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## Opinion Piece

# Europe Day – The mobilisation of the agricultural and rural communities is essential for the June elections!

This year's Europe Day takes place in a special context, between the end of a very special mandate dominated by crises and the election campaign period we are entering. From 6th to 9th June, 400 million European voters will be deciding on our common future. This 9th May is therefore an opportunity to take stock of the past mandate and to explain why the next few years will be so fundamental in Brussels, particularly in terms of agriculture.

Through our respective mandates within Copa and Cogeca, we have had the opportunity to observe, at close quarters, the workings of the institutions and the importance of the decisions taken there throughout Ursula von der Leyen's term at the European Commission.

Successive crises since March 2020 have forced European leaders to revise their approach: COVID, the war in Ukraine, the food security weapon brandished by Putin, inflation and the recurrence of extreme weather events have all shown that our agriculture is a sector that is both essential, strategic, and vulnerable. Each time, Europe has proven to be at the right level for action, and has been able to react quickly, whether through the Next Generation EU plan, its energy independence and food security strategy, or more recently through its CAP simplification proposals. These different strategies, approved by 27 Member States, sometimes in a matter of weeks, have been real feats of strength, which would have been impossible to implement without good coordination between our EU institutions.

During this term of office, the most striking thing for us has been the paradigm shift that has taken place on agricultural issues. We have now moved away from the dogmatic, top-down approach of Farm to Fork in the early stages of the mandate, towards greater dialogue and a more strategic approach to agricultural issues in recent months.

Beyond the political display, Farm to Fork quickly showed the limits of a vision with no assessment and no thought given to implementation. This problematic method was recognised first and foremost by the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, who decided in September 2023 to launch a 'Strategic Dialogue for the Future of Agriculture', currently underway in Brussels.

However, let's be very clear here; many texts have not been concluded under this mandate, leaving a number of questions unanswered, whether on plant protection products or animal welfare, on which the next Commission and Parliament will have to take a stance.



This change of method will have to be confirmed on these issues after the elections. To continue with ideology or sterile polarisation would be to waste precious time.

Alongside the work of the Commission, the political action of the Members of the European Parliament is also to be commended. When it comes to agriculture, they have been among the first to raise the concerns and questions of the farming and forestry community, acting as an intermediary and moderating many proposals. This is why it is essential for political parties and voters to bring to Parliament, MEPs who work on these issues and have personal knowledge of the problems facing European agriculture and rural areas. We are convinced that this issue of the rural/urban divide must be addressed at European level.

Over the next mandate and in the current geopolitical context, three sectors will enable European sovereignty: energy, defence, and agriculture. Without this sovereignty, the EU will not be able to assert itself fully in the world and will remain dependent on other powers. Agriculture, forestry, and the cooperative movement must therefore regain an eminently strategic place at the heart of European thinking.

The coming term of office will have to respond to a growing number of challenges, including Ukraine's integration into the EU, farming generations' renewal, the challenges of climate change and biodiversity, safeguarding our agricultural model to ensure our food security, and ensuring the coherence of our trade and internal market policies. No simplistic answers can be given to these questions, and only a concerted approach, based on listening more closely to farmers and other players in the food chain, will enable us to move forward.

Farmers are certainly among the Europeans who are most aware of the importance of the EU, not only through the support they receive for income, investment, and transition, but also through the trading opportunities offered by the single market and the common standards developed by the EU. Agriculture has always played a vital role at the heart of our Union because food security is above all a guarantee of peace and stability!

Looking at the disappointment of the British people following Brexit and the hope of new countries applying to join the EU, we are convinced today that above all we need 'more of Europe'!

In order to provide a strong legitimacy for action, and to ensure that the voice of farmers and rural people is heard in the next Parliament and the Commission, it is essential today, even more than yesterday, that European farmers get involved and vote.

Let's elect MEPs who will confirm the change of direction and agricultural paradigm in Brussels!

***Christiane Lambert, COPA President***

***Lennart Nilsson, COGECA President***



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Translations will be available in DE, ES, FR, IT, PL and RO on the Copa-Cogeca website soon.

About us - Copa and Cogeca are the united voice of farmers and agri-cooperatives in the EU. Together, we ensure that EU agriculture is sustainable, innovative and competitive, while guaranteeing food security for 500 million people throughout Europe. >>> More information [www.copa-cogeca.eu](http://www.copa-cogeca.eu)

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