any distortion of the market or competition.

## 2. Gist of the communication

2.1 To achieve the Europe 2020 goals, support must be given to a form of agriculture that guarantees food safety, the sustainable use of natural resources, the dynamism of rural areas, as well as growth and employment. An effective promotion policy is key to achieving these objectives.

2.2 Promotion programmes are co-financed on the basis of a maximum of 50 % contributed by the EU, a minimum of 20 % contributed by trade associations and the remainder contributed by the Member State. Often, however, the submission of programmes in non-EU countries has been lacking in ambition, with weaker and delayed impact.

2.3 The Commission communication sets out the shortcomings in current promotion measures, such as red tape, an imbalance in the actions taken and obstacles hindering progress. It then puts forward suggestions as to how to tackle these problems and enhance the image of European agricultural products.

2.4 The communication sets out the following objectives for the future promotion policy:

- greater European added value;
- a more appealing and assertive policy;
- simple management; and
- greater synergy between the various promotion instruments.

2.5 The Commission outlines guidelines for the promotion policy.

### 2.5.1 A wider scope of application

- The scope of the initiatives could be extended beyond sectoral trade organisations to include private enterprises, if they offer a high added value for the European Union.
- It is proposed to have only one list of eligible products, following the list of products covered by the quality policy as closely as possible. Activities could deliver thematic messages and make widespread use of new technologies from enabling the exchange of good practices to facilitating the selling of products.
- To develop a European image of agri-food products, each information and consultation measure should include mention of the product's European origin. It will still be possible to state the origin of PDO and PGI products as the main indication.
- The impact analysis should examine the possibility of launching mixed schemes on the external market that would include a generic section and a commercial section where private brands could be presented.

- There will be reinforced support for the promotion of European food quality symbols such as PDO, PGI and TSG labels.

### 2.5.2 A wider scope of activity

- There should be a new type of activity consisting of technical assistance to help market operators participate in co-financed programmes, carry out efficient campaigns or develop their export activities.

### 2.5.3 Revised intervention methods

- This revision refers to multi-country programmes, which are currently not yielding the desired results. High-level missions to third countries involving the commissioner for agriculture and rural development and the participation of the Commission in international fairs will continue.

### 2.5.4 Promotion and the crisis

- Due to the constraints of the 2014-2020 financial framework, it would be more difficult to mobilise additional appropriations for information and promotion measures in response to crises. A decision is needed on whether funding for Community level response to a crisis should stem from the future promotion policy or from the horizontal measures under the CAP.

### 2.5.5 Simplified and optimised management

- The follow-up and management of programmes should be simpler, more flexible and more operational.

### 2.5.6 Greater consistency between information and promotion activities

- Measures carried out under the promotion scheme and other actions in this area will be more in tune with each other and with the common agricultural policy.

## 3. Analysis of the proposal and the Committee's comments

3.1 Earlier EESC opinions commented that in view of the challenges facing the European agricultural policy, it is increasingly important to promote EU agri-food products in order to help establish them as high added value products and maintain the EU's leading position as a food supplier<sup>(2)</sup>.

3.2 The EESC stresses the importance of the two aims of the new European policy for the sector: firstly, consumer information and awareness regarding the high quality standards and high added value of products on the EU market, emphasising the more robust guarantees for production methods, labelling, traceability and food safety and the more stringent environmental and animal-welfare requirements and due regard for workers' rights; and secondly, export promotion on the external market, stressing the quality, nutritional and gastronomic value, sustainability and safety of European products.

3.3 The Committee endorses the Commission's move to revise current EU policy on information and promotion activities to make it more effective, targeted and ambitious.

3.4 The Committee broadly supports the proposals and guidelines set out by the Commission in its communication as regards future policy for promoting agricultural products for the purpose of improving the sector's competitiveness and raising awareness of the high standards of the European agri-food model.

3.5 The EESC notes that there is no reference in the Commission communication to provisions for an automatic or semi-automatic mechanism that could help economies hit by food crises recover and would be rapid, efficient, systematic and effective. While acknowledging the limitations resulting from the current financial crisis, the EESC considers it absolutely crucial to increase the budget for information provision and promotion measures for agricultural products on the internal market and in third countries. New, additional resources need to be identified in good time as part of the 2014-2020 financial

framework, in order to address new crisis and emergency situations that could hit the sector and which the appropriations for promotion and information policy under the CAP would not be able to cover.

3.6 The EESC emphasises that programmes should have a European and added value-based vision, including a focus on job creation, and believes that the Commission should draw up clear guidelines for national, multi-country and third country programme applicants in the Member States. The evaluation of programmes should be improved, using a strict evaluation system with specific indicators. It is essential to introduce greater transparency into the selection and prioritising of programmes at national and EU levels. To simplify procedures, multi-country programmes could be submitted directly to the Commission, and selection processes should be speeded up at national and the EU levels.

3.7 Regarding the possibility to broaden the range of beneficiaries of promotional programmes, the EESC believes that priority should be given to trade organisations within the agri-food sector as they are the bodies that bring businesses together and co-finance operations. All other beneficiaries should be approved only on the recommendation of sectoral trade organisations.

3.8 Any sectoral trade organisation proposing a programme should have the opportunity to act as project manager, either solely or jointly, depending on the scale of the initiative, and the capacities and experience at its disposal. The possibility should be considered of allowing smaller branch associations from the new Member States to apply for promotional programmes as beneficiaries and as executive bodies because they have the best knowledge of their traditional products and how to promote them.

3.9 The EESC advocates a single list of eligible products with a view to simplifying procedures. The list of products covered by the legislation should be extended to allow for the promotion of all products that deliver the European quality production message or can strengthen it. For products with a strong national identity it might be an advantage and should be possible to indicate national origin even if they do not have the PDO or PGI label. However, the Committee feels that the arrangements for implementing these proposals should be balanced by the need to promote primarily EU products.

3.10 The Committee supports the proposal to establish a European platform for the exchange of good practices between professionals in the development and implementation of well-structured and coordinated multi-country promotional campaigns including through the use of new technologies, which can be a valuable tool here. Special attention should be given to ensure that the use of these mechanisms does not lead to the distortion of markets or competition.

<sup>(2)</sup> CESE 1859/2011, OJ C 43, 15.02.2012, p. 59-64.

3.11 With regard to ways of improving the quality programmes and designing them to cover several countries, the EESC agrees that these multi-country programmes should be given priority because they provide a truly European dimension and require the EU's support. The EESC suggests that the Commission should increase its contribution especially where emerging markets are involved.

3.12 The Committee welcomes the proposal to allow programme promoters to give detailed information for the first year of implementation only, where the programmes in question are preceded by market analyses and impact assessments setting out the potential for achieving the objectives, and to provide details for the subsequent years at a later point. This would make programmes more flexible and enable them to react to market signals.

3.13 In addition to the European food quality schemes mentioned in the communication (the PDO, PGI and TSG),

other quality schemes could be envisaged, to relate, for example, to organic production and regional quality.

3.14 The EESC believes that promotion legislation should clarify the role of brands and the balance between generic promotion and the promotion of private brands, particularly in non-EU countries. This would contribute to the efficiency of promotional campaigns (greater impact vis-à-vis importers and consumers) and provide greater incentives for participation by businesses which, in the final analysis, co-fund these actions. With a view to ensuring complete and transparent information, mentioning product origin should be permitted, including for products that have not been granted a denomination of origin or a protected geographical indication. The concept of EU origin could be conveyed through umbrella slogans that do not jeopardise the consumer's right to be properly informed.

3.15 From the point of view of simplification, the idea of reconciling the budget across the various promotion programmes should be supported.

Brussels, 11 July 2012.

*The President*  
*of the European Economic and Social Committee*  
Staffan NILSSON

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