

'A "green" Europe?' from the Lëtzeburger Bauere-Kalenner (1965)


Caption: In 1965, the Lëtzeburger Bauere-Kalenner, periodical for the Luxembourg Farmers' Association, would welcome the implementation of a common agricultural policy in Europe.

Source: Lëtzeburger Bauere-Kalenner 1965. 1965. Luxembourg: Centrale paysanne. "Ein « grünes » Europa", auteur:Gillen, Mathias , p. 41-43.

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A 'green' Europe?

By this, we do not mean a Europe with expanses of green on all sides, in the way that Ireland, whose entire surface is dominated by meadows and pastureland, is referred to as the 'Emerald Isle'. Rather, 'green' is meant figuratively, signifying something like 'agricultural', as in the expressions 'green report' and 'green plan' referring to the agricultural situation or to the measures being envisaged to promote agricultural development. A 'green' Europe would thus denote something like an 'agricultural' Europe, as opposed to the political Europe on which sights have been set. Even this definition is not yet clear enough. What we hoped to get across with this title is as follows: has not the time come for Europe's agriculture, or, for the time being at least, that of the six EEC countries, to build a European organisational structure, one that is in keeping with today's circumstances, is effective and enjoys a democratic, by which we mean electoral, basis?

Agriculture has so often been accused of falling behind the times, of ignoring the winds of change and of handicapping itself by pursuing its aims individualistically, haphazardly and totally inconsistently. Could it not, for once, try to catch up with, perhaps even get ahead of, the groups focusing solely on politics by electing a genuine Agrarian Parliament to defend its interests? A European 'Agricultural Chamber' of this kind would represent the entire farming community, from Frisia to southern Italy and from the north of Germany to southern France. Their leading personalities and administrators would be just the right people to engage in discussions with national and supranational authorities and bodies. Just imagine the sort of impression that it would make in, for example, Brussels, if six representatives elected at pan-European farming elections were to call in on the Commission Vice-President Sicco Mansholt, for example, with a view to discussing agricultural problems and voicing demands! They could not fail to be heard. Determining the legal basis and the organisational and electoral arrangements would be a matter for the farming community itself.

Given the circumstances which vary widely from one country to another and the apparently conflicting agricultural interests, our idea may be seen by many as utopian. We ourselves have raised this and many other objections. We shall be addressing this aspect in rather more detail a little further down. But, first, a little more about the benefits that the suggested plan could offer.

The emergence of a political Europe is not for today, nor is it for tomorrow. A lot of water will flow under the bridge before such a Europe — whether it be the 'supranational Europe' or the 'Europe of nations' — materialises, despite all efforts to breathe new life into the project or what the politicians call 'revivals'. The main reason for this regrettably slow rate of progress is, in our view, the fact that the idea has not yet taken hold in the minds of ordinary Europeans. The advocates of European political union are probably themselves mostly to blame for this state of affairs, for there are simply too many structures, organisations, unions and committees pursuing this aim. Faced with such a bewildering array of committees, plans and councils, the man in the street begins to lose track and, in the end, skips anything in the newspaper to do with a 'united Europe'. And yet a genuine, viable Smaller or Greater Europe can never be the work of a handful of intellectuals; it can only grow out of the combined understanding and joint will of the various groups that make up the population.

However, even assuming the desired 'Europe' materialised, whether politically or economically, in the not too distant future, and assuming, further, that general elections were held for a European economic or political parliament vested not only with advisory powers but even with extensive powers of scrutiny and assent — what would agriculture as a whole stand to gain? The working population in the farming sector accounts for only 20 % of the total population in the six EEC countries. So even if, in elections to a European Parliament of whatever kind, all agricultural electors were to vote only for farming candidates, they could, at best, win only a fifth of the available seats. A minority of this kind would be virtually powerless and would have to agree to all sorts of compromises, and the European Executive would have no option but to be guided by the majority. Indeed, this minority relationship inherent in the way that the population is structured is the main reason why too little has, in the past, been done for farming in the various countries. A government, whether national or supranational, will always be dependent on the majority in parliament, as long as it is answerable to it — which, it is to be hoped, will continue to be the

case in a future ‘united’ Europe. Since it is not possible in this way to take adequate account of agrarian interests, we believe that the farming community in the six EEC countries should elect their own representatives and create a ‘green’ Europe, with green authorities and a green administration. In the event of subsequent, political elections, it would then still be possible to put forward additional farming candidates. If further European countries were to join the EEC, they, too, could send elected representatives to the Green Parliament.

And now to the objections.

The first point to be made will be that farming already enjoys collective representation in the form of the Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations (COPA). It is certainly true that this Committee, which is made up of representatives of organised farmers in the six Member States and meets as and when required, performs a valuable service and is ready and able, as it showed in the recent agricultural negotiations in Brussels, to state its views loud and clear. It is equally true that, in November 1963, the COPA delegates, meeting in Strasbourg, were unequivocal in their expression of the demands of Europe’s farmers and, in presenting their position on agrarian policy, underpinned their case with scientifically-based arguments encompassing the economic, demographic, social and, more generally, human dimensions. And it is again true that the European Parliament in Strasbourg has set up a specialist agricultural committee, which is doing all that it can. But all that forms part of the general political grind; it would, in our view, be better for a body emanating from general European farm elections to be responsible for the defence of agricultural interests. The European efforts so far can be likened to a train that comes up against one or even several stop signals each time that it approaches a station. If, perchance, a green light appears to clear the way, it can be certain that there will be a red light waiting just around the bend. The best thing must surely be for farmers to alight from this Europe-train, look to themselves and take the straight road through to their destination. (The IFAP and the ECA will have to go their separate way here, since their activity overlaps with the EEC sphere.)

That we are not alone in advancing such ideas is, for example, clear from the following extract from an article which appeared in the 3 October edition of the Belgian farming gazette *Le Journal des UPA (Unions Professionnelles Agricoles)* concerning the French dairy producers’ strike:

‘Admittedly, the leaders of the EEC professional agricultural organisations represented in COPA have, for years now, been accustomed to carrying out joint studies and making common representations to the EEC authorities. Admittedly, they have, since November 1963 and the mass meeting of their delegates in Strasbourg, defined the philosophy underlying the agricultural policy that they wish to promote. But all this still lacks active, dynamic cohesion, there is still a failure to act collectively, to rely on the means which have today become necessary ...’

The shortcomings referred to here could be overcome by the establishment of a common European representation for farmers. Its leadership and the associated administrative support would have sufficient clout to deal with any situation that might arise. The Belgian newspaper referred to does not, admittedly, go so far as to call for a breakaway from the so-called European bodies that have held sway hitherto and the establishment by farmers of their own, elected European representation.

A further objection might consist in saying that a representative body of this kind would lack any kind of executive power and would, as has been the case with farmers’ representatives to date, have to confine itself to petitioning the European Commission in Brussels. Well, that remains to be seen. But, frankly, if a two- or three-man delegation acting for, and with a very clear mandate from, hundreds and thousands of farmers and their families from throughout the EEC were to put a particular, cogently argued view to the relevant authorities, it is hard to imagine that those authorities would simply disregard its demands or reject them out of hand. To be sure, this would mean having to take a unified stance on all important issues — but the lack of consistency in the views, opinions and demands emanating from the various countries is the very reason

why European agricultural policy has hardly left the starting blocks.

Which brings us to a further objection. In a European agrarian parliament, made up exclusively of farmers' representatives, national special interests would surely clash, and uniform guidelines and common plans would come to be seen as an illusion. Indeed, there might be teething problems along these lines, but the fact is that farmers in every country have learnt an awful lot of late. The European economic union will have been completed by 1970 at the latest, whether or not Europe's farmers have established a common position. The Common Market, which is to say the free movement of goods — including that of agricultural products — is undeniably on the way. Prices, too, will be the same everywhere, with national governments no longer having any scope for price intervention. 1970 is now only five years away, and the target date may even be brought forward. Surely the time has come for the farming communities in the six countries to give careful thought to their common destiny? Solidarity is the order of the day. If things go badly for one, the other will not do any better. That is why common solutions must be studied, devised and put forward, not only on the pricing front but also in such areas as production and production costs, market organisation, farming cooperatives, investment, social problems, etc. Liaison at all levels and across the board offers the best chance of bringing conflicting lines of action and opposing demands to a common denominator. It is better for farmers themselves to reach an understanding than for solutions, devised without their involvement, to be handed down from above by a supranational authority. And where better to build and attain that mutual understanding than in a freely elected European agrarian parliament? Achieving that understanding will be more essential than ever when the three authorities have merged, there being a real danger that the interests of farming will slip even further down the overall agenda with the new 'single High Authority'.

That the vast majority of Europe's farmers have recognised the need for international solidarity in pursuit of specific goals became clear in the course of the French dairy producers' strike in September and October last year. Why not give visible expression and tangible shape to this remarkable sense of solidarity through common representation? New times call for new ways and means. How much we would have stood to gain if, to take just two examples, the EEC farming community had taken a common, unified stance in the GATT negotiations in Geneva (customs agreement) and during the Kennedy Round (reduction in customs duties payable by third countries, and in particular the USA). These are matters of concern to all farmers, whether they live in Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium or Luxembourg.

Farmers, read the signs of the times! Strength lies in unity.

M. Gillen