



BULLETIN
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The *European Affairs in the Croatian Parliament Bulletin* is published monthly by the European Affairs Department. The Bulletin provides an overview of the Parliament's work related to European affairs and arising from the membership of the Republic of Croatia in the European Union.

The Croatian Parliament, as the national parliament of an EU member state, participates in the decision-making process at the European level by overseeing the activities of the Government in the European Union institutions and by exercising the powers conferred on national parliaments by the Lisbon Treaty.

Activities of the European Affairs Committee

The Committee for European Affairs carries out European affairs in accordance with the Act on the Cooperation of the Croatian Parliament and the Government of the Republic of Croatia in European Affairs and the Rules of Procedure of the Croatian Parliament.

At its 70th session, held on 27 September, the Committee discussed European documents in accordance with the Work Programme for the Consideration of the Positions of the Republic of Croatia for 2021 and 2023.

Positions of the Republic of Croatia on EU documents

In accordance with the work programmes for consideration of the positions of the Republic of Croatia for 2022 and 2023, the European Affairs Committee forwarded 5 positions of the Republic of Croatia on EU documents to the working bodies of the Parliament for their opinion.

Monitoring the work of the Government in the European Union institutions

In September 2023, the Croatian Government submitted to the Parliament its positions for four Council meetings:

- [3968](#) Agriculture and Fisheries Council
- [3969](#) General Affairs Council
- [3970](#) Competitiveness Council (Internal Market and Industry)
- [3971](#) Justice and Home Council

EU documents forwarded directly to the Croatian Parliament

Pursuant to the Protocol (no. 1) on the Role of National Parliaments in the European Union, all draft legislative acts and communications are forwarded directly to national parliaments.

The Croatian Parliament publishes daily the received EU documents, along with information on the reference code assigned to each document, the applicable adoption procedure, its submission date and the timeframe for carrying out the subsidiarity check.

In September 2023, the EU institutions forwarded to the Croatian Parliament 57 documents: 34 draft legislative acts, and 23 communications and other non-binding documents.

Application of EU law

In September 2023, the Croatian Parliament enacted two laws in the process of harmonization with European Union law.

*Information
on Inter-parliamentary conference on the contribution of national
parliaments to improving the CAP
The Croatian Parliament, 25 September 2023*

Marking the tenth anniversary of Croatia's membership in the European Union, the Agriculture Committee of the Croatian Parliament organized an inter-parliamentary conference on the contribution of national parliaments to the improvement of the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union. With a view to promoting carbon print reduction, for the first time the Croatian Parliament organized this event as a paperless conference.

The aim of the conference was to conduct an analysis of the instruments of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the CAP's impacts on the competitiveness of the agriculture of the member states, the preservation of rural areas, generational renewal and the sustainable use of natural resources.

In addition to members of delegations from 24 parliaments of the European Union and countries from the Alps-Adriatic-Danube region, the conference was also attended by representatives of the academic and professional community, agricultural institutions and chambers.

The Chairwoman of the Agricultural Committee Marijana Petir, the initiator of this conference, addressed the participants at the beginning of the conference. "I believe that you, in your capacities as members of the committees responsible for agriculture and rural development and as elected representatives of the citizens in your constituencies, are in daily contact with farmers and representatives of your rural communities. I believe that you can therefore witness first-hand about the achievements financed from the Common Agricultural Policy funds, but also about the constraints that farmers and local communities are facing due to rules that do not sufficiently take into account the individual EU member states' different starting positions", Petir said. She emphasized the need for a greater involvement on the part of national parliaments' competent committees as well as of farmers in the creation of the Common Agricultural Policy, in the preparation and design of measures, programmes and activities financed from this, still most generous European envelope.

Addressing the participants of the conference in a video message, **the European Commissioner for Agriculture, Janusz Wojciechowski**, reminded that safeguarding food security was an essential task of the European Union. "Together we share the responsibility of implementing this Policy. It is necessary to share experiences, exchange good examples and discuss what has worked well so far, and what could be done better in the future", said the Commissioner. "We must deliver for farmers by enabling their competitiveness, ensuring their access to best advice, knowledge and innovations... maintain a resilient food supply and secure the future of rural communities", Wojciechowski said.

The Speaker of the Croatian Parliament Gordan Jandroković, officially opened the conference. In his address to European parliamentarians and conference participants, he expressed the hope that the results of their discussions would ultimately contribute to the improvement of the Common Agricultural Policy, so that this Policy would be able to respond to the needs of farmers and consumers, today and in the future.

First panel on challenges and opportunities of the Common Agricultural Policy in the context of the implementation of the CAP national strategic plans (CSPs)

In her introductory speech on this topic, **Minister of Agriculture, Marija Vučković**, highlighted the constructive cooperation of her Ministry with the Agriculture Committee of the Croatian Parliament, concerning national positions for proposals for legislative acts at the level of the European Union, reports from meetings of the Council of Ministers of Agriculture and

Fisheries or cooperation on specific issues. She talked about the benefits achieved in the agricultural sector during the ten years of Croatia's EU membership, and pointed out that today the value of Croatian agricultural production has increased by approximately 29 percent, productivity by approximately 62 percent, while the export of agricultural and food products has augmented by almost three times. She also highlighted the influx of significant funds from the EU budget, as well as additional funds, which made it possible to increase the competitiveness and productivity of Croatian agriculture. Minister Vučković also spoke about numerous challenges in the agricultural sector and the joint efforts of European institutions and member states to find solutions.

The Chairman of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Parliament, Norbert Lins, emphasized the Croatian contribution to the CAP during the Croatian presidency of the Council in 2020, despite the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. He emphasized the need for the joint action of the EP, the Council, the Commission and national parliaments in implementing the reform processes of the CAP. He presented the EP's achievements during the adoption of the new CAP reform package, with an emphasis on achieving a fairer distribution of the CAP funds, promoting fairness and supporting small farmers. He highlighted the key role of national parliaments in the implementation of CAP measures, with regard to national strategic plans that should deliver on their objectives at the local level. He emphasized the importance of dialogue between the EP and national parliaments within the framework of inter-parliamentary cooperation, as well as the opportunities granted to national parliaments, namely in scrutinizing the respect of the principle of subsidiarity.

The Director-General of the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Commission, Wolfgang Bartscher, talked about the prominence of national parliaments' role in improving the CAP. He referred to several important topics related to the implementation of the CAP. Like the previous speakers, he emphasized the importance of working on food security, with simultaneous adaptation in times of crisis. "Climate change, environmental degradation, all this affects agriculture, and the CAP should be made sustainable in the new circumstances", said Bartscher. He believes that Europe is strong when it comes to food security, but that crises show that it is also vulnerable, particularly so when it comes to energy. He emphasized the importance of introducing new technologies into agricultural production and of fairer financing of small and large agricultural holdings. He also mentioned food inflation, i.e. its affordability, as one of the challenges.

Regarding sustainability, economically, ecologically and socially, he believes that now is the time to make the right decisions, taking into account the different situations in different member states, which is why flexibility is needed. "National plans and decisions will be crucial and it will not always be possible to point the finger at Brussels", he said. "Ultimately, each member state will need to define to what level the EC will finance something, and what will be financed from national sources", he concluded.

Representatives of national parliaments took part in the discussion that followed and presented their views on this topic. They talked about the need to reduce administrative burden

for farmers and to reduce input costs. Most representatives believe that it is neither simple nor easy to establish a balance between the CAP, the requirements for environmental protection and competitiveness. Representatives from Italy and Portugal spoke about the big problems faced by farmers in their countries due to climate change, extreme weather events, the invasion of pests from Asia that destroy fruit plantations such as apples and pears, etc.

The Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Zagreb, Ivica Kisić, spoke about the agro-environmental diversity of the European Union countries, i.e. the specificity of agricultural production in the north and south of Europe, which should also be taken into account when creating the CAP. He proposed that the EU member states be allowed to decide independently on the agro-environmental measures they will take in order to achieve the set goals related to climate change, and environment, landscape and biological diversity preservation.

Wolfgang Burtscher, Director-General of the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Commission, concluded the panel. He reiterated several important points and problems related to the implementation of CAP national strategic plans, such as yield inflation, the need to revise the Multiannual Financial Framework, the challenge of Europe's self-sufficiency in food production, climate change and the importance of farmers' adaptation to new circumstances, the use of new technologies and digitalization in agricultural production, and the implementation of crisis management methods in risk situations.

Second panel on the contribution of national parliaments to improving the CAP dedicated to the Declaration on GMO-free Alps-Adriatic-Danube region

Chairwoman of the Agriculture Committee, Marijana Petir, chairman of the Committee on Agriculture of the Hungarian Parliament Sándor Font and Executive Director of the Croatian Agency for Agriculture and Food Darja Sokolić presented their keynote speeches about the Declaration on GMO-free Alps-Adriatic-Danube region and the review of the proposals for new European Commission Regulations concerning plants obtained by new genomic techniques and the production and marketing of plant reproductive material.

- With the Croatian Parliament Declaration on GMO-free Alps-Adriatic-Danube region, we wanted to emphasize that the natural resources we manage, which are also a resource for food production due to their biological diversity, are of immeasurable value, the preservation of which should be constant, said Petir and added that, on the example of the entire Alps-Adriatic-Danube region, it is important to emphasize the conditionality of high-quality food production, which is based on the daily efforts of family farms and their efforts to preserve and rationally use the resources they use for this production.

Speaking about the preservation and protection of resources, she pointed out that this simultaneously affects the preservation and strengthening of rural local communities and the retention of residents in rural areas. Also, as she emphasized, the Declaration warns of the importance of harmonious and sustainable coexistence with nature and expresses support for

environmentally sensitive and ecological cultivation of agricultural products, as well as the preservation of biodiversity as a pledge of a secure future. We believe that it is important to support the member states in their determination to be GMO-free and that it is necessary to continue to finance projects aimed at environmentally sensitive agricultural production, but also to promote and brand local and high-quality food and to focus more on ecological agricultural production and cultivation of GMO-free products, supporting their position and competitiveness on the market, Petir said.

In the following, she spoke about the need for adequate declaration of GMO-free products and the establishment of clear criteria related to the labelling of these products, as well as the strengthening of control bodies, official and reference laboratories for GMOs. She also warned that the European Commission continues to grant approvals for the registration of new GMO products for use within the EU, despite the opposition of the European Parliament and the decision of the European Court of Justice. - If we add to that the concern caused by the new regulations on plants obtained by new genomic techniques and the production and trade of plant reproductive material that are currently in the adoption procedure, it is the right time to open a dialogue and address our determination that we want to maintain the status of a GMO-free region, emphasized Petir.

Speaking about the goals of relevant European documents such as the European Green Deal, the Farm to Fork Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy, she said that they are directed towards sustainable agricultural production and the preservation of rural areas and include the goal of 25 percent of the area under organic production by 2030, emphasizing how organic farming excludes the use of GMOs. –This Declaration opens up space for strengthening organic production, and this is precisely why we have invited the countries of the Alps-Adriatic-Danube region to join our initiative so that the entire area becomes free of genetically modified organisms, concluded Petir and sent this invitation to the representatives of all other parliaments to join this initiative and make the necessary effort so that support for GMO-free areas is accepted in their countries as well. On that occasion, Petir called on the European Commission to introduce compensations/subsidies for farmers who stop using glyphosate-based plant protection products and to find an alternative for this type of plant protection products through research and development, i.e. a replacement active substance that will benefit nature, the environment and the health of people and animals to be safer and less harmful, and equally effective in protecting plants and agricultural production.

The Chairman of the Committee on Agriculture of the Hungarian Parliament, Sándor Font, spoke about the unpredictability and impact of GMO organisms on human health, but also on the environment, warning that they cannot be controlled. – Hungary has special laws according to which we as a country have unanimously decided that we want to be a GMO-free area since 2006, and since 2012 this provision has been included in our Constitution, said Font and added that he agrees with all the goals of the Alps-Adriatic-Danube Declaration, stressing that he believes that there should be adequate procedures and permits when we are talking about GMO products. Font also said that it is important to do everything in our power to adequately control such products as well as perform the necessary analyses and systematically disable those

who would try to cheat the existing laws. - The priority is to ensure that only GMO-free food comes to our market, and this applies equally to food for humans and animal food, Font concluded.

A detailed overview of the activities, when it comes to GMOs in Croatia and its control, was given by the **director of the Croatian Agency for Agriculture and Food, Darja Sokolić**, primarily speaking about the production of soybeans.-Croatia has significant potential and resources for the production of soybeans, which includes suitable soils, developed cultivation technology , educated producers, and most importantly own cultivars and developed conventional breeding methods that are adapted to our agro-ecological conditions and are characterized by high values of agronomic properties, Sokolić said in the introduction, adding that soybeans, in addition to the nutritional aspect, also play a major role in the sustainability of the agro-eco system by enriching the soil with organically bound nitrogen, which contributes to the richness of the soil.

She went on to state that in Croatia, in the past 10 years, soybean production has risen from 50,000 hectares to as much as 100,000 hectares, which, she emphasized, makes soybeans the third most abundant crop in agricultural land. It is important to point out that almost entire annual area of soybeans was sown with seeds that were produced and processed in Croatia, Sokolić pointed out, stressing that at the same time we provide domestic needs for soybeans, while part of the seeds are exported to third countries. Sokolić also said that according to certified quantities of seeds in 2023, Croatia is the third largest producer of soybeans in the European Union. At 7,167 hectares, in 2023, Croatia recorded the largest area of soybeans in its history, and in the period from 2022 to 2023, the amount of certified soybean seeds is about 8.5 thousand tons, Sokolić said. In conclusion, she presented the work of the National Reference Laboratory for GMOs of the Croatian Agency for Agriculture and Food, stating that it analyses, controls and determines GMOs in seeds, food and animal feed.

After the introductory presentations, **the chairman of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Parliament Norbert Lins, the vice-chair of the Committee for Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of the National Council of Austria Nikolaus Berlakovich, the president of the Association Biogarden - in harmony with nature Silvia Kolar Fodor and the best European organic young farmer 2022 David Pejić** spoke at the panel. Lins expressed his personal doubts about the Commission's proposals and genomic breeding techniques and asked the conference participants how coexistence between organic and conventional farming and the impact of new technologies on farming can be guaranteed. The Commission takes into account that there is a political will for organic farming even when we talk about seeds and varieties and new breeding methods and takes into account the importance of labelling, but I invite you to discuss whether we should treat all new breeding techniques as if they were GMOs, Lins emphasized.

The representative of Austria, Berlakovich, said that Austria has a long history related to the use of genetic industries in agriculture and emphasized that the first law on genetic engineering was passed in the parliament in 1994. Since 2002, Austria has been the first country to vote its

territory as the GMO-free area and all Austrian provinces have accepted it, Berlakovich said, adding that there are 64 regions in the EU that are part of the GMO-free area common alliance. He went on to say that more and more legislative solutions are moving in the direction of banning GMOs, but on the other hand, he also warned that the Commission rejected some decisions to ban it, that is, it left it up to each country to decide, according to him. - In this regard, I can say that Austria went a step further and launched the Danube-soy initiative with the purpose of reducing dependence on GMO soybeans from South America, and 24 European governments joined that initiative, Berlakovich concluded.

Silvia Kolar Fodor, the president of the association Biogarden in harmony with nature, spoke about the high climate and environmental requirements of the EU, but, as she expressed her fear, the European Commission is doing the exact opposite with the new laws. - In 2018, the European Court of Justice ruled that the products of new technologies are GMOs and that they should be regulated as such, but the new legislative proposal is the opposite of that, said Kolar Fodor. She cited a number of examples that enable GMOs, primarily pointing out that there is no consumer protection, and there is no way back when GMO organisms end up in the environment. She also warned about the potentially greater use of pesticides with new genetic techniques. There is also the problem of coexistence with organic agriculture, and there are effective protection mechanisms, Kolar Fodor said, adding that it is a question of patents that the Commission is not dealing with for now. She also raised the issue of the use of bio-piracy because, as she said, the new law is not aimed at preserving biodiversity, but at exploiting it for profit.

The best European organic farmer in 2022, David Pejić, said that the fact that Croatia is a GMO-free zone makes him particularly proud, stressing that it is not just a title. - It is a commitment that we have taken together for a sustainable future, that by 2030, 25 percent of the EU's agricultural areas will be under organic cultivation, said Pajić. He warned of the contradiction between the spread of ecological production and conventional production, which is becoming less and less ecological. - The ecological damage caused by chemicals like DDT and the long-term health consequences of leaded gasoline had not only local but also global consequences, Pejić emphasized, adding that in the context of genomic modification, today's innovation can be tomorrow's regret. In conclusion, he pointed out that we must not lose sight of people's health, the biodiversity of the land and the integrity of traditions. - In order to preserve what we have built, we must be active and vigilant, we actively defend our status as a GMO-free zone by rejecting new genomic techniques because they fundamentally contradict our ethos of sustainable and ethical agriculture, said Pejić.

The debate was attended by **representatives of national parliaments**, most of whom supported the GMO-free concept and initiative of the Croatian Parliament, talking about concerns about the spread of GMOs on the one hand, but also ensuring sufficient agricultural production and strengthening the competitiveness of existing farms on the other. Special attention was paid to securing biodiversity on European soil as well as introducing a scientific approach to new technologies in agriculture by investing more funds in innovation and research. When it comes to the decision of an individual state on the use of GMO organisms, it was said that information

about this is one of the key challenges, and it was emphasized that consumers themselves must have the option of choice, as well as the states themselves, some of which, as warned, may not have the capacity to be GMO-free. It was also warned that little is still known about GMOs, as well as about their consequences. It was emphasized that in the preparation of legislative solutions, the needs of the farmers themselves must be listened to and thereby enable them to stay and survive in the countryside and rural areas.

The closing speech was given by the **director-general at Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Commission, Wolfgang Bartscher**, who said at the beginning that this topic is very complex for the EU. - On the one hand, some believe that it is for ethical reasons or principles and precautions to preserve biological diversity that such techniques should not be used, but on the other hand, we also have those who advocate the use of new technologies for the sake of food security and nutrition sustainability, said Bartscher adding that ethics is the key to this debate and should be taken into account as such.