

Workshop 7: The EU-rural citizen relation

Rapporteur: Kim Smedslund

Participants were invited to discuss on how EU is seen and understood by rural citizens in positive and negative ways. Do we know enough about each other and if so, what are the 'underlying' expectations and wishes from each other? Do we listen to each other? What kind of solutions do we have?

A good part of the discussion was about understanding how decisions are made in the EU and through that a better understanding of what EU is. The Agricultural policy and to it related rural development belong to the CAP. It used to be exclusive competence of the EU, but is now under shared competence between the Union and the member states. The legislative proposals are done by the EC independantly or by invitations from the European Parliament, the Council, a successful Citizen's initiative or the Council of the European Union. CAP decisions are made in codecision ("ordinary legislative procedure") with qualified majority voting (see attachment p.2). This causes delays in case of non agreement. Through the decisionmaking procedure, member states have a strong say in the CAP. As member states have gained a bigger role in deciding on regulations and programmes on CAP rural development, one could say they are EU, or legislators of EU - in some cases a majority decides, sometimes a minority blocks.

A big part of the decisions related to rural areas and their development come from EU and affect as such rural citizens. More powers are intended to be given to member states to implement CAP. Rural citizen's are more submitted to national interests in rural Development. Rural development measures funding—including LEADER-CLLD is suggested to be cut by 28%. Inside EU and CAP, sectoral forces combined with conservative-reformative, old-new member states discussions lead the process instead of cooperation.

The workshop did not come to suggest any additional messages to the ERP Manifesto as the need for better cooperation between EU and the rural citizen is clearly expressed. The need of a clear, simple factbased communication from EU to the grassroots level about EU, the commision initiatives and results of its rural policy actions are needed. The grassroots is not necessarily reached by dialogue groups mostly composed by professionals. The best placed intermediaries could be LEADER groups or Community/Village organisations, municipalities close to the rural citizen. Ministries, Regions, RD networks are sometimes too far from rural realities.

Nothing will change unless there is a paradigm change towards an integrated cross-sectoral partnership thinking. What is the price to pay for exits, exodus and forgetting that there are lot of rural citizen's in Europe facing difficult challenges and living conditions.

Attachment - Decision-making in EU - data from EP fact sheets – reformulated by rapporteur

First reading and approval

1. Commission proposal 2. First reading in Parliament: Parliament adopts its position by a simple majority 3. First reading in the Council: The Council adopts its position by QMV 4. If the Council approves Parliament's position, the act is adopted in the wording which corresponds to Parliament's position.

If not, the Council proposes amendments

1. Second reading in Parliament – The EP has three months to take a decision. 2. The EP may approve the proposal as amended by the Council or take no decision; The act is adopted; 3. The EP may reject the Council's position by an absolute majority; the act is not adopted and the procedure ends;

If the EP suggests amendments, it can adopt, by an absolute majority of its Members, amendments to the Council's position, which are then put to the Commission and the Council for their opinion.

1. Second reading in the Council. The Council can approve the 2. EP amendments by a qualified majority and 3. unanimously on those on which the Commission has delivered a negative opinion in three months and the act is adopted.

If the Council doesn't approve, the Conciliation Committee is convened within six weeks.

1. The Conciliation Committee consists of an equal number of Council and Parliament representatives, assisted by the Commission. It considers the positions of Parliament and the Council and has six weeks to agree on a joint text supported by a QMV of Council representatives and a majority of Parliament's representatives.
2. The procedure stops and the act is not adopted if the Committee does not reach agreement on a joint text by the deadline.

If the Committee adopts the Act, the joint text is sent to the Council and Parliament for approval.

Third reading by Council and EP

- The Council and Parliament have six weeks to approve the joint text. The Council acts by a qualified majority and Parliament by a majority of the votes cast.
- The act is adopted if the Council and Parliament approve the joint text.
- If either of the institutions has not approved it by the deadline, the procedure stops and the act is not adopted.

Over the past few years, the number of first reading agreements based on informal negotiations between the Council and Parliament has significantly increased.

Consultation procedure

Before taking a decision, the Council must take note of the opinion of Parliament and, if necessary, of the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. It is required to do so, as the absence of such consultation makes the act illegal and capable of annulment by the Court of Justice (see judgment in Cases 138 and 139/79). C. Consent procedure

