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Dacian Ciolos confirmed as EU Commissioner for Agriculture

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Report Highlights:

Romanian Dacian Ciolos was warmly received at the European Parliament's hearing on Friday, January 15, 2010 in his bid to become EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development. Ciolos was confirmed as Commissioner at the Parliament's formal vote on Tuesday, February 9, 2010. The new Commission took office on Wednesday, February 10, 2010. Its mandate continues until October 31, 2014. During his first official trip as Commissioner, Ciolos asserted that an extensive public debate for a reformed, better tailored CAP was needed.

General Information:

On November 27, 2009, European Commission President, Jose Barroso, announced the portfolios for the next Commission. Former Romanian Agriculture Minister, Dacian Ciolos, was proposed as the next Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development to succeed Marianne Fischer Boel. Although Ciolos is the only agricultural engineer among the nominees and Romania was the only Member State pushing for the agriculture dossier, the appointment of a candidate from a new Member State came as a surprise to many officials and politicians. Ciolos' candidature has been controversial given Romania's allegedly poor handling of EU agriculture money, more specifically the questionable allocation of EU accession funding. Moreover, Romania has a large farming sector with a bigger share of agricultural employment than any other Member State, a factor that usually works against candidates due to concerns over national interests.

When asked why he nominated a candidate from a Member State with malfunctioning agricultural funds, Barroso declared that, based on his CV and experience, Ciolos is the best qualified nominee for the position of Agriculture Commissioner and that asking the question was an insult to both the country and the person. Ciolos studied at the Montpellier University in France, has worked for the Regional Federation of Organic Producers in Brittany and met his French wife at the Commission's DG Agri. As such, his nomination is seen by some as being the result of intensive French lobbying.

As is the case with all Commissioners-designate, Ciolos had to gain approval from the European Parliament before he could take office. He appeared before a hearing of the Parliament's Agriculture Committee meeting on Friday, January 15, 2010. The formal European Parliament vote which was originally scheduled to take place on January 26, 2010 was postponed to Tuesday, February 9, 2010 due to the withdrawal of the Bulgarian candidate for the new Commission, Rumania Jeleva. The new Commission took office on Wednesday, February 10, 2010. Its mandate continues until October 31, 2014.

On previous occasions, the European Parliament has rejected one or two candidates, resulting in a delay of several weeks and a reshuffle of portfolios and nominations of new candidates. The current Chair of the European Parliament's Agriculture Committee, Paolo De Castro, told the press that he would back Ciolos' nomination because he is *'the right man for the job and as a former Agriculture Minister knows the CAP very well'*. However, at the time, De Castro did not want to speculate on how other Members of the European Parliament may react to Ciolos' nomination.

In any event, Dacian Ciolos was warmly received at the Parliament's hearing on January 15. Paolo De Castro said that the applause Ciolos received at the end of the session was the warmest for any Commissioner-designate so far.

Ciolos asserted that the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) needed to be reformed, adding that reform did not imply reducing financial support but adapting it to tackle new challenges. He underlined that he would be putting forward arguments for a well-funded CAP as the new CAP could not be built without a commensurate budget. Ciolos identified three measures needed to improve competitiveness over the next three years: a) investment measures to help farmers adapt to

new challenges, b) balancing of direct payments between the old and new Member States, and c) using international negotiations to help farmers better use opportunities in the world market.

In response to a question on how the EU could best react to the issue of farmer income which has fallen over the years, Ciolos claimed that direct payments should ensure a minimum level of income for European farmers. The reform should rebalance the way in which aid is distributed among regions, farmers and Member States.

While acknowledging that measures to guarantee income when there are strong price fluctuations could be implemented in the future, Ciolos underlined the necessity to ensure that such measures do not slow down the market, stressing that the market needs to decide the price. He also undertook to support improving contractual relations between producers and retailers. Although new mechanisms to prevent price fluctuations should be implemented, the old days of market regulation should be avoided.

On export support, Ciolos favored regulatory measures to help markets function better, while not working against markets, adding that in certain sectors subsidies could be maintained.

He felt that a structural policy was needed to modernize small farms and to develop existing opportunities in local markets where high demand for local products exists.

In response to a question on Doha, Ciolos stressed that he would be tough in this area where the EU had already made significant concessions and could not go further. He asserted that the EU must wait for its partners' proposals.

He stressed the importance of the EU quality products policy, adding that the EU needs to make its high standards better known. On co-existence between GMO and non-GMO production, Ciolos asserted that consumers and farmers should be able to choose, explaining that closer cooperation between Member States was needed.

Cioloş recently took his first official trip in his new capacity to Spain, the Member State that holds the Presidency of the EU Council for the first half of 2010.

During his meeting with the Minister of Environment, Rural and Marine Affairs, Elena Espinosa Mangana, they discussed various issues including the future of the CAP after 2013, competitiveness of the agro-food industry, the future strategy EU 2020 and the priorities of the Spanish Presidency in the agricultural field.

Ciolos was quoted as saying: *'...the European Union needs a better tailored, reformed Common Agricultural Policy, to answer the challenges of food security, growth and jobs in rural areas. European agriculture must address the demands of the market and the expectations of society concerning public goods, the environment and climate change. For this, I will launch an extensive debate with the Member States and all stakeholders across the EU.*

Espinosa Mangana responded: *'... the Common Agricultural Policy should be part of the debate on the future of Europe in the context of the 2020 Strategy. This is going to be one of the priorities of*

the Spanish Presidency of the EU Council.'

During the day, Ciolos also visited an olive oil cooperative and grove in Mora, where he had discussions with representatives of the agricultural and food sectors. He stressed the importance of high quality European agricultural products and the necessity to launch a more dynamic, concerted European policy to promote them.