

New scenarios for European agriculture, from globalisation to integration policies

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The approval of the medium term reform of the Community Agricultural Policy undoubtedly shows a new approach to the themes of agriculture both in terms of contents and future projections.

It contains significant mutations renewing the same framework of agricultural policy actions, accelerating along the path already undertaken starting from MacSharry reform and pursued with the launching of Agenda 2000. Much has been done over the last fifteen years to make European agriculture and the market come nearer, as well as to answer to the needs expressed by consumers. Actions of support to farmers have been reframed and new perspectives have been built up in the sector of trade relationships, based on the themes of food safety, development of rural territories and environmental protection, by setting up a system of sustainable policies not only in financial terms, but also from the point of view of social awareness.

The role of market support functions and direct assistance had already been retrenched with MacSharry reform, while that of measures encouraging the environmental role of agricultural policies had been strengthened. With the launching of Agenda 2000 the rationalisation of expenditure has been further pursued, taking into account the constraints established by the agreements on international trade, significantly reducing the support system and at the same time opening the paramount issue of rural development policies, so far lacking a systematic framework.

With the medium term reform, European farmers finally enter the new perspective of policies providing support to the sector, with selective measures aiming at promoting a sustainable agriculture at the same time following the path leading to decoupling and support eco-conditionality.

Award are no longer granted to farmers as such, but according to their behaviour, to the production of positive externalities originated by the exercise of their agricultural activity. Farmers are therefore encouraged towards socially "useful" behaviours, rewarded insofar as they are values that benefit society, and for which no exchange or market value is determined.

Substantially, it means shifting from social justification of action based on specific needs, typical in Europe after World War II, to a new dimension corresponding much more to the

renewed requirements of citizens, territories, markets and last but not least developing countries.

This reframing of policies has undoubtedly been influenced and urged by the phenomenon of globalisation, affecting the whole system of economic and social interaction. While markets become wider, access to consumption occasions increases, as does their variety and the extent of social awareness, coupled with the spreading of information worldwide, influencing consumption behaviours.

Such dynamics have in time required new models for the regulation of exchanges, new themes attracting the attention of policymakers, as well as new significant requirements demanding the attention of the community agricultural policy.

From the point of view of international relations, this engendered a progressive elimination of EU barriers to import, customs duties were reduced and the function of quotas is increasingly less significant. In a few areas around the world a total liberalisation of exchanges has been granted: EBA (Everything But Arms), for instance, allows de facto the 49 poorest countries of the world to export any product without limits imposed by quotas, and especially without any duty. The agreement will soon come to include also all the countries of Lomé convention. This is clearly of extraordinary momentum in terms of competitiveness of productions and reframing of support strategies. Over the last decade the world trade of instrumental and consumer's goods has grown nearly four times as fast as compared to the growth of the world's GNP, and for agricultural products in particular the trade turnover of commodities has increased by over 270%.

In this framework, the European support system must change its strategy, reformulating its objectives in tune with ongoing changes.

Within this rapidly evolving scenario, where the processes highlighted above seem to be increasing their intensity, production and trade relation regulation systems, production quotas, sugar quotas, milk quotas, regulations concerning vineyards, aids to fodder production etc., appear as a system of policies developed over time in order to foster a community space, support the construction of a single European market by protecting it against the pressure of international competition, especially from countries with more abundant resources and easier access to low cost production factors. Yet, such policies were developed based on objectives which have now been achieved. Moreover, several events have oc-

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curred, deeply influencing the awareness of citizens and consumers. Food scandals had a huge impact, determining a change in the demand of services relating to food products, causing a radical change in the relation between producers and consumers, now more and more aware of the costs of agricultural policy when it is no longer justified by its original objectives.

The reform tries to provide answers to these changes, approaching the farmer to the market and supporting the need to meet the requirements expressed by the citizens.

These considerations moreover take a further standpoint in view of the advance of regional integration promoted by the EU. The role played by the European Union, both in terms of global and regional integration and development of the objectives of economic and social cohesion, has presently reached an extremely crucial phase. This occurred both with reference to internal affairs, with the perspective of a wider Europe, more integrated under the socio-economic and institutional viewpoint, and with reference to foreign affairs, considering the growing relevance of its role marking international relations and especially their regional dimension. Special attention should, in this respect, be devoted to the evolution of the system of relations with the

southern Mediterranean shores, where the traditional connections between Europe and Mediterranean third countries (the twelve partners of the southern shore) has found a new drive especially thanks to the increase of trade relations, suggesting a common platform for some aspects of the agricultural policy, based on the complementary nature of the various forms of Mediterranean agriculture.

This is a challenge that is also a potentially crucial opportunity to reorganise the agricultural offer of the whole Mediterranean basin, in a context of increasing market competition where the competitive ability of Mediterranean agricultural models will be fully exploited only by the integration of complementary aspects and services through the enhancement of their quality features.

And in this scenario does the full potential of Mediterranean agriculture emerge at its best: its features, tradition and quality of products are a huge heritage which can be the right lever to touch in order to respond to the new requirements of consumers, becoming the driving force of local development very often linked, both on the northern and on the southern shore, to the strength and advance of values expressed in the sector of agriculture.