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EP Hearings and EU Food agenda: mixed feelings about the 3 Commissioners involved

Members of the European Parliament last week held hearings with the three Commissioners-designate with food-related portfolios.

The portfolios of Mr [Vella](#) (ENVI/PECH), Mr [Andriukaitis](#) (Food Safety and Health) and Mr [Hogan](#) (Agriculture), will have an impact on what ends up on European citizens' plates.

Among the three, there was no surprise at all at the hearing of Phil Hogan, former Irish Minister of Environment, whose [track record](#) fits better with the aims of intensive agriculture than any environmentally-friendly objectives. His nomination signals the start of the slide back to intensive farming, where social or environmental aspects are sidelined. In Hogan's eyes, small farmers are a 'problem' and issues the Greens are fighting for like [climate](#) mitigation measures, protection of biodiversity, short food chains or animal welfare are instead viewed as complicating farmers' lives. To put it short, Hogan is the perfect candidate for the re-establishment of a Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) which can drive forward the industrial farming and trade liberalisation agenda to the advantage of the agri-food industry and against small farmers' interests.

On TTIP and the possible threat on existing food safety standards, it seemed clear that Vytenis Andriukaitis, despite some weakness on food safety and animal welfare issues, will make no compromise on existing EU food safety standards. He also admits EFSA should be more transparent and calls for scientific information to be assessed against clear criteria. Mr Andriukaitis also considers stopping food waste to be crucial, but made no commitment on any legislative action in this field, nor to the stalled Communication on Sustainable Food, although it is ready for adoption. Following the same line, Karmenu Vella vaguely mentioned the possibility to 'reanimate' this pending proposal of communication which is supposed not only to tackle food waste but also question the whole current food system from farm or water to fork.

In his speech, Mr Vella revealed his lack of fighting spirit on defending environmental issues. He gave only one convincing response about the proposal to merge the environment and fisheries portfolios, claiming it would reinforce both, as 70% of our planet is oceans and the two can complement each other. He also underlined his commitment to continue the fight against illegal fishing but did not commit to ensure that the Commission has sufficient resources for this. On the other hand, Mr Vella did not understand the Environment committee's concern that the new Commission would not have sustainable development as a key objective. Mr Vella explains that even if sustainable development is not integrated in the mission letter of Vice-President Katainen (responsible for supervising the Environment Commissioner)

this does not mean the new Commission would not have this cross-cutting issue as key objective in its mandate.

On [GMOs](#), candidates to the Commission posts were overall positive, standing on the same side as President Juncker, willing to reform the '[undemocratic](#)' authorisation procedure. Mr Andriukaitis genuinely recognised the myriad of problems posed by GMOs to biodiversity and the need to respect the interest of citizens and member states but did not commit to mandatory anti-contamination measures. Let's hope then the Commission will make sure the important and necessary overhaul of the EU authorisation system is not jeopardised by the controversial proposal to allow member states to opt out of GMO authorisations, which cannot be a trick to allow easier EU authorisations.

The authentic and convincing performance of the EC candidate for Food safety and Health gives a glimpse of an eagerness to work into the right direction; however one can doubt his capacity to impose his views in a new Commission, including Vella and Hogan and actually dominated by a growth and competitiveness logic at the expense of a progressive vision for a more equal and sustainable society allowing for more coherent and fair food systems.

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