Xth European Association of Agricultural Economists Congress

Exploring diversity in the European Agri-Food System

CONTRIBUTED PAPER:

THE FARM STRATEGY APPROACH TOWARDS COMPETITIVENESS UNDER THE CAP REFORMS. THE CASE OF ANDALUSIA IN SOUTHERN SPAIN

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ABSTRACT

The evolution of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and its successive Reforms, has caused a loss of both internal coherence and social legitimacy. On the other hand, the Agenda 2000 has situated agriculture within the objective of competitiveness. What may well be asked is whether indeed the different European agricultural systems are converging towards this objective of competitiveness. To be able to reply to this question it is necessary to change from a "meso" analysis of the CAP to a "micro" analysis of farms referring to specific regions. Starting from this context and problem, this paper analyses how the agriculture of the region of Andalusia can be affected by the competitiveness approach in an area which is in an advanced process of modernisation but nevertheless maintains a strong agricultural character and a dependence on the CAP. For this analysis, we have started from the fact that farmers make *strategic decisions* so as to adapt to a changing political situation. The main objective of this work is to contrast the importance of a combination of structural and strategic variables to explain the differences in the competitive position of agricultural systems compared with different situations of the CAP. In order to achieve this objective, analytical instruments of competitive and strategic approaches, normally designed for individual enterprises in other economic sectors, have been used, adapting them to the agricultural system as a whole. The results allow the affirmation that the farmers who obtain the best competitive positions are those who adopt a strategic position concerning their activity, with a greater coherence between the definition of their objectives and of the resource allocation strategies they design in order to achieve them.

KEYWORDS: Common Agricultural Policy, Competitiveness, Strategic Analysis, Agricultural Systems

1. INTRODUCTION

With the Treaty of Rome six European States decided to unite in a common project of ambitious goals and prospects. In order to make the integration project possible they had to find a way to define common interests so as to achieve real unity and an indication of the degree of success of their collaboration. After the war, with domestic food markets short of supplies, all members of the project shared the same aim: guaranteeing the food supply of the population and in future preventing war from being the method of competing for the opening up of the market. Agreement on objectives also meant agreement on the instruments and methods to be used to achieve them. The Common Agricultural Policy (PAC) originated in this manner, after the Stressa Conference, with the necessary political agreement; it was as much a sectoral instrument as a truly common policy.

From the first definition of the aims of the CAP, mentioned in the famous article 39 of the Treaty of Rome, farmers were identified as the beneficiaries of this Policy. Comparably, the European population realised how appropriate the policy was and approved it unreservedly. In this initial stage it could be said that the CAP was genuinely common as no-one questioned the legitimacy of its contents.

The building of the European integration project itself depended on its expansion. With the successive incorporation of new member States the diversity of these grew which led to growing differences of needs and objectives. At the same time, after a clear rise in productivity, the supplying of home markets and price stability was achieved. As a consequence of this development,

the problems of overproduction and surpluses were gradually to replace the initial concern for production.

As from this moment a hitherto-unknown process began: the need of each member State to define its own national aims as "*common*" as an answer to the demands made by its society and a parallel demand for achieving political support from other States to make this possible. The existence of different arguments to support these aspirations started to create uncertainty, confusion and contradictory incentives in the agricultural sector. In this transformation, the CAP began to lose its truly *common* character and was submitted to a series of partial solutions which obscured the will to achieve clear and unanimous shared objectives. Moreover, the interest in including such diverse concerns has led to the appearance of a series of internal contradictions which cause further criticism of its methods (Lamo de Espinosa, 1998): different and sometimes contrasting logic in the protection of continental and Mediterranean products, social alarm due to food crises, the regressive nature of aid distribution or the negative effect on the environment are well-known aspects of this internal criticism which has led to a crisis due to its loss of legitimacy to society.

It is also true however that during the last decade the international economy beyond the borders of the EU has moved towards liberalisation in an unprecedented manner. Globalisation offers a number of opportunities which the European Union, as an exporting power, has had to address in designing its policies. In this new context the incorporation of the argument of *competitiveness* takes on an importance which for the first time is shared by agriculture.

The policy regulating the operation of the agricultural sector in the European Union has undergone significant changes in recent years, and what is more important, will continue to be reshaped in the near future in the light of the recent events. Faced with this changing situation, the adoption of strategic behaviour by farmers becomes particularly important. The Reforms of the CAP have introduced the concept of *competitiveness* as one of the adjustment objectives which are desirable in the face of the profound crises of the agriculture of the European Union (European Commission, 2000a). But any mention of competitiveness is inseparably linked to reflection in *strategic* terms. They are the agents of the changes demanded of its agriculture by European society, which will have to adopt strategic behaviour. In other words, farmers will be obliged to make business medium- and long-term decisions so as to guarantee the viability of their farms in a context of far-reaching changes. Not only have the rules of the game been modified, but with the incorporation of new countries to the EU, with the commitments which may be acquired after the WTO Round, and with the attention to the quality-safety demands asserted by European consumers/taxpayers, the operating rules are still to incorporate even greater changes.

In this context of uncertainty in the face of such profound changes, any strategic management approach demands a future-orientated attitude. The future must therefore be anticipated; we must foresee the probable situations concerning which decisions will be made and consequences simulated. Because of this, it is necessary to reflect on the pertinence of the objective of competitiveness and on the measures of the CAP contained in the 1992 Reform and in the Agenda 2000, so as to determine the degree of coherence between objectives and measures, on the one hand, and to try to assess the distribution of the positive and negative aspects, on the other. Some questions which seem to be appropriate would be those mentioned below.

Are strategies of adaptation to the new Reforms indeed tending towards competitiveness? Is there distortion in the optimising behaviour of farmers, caused by the subsidies, when these become a maximising objective? Do the strategies of the producers comply with the objectives of competitiveness and food quality and safety, as consumers and society in general demand?

2. OBJECTIVES

Given the nature and scope of current and future changes within the CAP, it is necessary to change from a "meso" analysis to a "micro" analysis of farms and agricultural systems, referring to specific regions and areas. Because of this, the essence of this report consists of the analysis of the effects of the CAP reforms on particular agricultural systems of one of the most important Spanish regions for agriculture, Andalusia. To be more precise, the relationships between the *strategic behaviour* of farmers as a reaction to the aforementioned changes are analysed, and the connection with the competitive advantages obtained by the systems they represent.

For the reasons given, the relationship between competitive and strategic aspects is at the core of this research. An attempt has been made to combine analyses based on very different variables: the competitive aspects will be examined by means of quantitative variables which can easily be measured and interpreted by indicators, whereas aspects of strategic behaviour have been analysed by variables, qualitative in many cases, which often cause quantification difficulties. This analysis is based on the fact that farmers make strategic decisions in order to adapt to a changing environment defined by economic globalisation and the new CAP, which has put its faith in *competitiveness*. A modification of their competitive position follows from these changes, which will make them future "winners" or "losers" depending on whether they make the right strategy decisions concerning the new objectives of the Reform.

An analysis is therefore made of how the agriculture of a region can be affected by the new logic of competitiveness. It is particularly important to test to what extent the agriculture systems of the objective proposed by the new CAP converge or diverge. In regions such as Andalusia, which maintains a strong agricultural character and depends on European Union aid, the analysis of these processes is of interest.

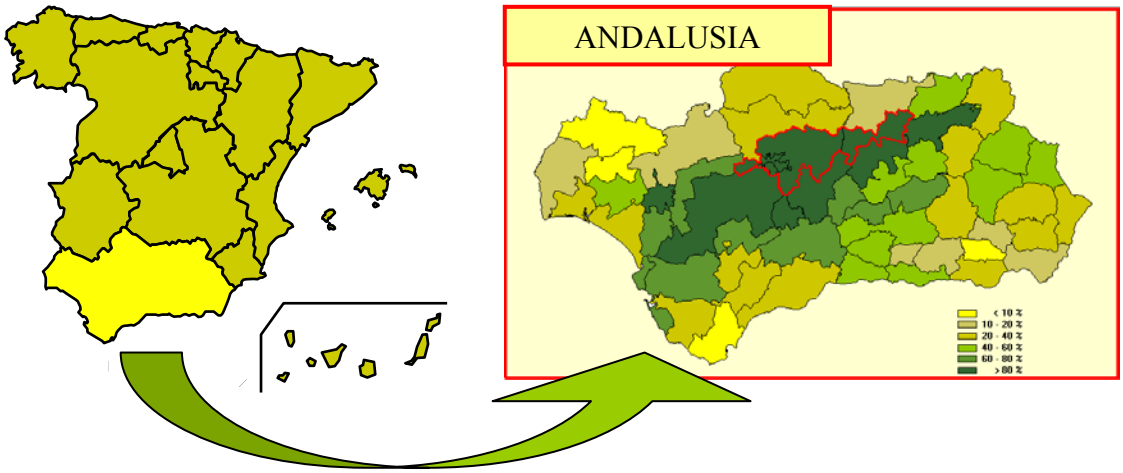
3. THE METHOD

The present report includes part of the conclusions of a Doctoral Thesis entitled *"An analysis of the effects of the Reforms of Common Agricultural Policy and the feasibility of the adaptive strategies of the agricultural systems of the Guadalquivir valley"*. Its author (Rosa Gallardo) and Directors are those signing this paper which was presented in January 2002. The Thesis mentioned, for its part, is included within a European Research Project developed between 1997 and 2000 entitled: *"CAPMEDIT - The CAP Reform and the Development of Mediterranean Agriculture"*- FAIR 3 CT 96-1579. Five Universities from Mediterranean Europe, Lisbon (Portugal), Viterbo and Portici (Italy), and Valencia and Cordoba (Spain) have participated in this project; the authors are full members of this research team.

The geographical area chosen for the research is one of the most representative areas of Spanish agriculture: the Valley of the River Guadalquivir crossing Andalusia, the southernmost region of Spain which occupies some 20% of the surface area of Spain. In this region two agricultural resources, which are very sensitive to the changes occurring within the CAP, coexist and compete for the use of the same areas: these are COP [4] crops and olive groves. The latter Mediterranean crop in Andalusia in particular represents the largest region of world production (80% of Spanish olive oil production and 30% of world production). Moreover, areas of both dry farming crops and crops needing irrigation were chosen so as to contrast different strategic categories.

[4] Cereals, Oil products and Protein products

FIGURA 3.1: THE GEOGRAPHICAL AREA



The information was obtained from primary data gathered from a socio-economic survey and a strategic survey of farmers, as well as from the interviewing of experts. This was in turn complemented with the available secondary information. In this way the agricultural systems under study were selected and characterised. Groups of farms were identified which shared similar characteristics, which led to the **design of a farm typology** allowing the synthesis of the whole diversity of results without being excessively specific which would no doubt have diminished the interpretative capacity of the work (Landais, 1996).

The classification typology of agricultural systems has been established on two levels. In order to analyse competitiveness, the classic differentiation variables have been used, in this order: unirrigated-irrigated land, productive orientation and dimension. The first two variables have been used for the identification of systems, while dimension was the differentiating criterion for the types within a system. In their urn, the system differentiation criteria, corresponding to what are known as "*non automatic"* typologies*,* (Sayadi, 1998) were as follows the degree of diversification, and the complexity of the system (in the case of irrigated land). For the analysis of the adaptive strategies, the differentiating criteria used for both types were attitudes, business objectives and behaviour..

As for the number of types, in the case of this research 17 types have been identified, for which the corresponding "type farms" representing them have been characterised. They are shown in the Table 3.1.

For the *Analysis of Competitiveness* special attention was paid to endogenous aspects, without forgetting the exogenous ones (essentially the political atmosphere and its impact on business competitiveness). For the analysis of the "micro" dimension of competitiveness, its two key components were considered: the adoption of new technologies and the efficient allocation of resources (both internal and external) (Van der Meer & Yamada, 1990). A group of "*specific*" indicators was designed in order to carry out an in-depth analysis of competitiveness. In addition, the behaviour of the agricultural systems studied was simulated in various scenarios projected for 2006: Agenda 2000, Status Quo and Liberalisation.

- *Alternative crops:* number of crops present on the farm
- *Increase in surface area:* this is a binary variable which reflects whether the surface has increased in the last ten years
- *Introduction of improvements:* this is a binary variable which reflects whether technological improvements have been introduced in the last ten years.
- *Age of the farmer*
- *Level of training*
- *Time devoted:* this variable differentiates whether the farmer works full-time, part-time or only attends to the "management" of the farm
- *Intensity of dedication:* measured by an Indicator which has been constructed, to which are added variables such as crop diversity, the externalisation of services, requests for technical advice, introduction of technological improvements, increase in surface area, realisation of other activities, level of indebtedness and training. The sign of the variable on aggregate depends on the sign of the impact on the Intensity in management.
- *Externalisation of services:* a variable which measures the service externalisation level of the farm involved
- *Characteristics of the machinery:* this variable reflects whether the farm has a fleet of machinery, and if so whether it is appropriate, or if it is not, whether most of the same is paid off or whether it is oversized.
- *Possibility of succession:* measured by the number of sons working on the farm.

Based on the integration of the previous variables, the so-called **strategic profiles** were defined. The profiles defined for each farm are included in the following table; by profile is understood the most outstanding aspect which for each type brings cohesion and coherence to the group of attitudes, objectives and strategies peculiar to each of them:

TABLE 4.4: STRATEGIC PROFILES

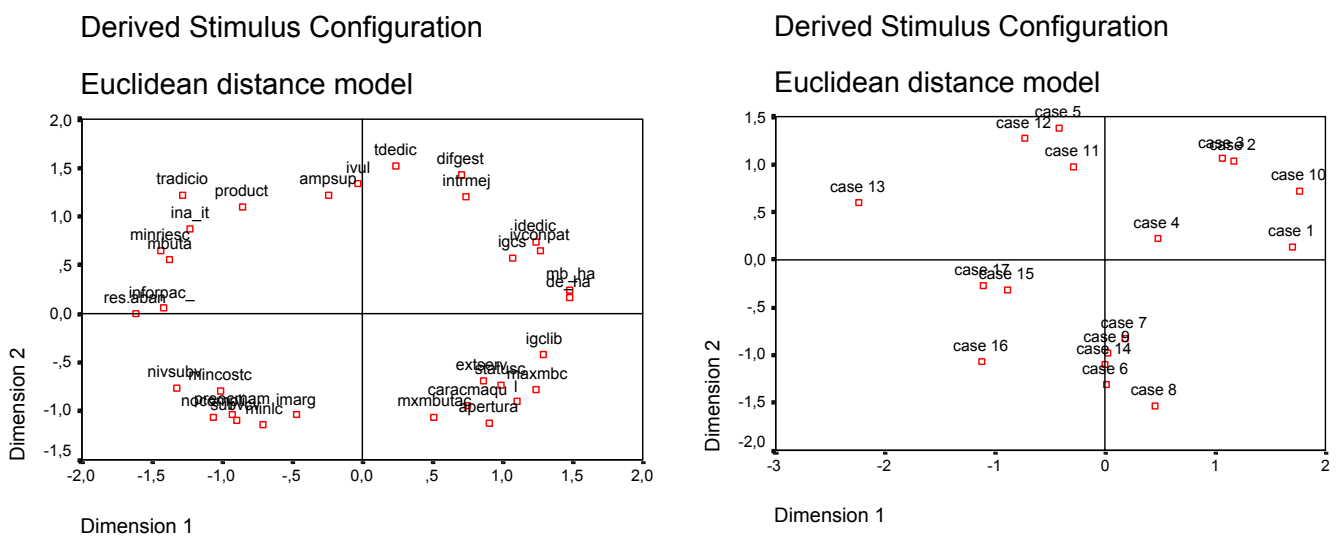
System	Type	Profile
COP Non irrigated	**S1S**	Minimising farm work and maximising subsidies
	S1M	Maximising productivity
	S1L	Minimum effort and maximum income, through maximising subsidies
COP+oliv. Non irrigated	**S12M**	Substituting subsidies for direct income (olive groves)
	S12L	Intense Involvement and Dedication to agricultural activity; great preoccupation about improving productivity
Olive Grove Non irrigated	**S2S**	Diversifying income so as to invest in more olive groves
	S2M	Intensity of dedication, for growth and investment
	S2L	Externalising services
Olive G. Non I-I	**S22**	Improvement of profitability by irrigation
Cotton + COP Non irrigated	**S31S**	Diversifying income; greater concern about other activities than about farming
	S31M	Interest in improvement and growth
	S31L	A traditional and relatively conformist attitude, and innovative behaviour, which complicates management
Hortic. Crops	**S32**	Diversifying high-risk crops
Olives irrigated	**S33S**	New farmer through the diversification of income
	S33M	Wide and intense dedication
	S33L	Maintenance
Citrus fruits	**S334**	Maximising competitiveness through quality, production and organisational improvements

Source: Authors material

The integration of this strategic characterisation, with structural, economic and competitive variables of the type farms analysed, allowed the application of the Strategic Groups approach. The aim was to group the variables giving an overall definition of the characteristics of each group and establishing a different type of farm belonging to each one of them. Based on the determination of the variables characterising each group, *strategic dimensions* were established, on the creation of which rest competitive advantages / disadvantages.

To carry out this analysis different statistical tools were used. Given the high number of variables (68), a "reduction" of variables was made by means of "factorial analysis". From what we obtained from applying this tool we selected those variables which were used to define the groups, using the "Multidimensional Scaling" tool both by variables and by cases (see Figure 4.1).

FIGURE 4.1: MULTIDIMENSIONAL SCALING



From the application of this instrument four Strategic Groups were defined. The following figure shows the agriculture representing each Group, its strategic dimensions, and the allocation of systems and types of farms to each one of them.

FIGURE 4.2: THE STRATEGIC GROUPS

Group II *Traditional agriculture, non-intensive in the use of factors and involving very little risk.*	**Group I** *Complex, innovative, and competitive agriculture*
S2S, S2M, S22 & S33S	**S32, S31M, S31L & S12L**
Strategic Dimension: Low risk and low intensity in the use of factors	**Strategic Dimension** Innovation and Complexity
Group III *Subsidised agriculture, uncomplicated, with few aspirations*	**Group IV** *Business agriculture, profitable, intensive in its use of L and K, concern to grow and improve*
S1S, S1M, S1L & S31S	**S2L, S33M, S33L & S34**
Strategic Dimension: Dependence on subsidies	**Strategic Dimension:** Economic dimension

Source: Own material

+ TRADITIONAL ⟷ + BUSINESS

- DEDICATION REQUIREMENTS LEVEL +

From the interpretation of the horizontal and vertical dimensions, which are those segmenting the groups defined, it can be affirmed that the *horizontal axis* represents the dimension referring to the *traditional-business character* of agriculture: the groups representing business agriculture (I and IV) would be on the right, and those identified with traditional agriculture (II and III) would be on the left. It must be pointed out that it is always easier to interpret the first dimension (Axis X) than the second (Axis Y), since it is the *horizontal axis* which best explains the variance. The dimension corresponding to the *vertical axis* explains the variance which is not explained by axis X, that is to say it contributes information on phenomena relating to the main phenomenon, which is in this case the differentiation between traditional agriculture and modern business agriculture. If the agriculture situated in the upper box (Groups I and II) and that corresponding to the Groups situated in the lower area of the vertical axis (III and IV) are compared, the *dedication requirement level*, or *management complexity*, would be the explanatory dimension of axis Y. If a comparison is made within business agriculture, that located in the upper box (Groupe I) and that in the lower box (Group IV), it is evident that complex and diversified agriculture, with various crop alternatives, etc..., requires greater dedication from the farmer than that which, although also being business farming, is easier to manage. That is because its competitive advantage depends more on the economic dimension than on aspects such as innovation or complexity, which would constitute the competitive advantage of Group I. If one compares the groups corresponding to traditional agriculture, that situated in the upper box (Group II, olive groves of small economic dimensions) would likewise require greater dedication than the agriculture situated in the lower box (COP).

Finally, some comments are made on the links between the profiles defined for each Strategic Group with the economic and competitive results of the agricultural systems analysed:

- The profile defined for **Group I** is that which achieves the best competitive results. It can be affirmed that innovation, crop diversification, and the complexity and intensity of management directly promote the competitiveness of agricultural systems.
- However, as was to be expected, the agriculture represented by **Group IV**, associated with its dimension, obtains a higher Total Income and also greater overall profitability, measured as much by the Gross Margin per ha. as by Net Farm Income per unit area.
- The agriculture of **Group I** is currently more dependent on subsidies than that corresponding to **Group IV**, which gives better results in a liberalisation situation.
- The link of competitiveness in a liberalisation situation with **Group IV** implies a direct relationship between competitiveness and the two variables which best characterise and differentiate this group: opening up and essentially reliance on quality. Therefore, in the face of the possible end to subsidies, the reliance on quality would be decisive in order to strengthen the competitive position.
- The agriculture corresponding to **Group III** is that in which most of the variable costs are covered by the subsidies received.
- Finally, the agriculture of **Group II** is that presenting the highest indexes of overall productivity of the factors.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The impact of the CAP on the competitiveness of agricultural systems and the strategic behaviour of farmers is clear. All systems analysed improve their competitive levels when agricultural subsidies are considered in their income structure. However, if we take as an initial objective the off-quoted *"European agricultural model"* as the reflection of a social and legitimately desirable situation, it is pertinent to assess whether a process of convergence towards this reference model is

occurring. Carrying out this analysis means assessing whether the competitiveness of the agriculture that the EU is supporting is improving, or whether on the contrary, the CAP is artificially sustaining a situation which is far from being the most desirable. In other words, if the CAP is supporting an agriculture undesired by European society, the gap between the social and private approaches of competitiveness will grow wider and wider.

The CAP may be favouring, even overcompensating, the income of secondary activity farmers more than those whose sole source of income comes from agriculture, which may be having a very negative effect on the debate concerning the legitimacy crisis of the CAP. In terms of efficiency, the fact that the CAP is supporting a specific type of farming generates a social cost. This cost is reflected in wasting resources which could have been socially productive being deviated towards ends which are profitable from a private perspective but have little or no social profitability. The introduction of strategic variables (the intensity of dedication, the reliance on quality, or the desire to grow and improve...) in the segmenting criteria of the allocation of resources of the CAP could favour the recovery of the legitimacy of this policy.

In most systems[12] there is a great divergence between the degree of competitiveness measured from the private point of view of the farmer and measured from the point of view of society as a whole. The diversified irrigation system, specialising in horticultural crops, and that specialising in citrus fruits, are those which present the best competitive positions. They are systems with a high adaptive capacity to changes in the environment, showing a low dependence on agricultural support, and have put their faith decidedly in diversification, risk-taking, and quality.

The greatest increase in surface area which has occurred in Andalusia within the 1987/97 period corresponds to farms devoted to large-scale COP cultivation, which are those showing one of the worst adaptation capacities to a possible free market situation in 2006. This tendency confirms the possible "wishful thinking" caused by the CAP commented on earlier, which may be leading to dangerous processes and strategies for the viability of some farms, in a more than probable future of progressive liberalisation.

From the analyses carried out, it has been confirmed that there is a direct and significant relationship between competitiveness and certain strategic variables, whether considered in isolation or associated in a profile.

- The *attitudes* of opening up, non-conformity and the assuming of risks are associated with the systems which present better competitive positions in a free market situation. On the contrary, the attitudes which are based on the maintenance of tradition, and concern for the CAP, as well as those which seek to avoid management difficulties, are linked with those systems furthest from the optimal level of competitiveness. These results show that the attitudes take the form of previous experiences which influence business behaviour, whether directly or indirectly.
- The farmers who obtain the best competitive positions are those who set themselves *objectives* in accordance with their possibilities, who know which resources they have and their potential and who adopt suitable strategies in order to fulfil these objectives. Therefore, the coherence between the *objectives*, the *strategies* designed and the *results* obtained is a clear source of competitive advantage.
- The *strategic behaviour* of assuming management difficulties, introducing technical improvements, crop diversification, intensifying the dedication to the farm, and intensifying the use of labour means these difficulties are directly linked to competitiveness. However, reliance

[12] All studies, except that specialising in citrus fruits.

on quality is the factor which correlates most closely with competitiveness, in a free market situation.

- The variables which segment agriculture analysed in strategic groups are the "traditional or business character" and the "dedication requirement" of each type of agriculture. Therefore, these results guarantee empirically the confirmation of a well-established body of opinion which affirms the existence of a *dual agriculture* which the CAP helps to polarise. This is however not only due to the structural economic variables but also to the fact that, as has been shown in the analyses presented, the attitudes and strategies of the businessmen in themselves strengthen still further the bipolarisation between the most enterprising and competitive positions and the most conservative or defensive positions. In consequence, what is incorporated is a new explanatory dimension of the dualistic process of European agriculture, which therefore becomes a key factor for the adaptation process to the competitive demand situation designed by Brussels.

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