



PARLIAMENTARY DIMENSION



Background note

Session 3

The challenges of European food sovereignty

With a keynote speech of Mr Norbert Lins, chairman of the European Parliament Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

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The challenges of European food sovereignty

The European Union's food sovereignty has been of geo-strategic importance for the Member States ever since the introduction of the Common Agricultural Policy by the founding fathers.

Since then, the European Union, thanks to a solid self-sufficiency in food production, has remained the world's leading agricultural and food exporting power, with a positive trade balance of around twenty billion euros.

The issue of food sovereignty has come to the fore once again through the prism of environmental requirements, which are considered a condition of the sustainability of an agricultural model and not an obstacle to it. By allowing a reduction in the transport of foodstuffs in favour of more local food production popular with consumers and citizens, whilst guaranteeing compliance with the minimum environmental requirements applicable in Europe, which are the strictest in the world, food sovereignty is a response to the need to reduce the environmental footprint of the European consumer's shopping basket.

Furthermore, the war in Ukraine, whose theatre of operations occupies a major world production area for cereals, sunflower and rapeseed, has recently reminded us of the strategic imperative to be autonomous in terms of agriculture and food. This crisis, which will have a lasting impact on the international agri-food landscape, calls for major European measures to preserve European production potential, stabilise world markets and provide sufficient supplies to countries that are heavily dependent on agricultural imports. The continent's food sovereignty is today confronted with four underlying trends:

- stability of its total agricultural production in a context of world population growth, which is the result of the reduction of its agricultural production potential (renewal of generations, artificialisation of soils, etc.) and a slowdown in agricultural productivity;

- growing imports from increasingly competitive third countries, combined with the multiplication of export crises, especially with the war in Ukraine or retaliation measures taken by Russia or the United States;
- citizens' growing mistrust, particularly concerning the food industry, with regard to the effects of international trade due to a lack of compliance
- with Europe's health and environmental regulations by its trade partners, which reduces the competitiveness of the European agri-food industry at the risk of leading to its inevitable decline;
- a re-localisation of food production demanded by consumers which translates into particular attention being paid to the origin of food products. Although this should increase convergence between European agricultural models, differences in standards create a high level of intra-European competition within different sectors of the industry. At the same time, origin labelling is banned by European regulations.

The Covid-19 crisis, followed by the sharp rise in agricultural commodity prices, has finally revealed some areas where the continent is fragile: **for example, the European Union imports 90% of its vegetable protein needs, which jeopardises its autonomy even in livestock production.**

In this context, does the “Farm to fork” strategy intended to be part of the European Green Deal not risk jeopardising the continent’s agricultural sovereignty by prioritising the objective of reducing the environmental footprint? How can the continent’s position as an agricultural exporter be reconciled with the requirement for the sovereignty and resilience of European food production models? How can Europe’s agricultural potential be consolidated to feed Europe and the world in years to come?