

3. From the Allgäu to Europe

Maria Heubuch

I come from a dairy farm in the Allgäu, a region of Southern Germany that is predominantly characterised by agriculture and tourism. I am a member of Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (the German Green Party) in Baden-Württemberg, a state in which the Greens currently put forward the State Prime-Minister. I have now been campaigning for over 30 years for sustainable, small scale agriculture, in the sense of socially and environmentally acceptable forms of cultivation and management, in Germany, in Europe and worldwide. At first, I promoted this approach regionally, and for the past 15 years as the Federal Chairperson of the German "Association for Family Farming".

Baden-Württemberg is also one of the industrial heartlands of Germany, where two large automotive corporations as well as numerous mechanical engineering companies have their headquarters. At the same time, however, Baden-Württemberg is very much characterised by rural areas, with a third of its 10 million inhabitants living in the countryside.

Getting the European message through in a multiple elections context

One of the great challenges for the Baden-Württemberg Greens in the European election campaign was undoubtedly that the local elections were held at the same time. Traditionally, the Greens in Baden-Württemberg have been strongly rooted in local communities. This is also reflected in the local election results. In Baden-Württemberg, the list of candidates for the Greens and those close to the Greens won over 1,660 seats in municipal and county councils; previously, this number was barely 1,400. In doing so, the Greens

have won a total of 19.1% of the additional seats. The Conservatives, as well as the Social Democrats and the Liberals had to come to terms with at times significant vote losses. On average, the proportion of the Green vote was over 12% at the Baden-Württemberg regional elections. In many districts, the proportion of votes won by the Greens and parties close to the Greens exceeded 20%; in four districts that are more likely to be categorised as rural, this proportion even rose to above 30%. The highest increase in votes for the Greens came from rural areas.

The Baden-Württemberg Greens had developed a campaign for the local election that centred on the slogan "shape it here". The campaign posters mainly focused on local topics, such as nature conservation, local traffic issues, or support for regional products. Obviously, the campaign for the European elections was only ever going to be successful if a thematic connection to the local elections could be established.

"Farming out of Passion"

Consequently, and in parallel to the federal level of the Green Party, the Baden-Württemberg Greens developed a campaign that was designed around my candidature and its key topics of agricultural policies and the countryside. The "Farming out of Passion" campaign targeted quality of life in rural areas and made the Common Agricultural Policy the subject of discussion; it concerned being free from GMOs, sustaining small and mid-sized farms, as well as animal welfare – here at home, in Europe, and worldwide.

We had discussions with voters on such topics as "the dangers of agro-genetic engineering" or "how can we maintain as many farms as possible, as a basis of being able to address social requirements regarding animals and the environment". These discussions took place during numerous

campaign events, which on occasion were held at farms. We also used the events to highlight the ramifications of the misguided, export-orientated Common Agricultural Policy for the rest of the world, as well as the background issues of the pending free-trade agreements with the USA (TTIP) and Canada (CETA).

At the European elections, the Greens in Baden-Württemberg won 13.2% of the votes, which placed them above the national average. Nonetheless, as was the case throughout Germany, they had to accept a loss of 1.8% of the vote. What is interesting here, however, is that the losses in rural areas were clearly much lower and therefore appear to reflect the trends observed in the local elections.

Europe requires a sensitive approach

During the elections campaign I noticed that many people have a growing distrust of European politics. In many cases, this suspicion is not well defined. Europe appears remote, overly bureaucratic and non-transparent. Yet, by engaging in conversation and asking questions, it is possible to highlight the connections between Europe and day-to-day life and the advantages that the European Union has created for its citizens. Others, however, disagree with the policies of the European Commission and the politics of the Member States in the European Council. Our duty as Greens should be to critically appraise political decisions that are wrong and offer clear alternatives. We should not allow European-level political decisions to appear as if there is "no alternative". If we do not all work very hard to re-establish the confidence that has been lost in the European Union, we are in danger of this suspicion turning into an open rejection of the European Union as such. As a Member of the European Parliament, I see it as my job to regain the confidence that has been lost.

This is not an easy task. It requires being in touch with the public by listening to their concerns and championing their requests. We have to ensure that the political units of member states and regions within Europe are respected and that the subsidiarity that has been promised and guaranteed in the European Treaties are indeed honoured.

2015 – The European Year for Development: Europe in an unsettled world

As a Member of the Development Committee in the European Parliament, I will be looking after the European Union's development policies and disaster relief. Overall, support from the European Union and its member states accounts for approximately 50% of the worldwide expenditure on development policies. In 2012, the EU invested over 55 billion Euros in development aid.

A UN summit in September 2015 is scheduled to generate a successor agreement to the UN's current development policies. With the "Post-2015 Development Agenda", heads of state and government leaders will agree on the targets and guidelines for a global development policy. The Cotonou Agreement, a trade and development policy agreement with 79 African, Caribbean and Pacific States, will expire in 2020. The agenda for a successor agreement will be set during this legislative period, making this a decisive legislative period for the EU's development policy. At the same time, we are currently confronted with a plethora of humanitarian crises of an unimagined magnitude, starting with the Ebola crisis in West Africa and spanning the armed conflicts in the Middle East, the Central African Republic and South Sudan.

In my view, our key task is to improve food sovereignty as well as food security.

Worldwide, extreme poverty and starvation continue to be a daily reality for close to a billion people. Among those affected, more than 70% belong to rural communities and are farmers, farm hands or landless peasants. Even the UN's ambitious development goals have not changed this. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the proportion of humanity suffering from malnutrition has dropped from 24% in the period 1992-1994 to 14% in the period 2011-2013. However, these figures are based on a daily calorie requirement of 1,800 Kcal, which is not enough for a person undertaking physical labour to live a self-determined life. These numbers not only ignore the problem of nutritional deficiencies caused by one-sided diets.

The German charity Welthungerhilfe estimates that the current number of people suffering from starvation and malnutrition is closer to 2 billion. The situation is particularly critical in Sub-Saharan countries, where almost one-third of the population is starving. In terms of absolute figures, the largest numbers of those affected by starvation are still found in Asia – 552 million people. And the situation is in danger of becoming worse. Current figures do not yet reflect the ramifications of the latest humanitarian crises, such as the Ebola outbreak or the dreadful armed conflicts in Syria and Iraq. Environmental catastrophes that have been triggered by global climate change, including extreme droughts or flooding, will wipe out more and more harvests in the future and exacerbate the problem. The situation is further inflamed by food speculation, which makes the famines even worse.

Strengthening the structures of small-scale farming – at home, in Europe and worldwide

Stabilising and promoting a varied family farming structure in developing countries

is the best guarantee to ensure food security. European development aid has to strengthen these structures through its developmental policies and relevant programmes, and must not thwart them. The fundamental principle must be to produce food in the area where it is needed. This is the only way to provide sufficient and fresh produce that is also aligned with the local traditions and conditions. Every country must have the right to safeguard its own food sovereignty. In this area, however, too many mistakes have been made and the monoculture of agricultural crops for export has been given priority too often. We must not repeat these mistakes. The global agricultural and development policy must not be allowed to become an accomplice to the establishment of agro-industrial monocultures and structures in developing countries under the slogan of “food security”.

When food security, or even more so food sovereignty, is to be attributed such great significance, this approach must also come to bear on other EU policies, the EU trade agreements, and the way in which the European Commission engages with the World Trade Organisation (WTO), in order to ensure political coherence. For this reason, measures that aim at price stability to support food security must not be defined as a trade-distorting tool. This applies both to establishing food reserves and to the opportunity for developing countries to protect their internal food markets, in terms of food sovereignty, from the volatility of the markets by regulating import volumes and prices. This is an important pre-condition to protecting one's own farmers from the dumping of imports and would also contribute to containing the food speculation that has added significantly to the food crises of the past years.

A further building block of food sovereignty is the right to access land, water

and seeds, as well as other production aids. In many countries, this is not obvious for farmers. A lack of legal certainty when it comes to registered property/land rights substantially limits access of traditional users. A scarcity of wells and waterholes as well as of locally adapted seed supplies pose further difficulties to small-scale farmers. Lacking education and training, and insufficient consultation and research that take local knowledge into account hamper the development of regionally suitable methods of cultivation and increases in yield. If you add to this the effects of “land grabbing” – the systematic purchase of land – then the entire basis for the population’s livelihood becomes a pawn in the game of large investors.

The impact of the EU’s trade policy on global food sovereignty

Export-oriented European agriculture is another contributing factor, especially in terms of intensive livestock farming, which uses additional areas of land in other parts of the world. Many developing countries cultivate protein-rich feedstuff for export, instead of food to feed their own population. The cultivation of feedstuff does not take place on small scale farms or traditional smallholdings, but on large industrial farms. This has not been changed by the latest CAP reform. This policy still exacerbates the global famine crisis and contributes to “land grabbing” and deforestation of the rain forests.

This situation is further aggravated by the EU’s trade policy, which is working towards an opening of the markets for European food and agricultural products. The European food industry is pushing onto the markets of developing countries with dairy and meat products and, increasingly, also with highly processed products such as sweet pastries and packet soups, placing additional pres-

sure on traditional eating habits and small scale farming structures. Yet it is precisely the preservation of these small scale farming structures, which are often organised in tight-knit village communities, that presents a guarantee in many developing countries for a stable supply of food that is adapted to regional and cultural needs. In addition, their preservation prevents rural migration, which is one of the main reasons for the growing slum dwellings found in the big cities of the developing world.

Particularly in the trade agreements with developing countries, we have to push for social and ecological standards in relation to agricultural products. These products, which are offloaded cheaply onto the European market as a consequence of social and ecological dumping, should no longer be allowed to find a soft target. In turn, the Common Agricultural Policy should also not be allowed to endanger any small scale farming structures in developing countries through dumping.

The Common Agricultural Policy: making use of the possibilities and keeping 2020 in mind

As already described above, the Common Agricultural Policy creates massive global problems when it is focused exclusively on export. In Europe, we also have to continue to work on a sustainable model of agriculture, instead of further promoting the “grow or go” model through the Common Agricultural Policy, as we have done so far. Although some foundation stones were laid for an agricultural turnaround in the new version of the Common Agricultural Policy, they are either too weak, as in the case of the greening measures, or have been made optional for the member states, as in the case of the direct payments and rural development. The CAP reform did ease administrative burdens on small farmers. But that is all it is. There is

a need for an integrated approach of Rural Development measures targeted at small farmers, linked to short food chains, direct marketing, working cooperately. Some of these options do exist in rural development measures but member states do not fully take advantage of these. Changes are kept to an absolute minimum.

The global market strategy of the EU has not been put into question by the reform, therefore the further liberalisation of markets will continue. In Europe, dairy farms will definitely come to feel this when the milk quotas are lifted on 30 March 2015. Within the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development in the European Parliament, I will be dealing with the development of the milk market. Many farms are trying to protect themselves by expanding their milk production. The amount of milk reaching the market is increasing steadily and there have been several price drops since the spring of 2014, even before Russia's import ban on milk products. The milk market is therefore under pressure.

A similar development was observed in Switzerland, where the milk quota was lifted earlier, in 2009. In Switzerland, the deregulation of the milk market led to a fall in milk prices and to a further market concentration on the side of the milk-processing industry; many farmers moved out of milk production. The safety net of the European Union is too weak to sustain varied milk production in the EU. In this context, fighting for an alignment of milk production to suit the European market is an important issue for me.

For a GMO free European agriculture

Another task I will focus on is creating an updated regulatory framework for the approval of genetically modified plants. Although the plan is for national member states to issue cultivation bans, there

are also concerns that the wording of the planned opt-out rules is in no way legally binding. In case of any doubt, member states could be sued by biotech companies and taken to the European Court of Justice. In addition, the plans for simplifying approvals are creating more problems than they are solving. Seeds do not respect borders. The coexistence between GMO free and GM-farming is an illusion. The EU has the duty to implement approval processes that satisfy the requirements of GMO free farms to the same extent as they must satisfy health requirements and all other environmentally relevant issues. Together with colleagues in the Green parliamentary group, I will work to oppose the simplified approvals procedure, and argue in favour of agriculture free of GMOs. To this end, we will cooperate closely with NGOs from the sector of environment and agriculture.

In 1997, the EU officially described its target for a Common Agricultural Policy as a European agricultural model for a multifunctional type of agriculture, claiming *"To both acknowledge as equal and take into consideration the different locations, farm structures and variations of farming within European agriculture, and also maintain the varied positive effects that are associated with a family-farming way of operating and/or minimise the negative effects that are associated with other agricultural ways of farming."*

However, the CAP reform was not successful compared to what it aimed to achieve for climate, environment and small scale farmers. Nonetheless, these goals still remain valid and are gaining in importance in the light of climate change and environmental problems, increasing poverty levels and crises-ridden regions.

The global agricultural report commissioned by the United Nations concludes this very clearly: "Business as Usual is not an Option!" We have to find new ways,

because only multifunctional agriculture in all its different variations can stand up to the enormous problems and challenges we face. To supply sufficient and healthy food

for all people, today and for future generations, is one of our most important tasks. Over the next five years, I will be working on moving closer to achieving this goal.



Maria Heubuch is a Member of the European Parliament for Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (the German Green Party). Maria is active on agricultural issues she has previously worked for farmers' organisations, and she has her own farm in the Allgäu.