



Open letter to the candidates to the European Parliament elections on June 7th 2009

Agriculture: A European project to overcome the crisis

Goal: 1 000 000 more farmers and 2 000 000 more jobs created in Europe within 5 years.

The European project was born of the desire to assure peace and fight against all forms of totalitarianism. This initial foundation quickly made way for a development model based on economic integration. What was first a political European project has hence become an essentially economic one. The result is that now, at the moment when Europeans have been invited to renew the European Parliament on June 7, the European project is no longer carried by a common vision that all Europeans can identify with. Adding to this lack of a common vision is an economic recession that puts many states on the verge of bankruptcy and challenges the EU.

The global economic crisis is joined by a climate crisis that could lead to, among other things, a drought impacting on large food production zones. This explosive cocktail is ushering in an extremely serious global food crisis that will begin this year. The recovery plans developed here and there to save the credit establishments and certain industrial sectors risk being overwhelmed by the brutality of the food crisis. The planetary food challenge - the priority of the century - is already the urgency of the decade. Around this issue, once more in Europe, is the question of peace.

Out of 6.7 billion people on the planet, more than a billion suffer from malnutrition. Three quarters of these people live in rural areas, and one quarter live in shantytowns. Small farming families make up a large portion of this population and the number is growing by 80 million each year. By 2050, the global population will reach 9 billion inhabitants. They will need to be fed by producing more and better with less: less soil, less water, less chemicals, less energy, and half as many greenhouse gas emissions.

This is the challenge of the century, a challenge that Europe must seize without hesitation in order to assure peace. If it fails to do so, violence and repression will be ever stronger since the shortage will be equally rife in our countries if Europe maintains its current agricultural policies and land taxes. Responding to this challenge means leaving behind the production-centered agro-industrial model that exhausts 10 million hectares of soil annually in the world and destroys 15 million hectares of tropical forests in order to reclaim and cultivate the land. It means changing the agro-food model and evolving towards agriculture that does not exhaust soil because it has been adapted to region and soil type. It means using less water. It means redirecting agriculture towards production capable of feeding farmers and their neighbouring populations, rural and urban, and moving beyond production dictated by the financial imperatives of export-oriented agriculture. It means leaving behind the pretentious European desire to feed the world with energy-consuming and pollution-prone production techniques. In using a massive amount of pesticides and synthetic fertilizers, the European agricultural model is participating in the destruction of food-producing cultures, notably in countries of the global south, and increasingly failing to nourish Europeans. This malnourishment is responsible for a decrease in fertility and the development of obesity and cancer.

That is why it is essential to launch an ambitious program of 1 000 000 more farmers in Europe within 5 years, especially in suburban areas, and to build around this ambition the foundations of a European policy to create 2 000 000 jobs in food processing, retailing, research and training in agro-ecology.

In June you are looking for the votes of European citizens. We would like to know if you will support and defend the following propositions to the European Parliament. We propose:

Priority 1: Agricultural land, priority issue

-  Create a structural European fund for rural and semi-rural land to finance the purchase of agricultural land by local collectivities and support the placement of farmers on the periphery of towns. This will help to secure and improve the supply of fresh and healthy foods to towns.
-  Put in place a European training plan in the field of new agro-ecological techniques (mentoring, European exchanges, research, training farms, etc.).
-  Help existing farmers keep their farms - especially in Eastern Europe.
-  Discourage the growth of large farms that takes place at the expense of small ones.
-  Discourage the policies of land speculation lead by both states and multinationals.

Priority 2: Putting food at the heart of policies

-  Stop the logic of urban sprawl and redefine urban policy in line with food needs and the fight against CO2 emissions.
-  Define a water policy (concerning distribution, treatment and price) guaranteed by real public enforcement.
-  Support the development of regional agro-food networks.
-  Encourage the planting of fruit trees in rural and urban areas. Integrate plots of farmable land into the construction of social housing.
-  Modify the public procurement code to allow for the re-localisation of collective food supplies.
-  Regulate prices according to proscribed profit-margins in the bulk distribution sector, post transfer prices, fix general sales conditions, and make these the same for all purchasers.
-  Support independent retailers in the city centre.
-  Help farmers to escape financial debt that halts redevelopment towards small-scale, sustainable agriculture.
-  Remove agriculture from the WTO and put in place, under the aegis of the UN, a food security council.

Priority 3: Adapted Rules and Norms

-  Ban the use of GMOs, pesticides and synthetic fertilizers.
-  Develop and protect the preservation, creation, and use of landrace seeds (aka peasants' seeds) and low risk natural pesticides.
-  Protect consumers and producers by putting in place an independent public European institution in charge of food inspection.
-  Recognize participatory guarantee systems at the national and European level as they relate to modes of production as well as distribution in transparent, equitable, and sustainable networks.
-  Adapt health and environmental standards to avoid centralization and allow for the development of short distribution circuits.
-  Put an end to export monocultures that develop to the detriment of food-producing communities by abandoning export subsidies and creating a protectionist mechanism expanded to social and environmental criteria (e.g. resources serving to finance co development programs).
-  Put an end to policies supporting agro-fuel and impose an import ban on them.

May 11th open letter to the candidates to the European Parliament election on June 7th 2009 initiated by two nongovernmental organizations Minga and Nature&Progrès.

Signatories

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