

Webinar “Called to Unity – Towards an Ecology of relationships Together for Europe, 2 March 2024

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I plan to say something about Article 17 and the Green Deal, respectively. Then I will argue that the methodology of Article 17 can prove helpful in promoting a just transition. Finally, I will offer some specific principles and recommendations.

1. Article 17

Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) provides as follows in its third paragraph: ‘Recognising their identity and their specific contribution, the Union shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with these churches and organisations. ‘

Article 17 is the world’s leading example of a commitment by public authorities to engage in a structured dialogue with churches and faith communities on current political issues. The “open, transparent, and regular dialogue” envisaged under the Article supports the objectives of the recent Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE), which aimed to engage citizens in shaping our future. Article 17 captures in 21st century terms the vision of a values-led society that Europe’s foundational thinkers of the post-war period took for granted.

2. The Green Deal

I turn now to the Green Deal. This is the world’s most ambitious policy framework to shape the future of agriculture in the light of wider goals. It is also our biggest project in the EU, with far-reaching consequences for almost all parts of society – an enormous achievement. Nevertheless, there is evidence that a significant part of the farmer population within the European Union

genuinely struggles to identify with the process of transition. There have been farmers' protests throughout Europe since the summer of 2022. In the background are some disturbing demographic statistics. In 2020 there were 9,1 million farms in the EU. But as compared to 2005, there were far fewer farms – a loss of approximately 5 million. In 2020, more than half of all EU farm managers were at least 55 years of age (around one third were at least 65), and only a very small number were young farmer managers (defined as those under the age of 40). In almost every EU Member State people employed in the agricultural sector have far more working hours per week on average than the rest of the work force.

European farmers are confronted with an enormous set of challenges –complex legislation, increased conditionality for financial support, and inflation. Perhaps it is not surprising that the number of small and medium-sized farms and of young farm managers is sharply decreasing. We who live in cities need to listen, to understand the attachment many farmers feel to their traditions and to situate the farming communities' social and cultural needs in a wider political context.

The relevance of Article 17

The FAO has identified Costa Rica and Ireland as countries which are developing credible national processes of climate-related transition. The change in Costa Rica is worth noting: it includes the reduction of military expenditure, a salient issue for the European Union as in every other part of the world. But today, I want to focus on Ireland and in particular on a report published in 2023 by the National Economic and Social Council.

The argument in this report is that we should not aim only at technical changes in separate sectors – such as reducing carbon emissions, sequestering carbon, changing the pattern of energy consumption, improving the nutritional quality of food, restoring water and soil quality, protecting animal welfare, enabling biodiversity and so on. What is needed in addition to these essential goals is an

overarching vision that will inspire individual farmers and farming communities to embark on a journey of positive change.

A transition to deliver multiple public goods should not focus only on the managers of farming businesses. For example, more research is needed on the implications of transition for workers in the supply chains and for downstream activity. Inevitably there are some relative losers in any 'just transition.' Targeted financial supports should be in place for the most vulnerable. We need new forms of public investment in housing and transport infrastructure.

The many factors and actors involved in a benign agenda for change call for innovative ways of engaging with stakeholders. Ultimately, a transition to deliver multiple public goods is a political question. To avoid a conflictual, crisis-centred approach, and gain traction for the changes that are required, we need to find spaces in which we can come together to deliberate, bearing in mind the whole context - including issues around food and diet, global food security, EU policies and legislation, and local democracy. To paraphrase Voltaire – if Article 17 *n'existait pas, il aurait fallu l'inventer!*

Principles and recommendations

To conclude I offer three principles and two recommendations:

- i. Ecology and food security go together: we need to share the primary goods of life while also accepting a longer-term responsibility to promote the ecological conditions on which life depends
- ii. A transition to deliver multiple public goods requires new ways of engaging with stakeholders in which place-based or localized approaches are central
- iii. In the wider economy, as in farming, any dichotomy between profit-based activities and non-profit activities does not do full justice to reality, or offer adequate practical direction for the future.

In this perspective, my two practical recommendations are as follows:

1. We should make creative use of Article 17, TFEU, to create multi-stakeholder frameworks for dialogue at member State level, regional level, and local level
2. These frameworks for dialogue should be supported by a research agenda aimed at clarifying the many situations in which both profit and not-for-profit considerations are in play. This new programme of research should contribute to the development of regulatory frameworks, relevant codes of practice at governmental level, and new environmental, social, and governance (ESG) metrics.