



**DIMENSION
PARLEMENTAIRE**



**Thematic Interparliamentary Conference on
Strategic Economic Autonomy**

Venue: Senate

Date: 14 March 2022

**Conclusions of the Presidency
on Strategic Autonomy in the Agricultural Sector**



Conclusions of the Presidency

on Strategic Autonomy in the Agricultural Sector

One of the main objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is to ensure food security in the European Union (EU) by maintaining our food production capacity and keeping a sufficient number of farmers in activity in a context of more volatile markets.

This integrated European policy boasts an undeniably positive historical record since its creation, and has made the EU the world's leading agricultural and food power thanks to a trade surplus. Today, this position is an asset that must be preserved in order to withstand global economic competition and promote a global agro-ecological transition.

However, while the CAP has enabled the EU to achieve a satisfactory level of food self-sufficiency and become the world's leading exporter of agricultural raw materials and foodstuffs, this situation threatens to deteriorate in the coming years, as certain current trends show:

- European agricultural production is growing more slowly than in the past, despite strong world population growth, due to a reduction in its productive potential and its exposure to greater climate risks;
- the EU is the world's largest importer of agricultural products and its dependence on certain products is increasing. For example, protein self-sufficiency has been and currently remains one of its major priorities for progress in terms of agricultural sovereignty, with the Union importing up to 90% of its plant protein needs, depending on the sector.

The EU's dependence on agriculture also extends to imports of certain agricultural inputs, raw materials and equipment, which is a source of vulnerability for European agriculture.

The outbreak of war in Ukraine, whose theatre of operations covers an area of cereal, sunflower and rapeseed production of worldwide importance, is a recent reminder that self-sufficiency in agriculture and food is a strategic imperative. This crisis will have lasting impacts on the international agri-food landscape, and calls for far-reaching European measures to preserve Europe's productive potential, stabilise world markets and ensure adequate supplies for countries that are heavily dependent on agricultural imports.

These trends partly explain a certain concern expressed by European citizens about the growing recourse to imports of agricultural and food products into the continent, especially in relation to free-trade agreements that have either been signed recently or are under negotiation, and which could penalise our agricultural model by distorting competition. This situation arises due to the use by third countries of production techniques and inputs that are strictly regulated or even prohibited on European territory for health and environmental reasons. However, several recent crises have shown that the EU is not in a position to ensure the systematic compliance of agricultural products from third countries with its own health and environmental rules, even though these imports account for a growing share of Europe's food supply. This creates unfair competition for European farmers and could create a climate of consumer distrust for the food they eat in the EU.

In addition to this consideration, there is these consumers' growing concern for the environmental footprint of their food consumption, including the impact of greenhouse gas emissions from the foreign production and transportation of food products to Europe. In this respect, changes in the use of forest land for agricultural production are the leading cause of deforestation worldwide, particularly in the tropics, and agricultural and food imports from these regions exacerbate the EU's carbon footprint and biodiversity problems.

In light of this situation, and at a time of sharp rises in agricultural prices on world markets – further proof of the relevance of resilience as a key issue for the European agricultural model – the Presidency of the Interparliamentary Conference on Strategic Economic Autonomy in H1 2022 considers that food sovereignty must once again be a top political priority for all Member States, in order to become an essential component of the Union's strategic economic autonomy.

This is an economic imperative, but also and above all an ecological one, insofar as food sovereignty is likely to reduce the environmental footprint of the European food sector, by reducing the greenhouse gas emissions generated by the transportation of food, while promoting more local food that conforms to globally recognised high environmental standards.

Consequently, the Presidency of the Interparliamentary Conference on Strategic Economic Autonomy in H1 2022:

- **Reiterates its wholehearted commitment to maintaining an ambitious agricultural policy** through a strong Common Agricultural Policy, whose primary objective is to feed Europeans and the world, by guaranteeing access to healthy and sustainable food for all;
- **Considers it necessary, to this end, to combat agricultural decline and work towards**

the renewal of generations of farmers;

- **Calls for fair remuneration for each segment of the food chain and decent living conditions for the EU's agricultural population**, as prerequisites for generational renewal and therefore for the sustainability of the EU's agricultural and food model;
- **Considers it essential to strike a better balance between environmental imperatives, which are required for compliance with European climate commitments, and economic imperatives in the agricultural sector**, without imposing excessive burdens liable to harm the competitiveness of European producers;
- **Calls on the Member States and the EU to implement the European Commission's "Farm to Fork" strategy in a coherent manner and, to this end, calls for the generalisation of mirror clauses as soon as possible**, with a view to guaranteeing the application of identical standards to the Member States and their trading partners, thus restoring a level competitive playing field for our farmers;
- **Requests an exhaustive examination of the consequences of the European Green Deal in light of the objective of food self-sufficiency and, if they lead to an unprecedented decline in European agricultural production, calls for them to be supplemented with an economic component capable of maintaining the productivity of the agricultural sector and our level of food self-sufficiency, particularly in the current context of the war in Ukraine;**
- **Insists on the need to help farmers move away from dependence on plant protection products and reduce the emissions related to nitrogenous fertilisers;**
- **Calls on the Member States and the EU to engage in research programmes that will shape agriculture in the future**, and to authorise the exploration of the potential of robotisation and new plant breeding techniques in order to adapt agricultural production to climate change while reducing its environmental impact;
- **Affirms that seeking greater reciprocity with third countries in respect of health, environmental and animal welfare standards should be the priority of EU trade policy in the coming months for agricultural and food products ;**
- **Calls for the verification of the compatibility of trade agreements with the environmental imperatives** contained in the European Green Deal and the Paris Climate Agreement;

- **Recommends more systematic customs inspections of agricultural and food imports** in order to act as a deterrent for our trading partners and improve the effectiveness of these standards;
- **Proposes, to this end, to work towards implementing more harmonised inspections of agricultural and food imports at European level;**
- **Observes that European consumers want to be better informed about the origin of the food products they buy;**
- **Supports the consumption of fresh products with a reduced carbon footprint** based on the development of short supply chains, and especially through contractualisation in collective catering and direct sales;
- **Calls for a more thorough re-examination of the value of labelling the origins of raw materials used in food products within the EU**, in light of the rules on the free movement of goods and non-discrimination, considering that the objective of consolidating the single market does not preclude the consideration of consumers' and citizens' growing concerns for improving the traceability of foodstuffs, with particular regard to their origin, and labelling procedures.