



23.3.2021

NOTICE TO MEMBERS

Subject: Petition No 0703/2017 by Evangelos Tsiompanidis (Greek), on behalf of the Farmers and Stockbreeders Party of Greece concerning substantial delays affecting payments by the Greek Ministry of Rural Development under the programme for the afforestation of agricultural land

1. Summary of petition

The petitioner is referring to a scheme for the afforestation of agricultural land under the current Rural Development Programme in Greece, which received a positive response from farmers, especially in less fertile areas. This environmentally friendly measure, which is also intended to provide beneficiaries with a small but steady income, is particularly attractive for those living in mountainous or disadvantaged areas. However, problems have recently been caused by the large amount of time needed to carry out the necessary verifications before beneficiaries receive payment. The programme was so attractive that a large number of farmers planted trees on all of their arable land. As a result, however, they have been receiving no income at all for the last three years, leaving many of them struggling to survive. Complaints are still coming in from farmers that payments for 2014 have still not been received, while no payments at all have been made for 2015. The Greek Ministry of Rural Development in turn is blaming other ministries for failing to reach the necessary joint ministerial decisions concerning approval of funds.

2. Admissibility

Declared admissible on 27 November 2017. Information requested from Commission under Rule 216(6).

3. Commission reply, received on 31 January 2018

The Commission is aware of the delays in payments to beneficiaries of the Greek Rural

Development Programme, including the Organic Farming and Afforestation measures.

As explained in the communication to the European Parliament for Petition 0541/2015, which concerned delays in the payment of aid for organic farming and was discussed at the meeting of the Committee on Petitions of 10 July 2017, the EU legal framework does not foresee any sanctions in case of delayed payments by the Member States. This will change as of claim year 2019¹, by which a method for reducing payments to Member States in case of late payments will be introduced and the Member States that do not pay beneficiaries in time will be penalized.

Nonetheless, the Commission's Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development enquires regularly on the progress made with respect to delayed payments for area-based measures. The Greek authorities have been repeatedly encouraged to advance with the delayed payments to beneficiaries and are reminded of the upcoming change in the legislation for area-based payments under the Rural Development Programmes.

4. Commission reply (REV I), received on 23 March 2021

The Commission is currently not aware of any delays in payments to beneficiaries of the Greek Rural Development Programme.

As of claim year 2019², the EU legal framework foresees a method for reducing payments to Member States in case of late payments to beneficiaries, and the Member States that do not pay beneficiaries in time may be penalised.

Nonetheless, the Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development monitors the progress of payments, including for area-based measures.

The payment deadlines started to apply to the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) as of the claim year 2019 for measures for which the Integrated Administration and Control Systems (IACS) applies (Article 75(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013³). In cases of non-respect of the deadlines, the Commission will apply payment

1 In the communication to EP on Petition 0541/2015, it was indicated that this would change as of claim year 2018. However, the Omnibus Regulation extended the transitional period for harmonising the payment deadlines for area-related payments between the EAGF and the EAFRD by one year.

2 In the communication to the Committee on Petitions on petition 0541/2015, it was indicated that this would change as of claim year 2018. However, the Omnibus Regulation extended the transitional period for harmonising the payment deadlines for area-related payments between the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) by one year.

3 Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the financing, management and monitoring of the common agricultural policy and repealing Council Regulations (EEC) No 352/78, (EC) No 165/94, (EC) No 2799/98, (EC) No 814/2000, (EC) No 1290/2005 and (EC) No 485/2008, OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 549–607.

reductions for the expenditure made after the payment deadline in line with the rules laid down in Article 5a of Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 907/2014¹.

Conclusion

The Commission is currently not aware of any delays in payments to beneficiaries of the Greek Rural Development Programme and will, nonetheless, continue to monitor the progress of Rural Development Programme payments, including area-based measures. As of claim year 2019, payment deadlines apply and the Commission may apply payment reductions to Member States that do not pay beneficiaries in time.

¹ Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 907/2014 of 11 March 2014 supplementing Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council with regard to paying agencies and other bodies, financial management, clearance of accounts, securities and use of euro, OJ L 255, 28.8.2014, p. 18–58.