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## **OP-ED by Pekka Pesonen**

### **The outcome of the European elections – the agricultural sector's take**

Dear followers and readers,

It is possible to see a glass as being either half full or half empty. This saying applies well to the outcome of these 2019 elections. While we can rejoice in the fact that 2019 finally brought about a record turnout, we can still regret that 1 out of 2 Europeans decided not to vote. Although this election has created a more plural European Parliament, it will also be a more fragmented one. The same logic also applies to the AGRI Committee of the Parliament. Many proactive and highly knowledgeable MEPs left or failed to join the new assembly. However, one of the positive surprises of this election is that a substantial number of newly appointed MEPs already have a well-established knowledge of farming, either through being farmers or agronomists themselves, or through their political, union or individual commitments.

This is no coincidence. The European agricultural community has been an active contributor to the European project and the Common Agriculture Policy for more than 60 years now. The level of ambition that the future Commission and Parliament dedicates to European agriculture will be a good indicator of the strength of the European project, as well as the unity of the Member States. It's also no coincidence that one of the very first files on MEPs' desks will be that of the CAP reform. There is no doubt that the new pro-EU party grouping will want to create a landmark policy and bring new thinking into the ongoing debate. However a landmark can also quickly turn into a black mark. Farmers need a long-term perspective and a stable framework, especially in the current tense international trade climate. A complete overhaul of the current project would create major uncertainties and postpone the application of essential measures necessary for facilitating the transition of our agriculture. This is why it is essential that new MEPs take advantage of the work conducted by their predecessors and base their proposals on the conclusion of the AGRI Committee vote in April. The newly elected chamber will also have to carefully consider the timeline and follow the Brexit developments. The UK exit process will block the final adoption of the EU budget and we cannot imagine a vote on the future CAP without a proper budget.

A landmark opportunity for the farming sector in the short run would also lie in the ability of MEPs to speak out against the ongoing trade discussion on Mercosur. We took note of the citizens' call for a greener Europe. As we tried to demonstrate with our campaign WeFarm4EU, European farmers and their cooperatives can be front runners in the fight against climate change and in boosting a European bioeconomy. However, we can only do so if the EU does not undermine farmers' efforts by tolerating imports of goods from trade partners that encourage deforestation and agronomic practices that are not accepted inside our borders. How can the EU justify to EU farmers and citizens that it plans to import further agricultural goods from Brazil a few months after Mr Bolsonaro's government authorised over 150 new pesticides, while the EU proposes the exact opposite strategy for its producers?

Above all, we hope that the new set of the EU's democratically elected representatives will fight for sustainable agriculture in the long term, ensuring that their decisions take into account social, economic and environmental aspects. Farmers' incomes are currently too low in Europe. We must rectify the situation if we want to overcome one of the biggest challenges of all: generation renewal in agriculture. This is a central challenge for the decade to come and this political cycle will have a decisive role to play in this regard.

Finally, the nomination of the new College of Commissioners and the Commission's President is a crucial next step. The June summit (20-21), will tell us who EU leaders will formally nominate as a candidate for the top job. Strong leadership is needed for the future of the European project as well as to ensure that the EU is well represented and defended at international level. As for the future Commissioner for Agriculture, we hope for an individual with a clear, pragmatic and strong vision for our sector – someone who is able to follow the example set by the current Commissioner.

A Commissioner also needs support from a robust administration. This is why I believe, in contrast to some of the statements made during the campaign, that DG AGRI's role and responsibilities should be strengthened in order to enhance the coordination of European Union policies that impact European farmers' and agri-cooperatives' activities. DG AGRI significantly contributes to a number of the Commission's political priorities, including trade, jobs, growth and investment, and the internal market.

Let's never forget, a strong Europe needs strong agriculture, and strong agriculture needs Europe!

**Pekka Pesonen, Copa and Cogeca Secretary General**

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- The following op-ed was released on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> June on Mr Pesonen's [Linkedin](#) account.
- For more information about EU farmers' and agri-cooperatives' views on various issues and the future of the CAP please head to [www.wefarm4.eu](http://www.wefarm4.eu).