**JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ**

**OF REPRESENTTIVES OF AGRICULTURAL CHAMBERS**

**AND ORGANIZATIONS OF THE VISEGRAD GROUP AND BULGARIA, CROATIA, ESTONIA, LITHUANIA AND ROMANIA**

# We, the representatives of the agricultural chambers and organizations of the Visegrad Group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) and Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Lithuania and Romania, met in Bratislava from 31 March to 1 April 2022 and to explore ways for strengthening our region's contribution to food security in the EU and in the world and we agreed on our common position.

# *As regards the macroeconomic and security implications of the war in Ukraine, we*

# EXPRESS our deep solidarity with the Ukrainian people and our colleagues – farmers. Since the beginning of the conflict our farming community has provided support to Ukrainian people and refugees arriving to our countries in terms of food donations, fundraising and other assistance. At this moment we are ready for a solidarity action focused on providing the Ukrainian agriculture sector with their most crucial need – input donations – seeds, fertilizers and plant protection products.

# WELCOME the fact that food security is becoming an important EU security policy, also in the light of the conclusions of the EU Leaders' Meeting, and that ensuring global food security and food affordability is placed at the forefront of the agenda of governments and EU institutions.

# APPRECIATE the response of the European Commission in the form of short- and medium-term measures published in the Communication on safeguarding food security and reinforcing the resilience of food systems.

# EMPHASIZE that the burden of the crisis must be shared across the EU since – as during the Covid-19 pandemic – Member States are affected very differently by the negative economic consequences of the war, whereas the countries of the Three Seas region are particularly vulnerable in a number of factors (direct trade with Russia and Ukraine, energy dependence).

# As Russia´s invasion of Ukraine has further destabilized the already fragile agri-food markets, in this extraordinary situation we strongly RECOMMEND to mobilize additional sources from the EU budget with the aim to enlarge the current allocation for the CAP, especially for its second pillar, which will support the aims of sustainability, fulfilling important environmental, climate and rural development functions and at the same time provide instruments for investment and innovation support.

# EMPHASIZE that, in order to ensure the efficient functioning of food supply chains as well as to increase their environmental sustainability, it is necessary to monitor the common market in terms of fair competition between producers in different Member States.

# *As regards food and feed security, we*

# DECLARE that farmers and food producers in our countries are committed to doing their utmost to contribute to domestic and global food and feed security.

# EMPHASIZE that after two years of pandemics and due to climate change and the consequences of the war in Ukraine, which will be global and last for several years, it is high time to reassess the attitude towards food security in the EU. The EU has a duty to produce food considering its favourable natural conditions as well as in view of the geopolitical risks and the deep food crisis that may ensue.

# SUPPORT the safeguarding of arable crops in Ukraine. It underlines that according to the World Food Programme without Ukrainian crops, world food supplies will be at risk. For this reason, we support the opening and securing of all Ukrainian supply routes and trade opportunities in order to maintain the feed and food security.

# HIGHLIGHT that ensuring food security is highly strategic and very important and that a fundamental change of the view of agri-food in Brussels and at national levels is needed, which would include a shift to production while making progress on sustainability. We ASK FOR at least medium-term policy direction for EU agriculture and food sector in the form of an EU Declaration on strategic role of food security.

# APPRECIATE the establishment of the European Food Security Crisis preparedness and response Mechanism (EFSCM), which can build on the lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic and the current situation and identify key principles for maintaining food security.

# SUPPORT the reduction of the use and risk of plant protection products, but UNDERLINE that it is necessary to take into account the geographical, climatic and economic specificities and the different baseline of each Member State. We EMPHASIZE that the average pesticide sales per hectare of agricultural land in our countries is well below the EU average. Reduction targets should take into account the need for plant protection in order to maintain a level of agricultural production that guarantees food security. The availability of alternative non-chemical methods should also be taken into account. According to most impact studies, a reduction in the volume of pesticides used will lead to a decline in production and, in the current circumstances, it is not possible to jeopardize EU agricultural production and its capability to supply population in different geographies, some less favoured.

# REQUEST the suspension of all decisions concerning non-renewals of active substances used as plant protection products for the years 2022 and 2023. In general, the use of specific substances should not be banned unless full-fledged alternatives are available.

# ASK FOR the development of a comprehensive EU strategy for plant proteins in order to increase plant protein production and reduce the EU's dependence on third countries in this regard. Such a strategy will provide stakeholders with meaningful and long-term incentives. Special attention should be paid to the supply of organic protein feed. In this context, we SUPPORT the development of national feed protein balances. In parallel, we consider that EU should allocate appropriate resources for research in plant breeding and adopt a science-based stance regarding the development of new varieties resistant to biotic and abiotic stress, including via NGT. Plant proteins are crucial for the transition to sustainable food systems – they reduce dependence on mineral fertilizers and contributes to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

# ARE COMMITTED to ensuring food security in the region. To achieve this, we must build on our comparative advantages. We should support sectors that provide protein feed of adequate quality, meeting EU maximum pesticide residue limit standards and that are still affordable for livestock farmers, preferably from local sources, while also helping to reduce countries' dependence on oil. In this respect, the ethanol industry has an important role to play, producing 1kg of protein feed per litre of ethanol. Their share in providing superb quality feed ingredients has helped many of our farmers to become competitive, profitable and less dependent on imported soy bean products.

# *As regards the flexibility of CAP in 2022 and following years (if needed), we*

# WELCOME the Commission's decision to introduce flexibility in the CAP for claim year 2022 and we ARE CONVINCED that, given the exceptional circumstances, there is an urgent need to take measures to increase EU production during the 2022 harvest season in order to contribute to food security.

# ASK FOR derogations from the greening rules beyond the implementing decision – namely to relax crop diversification requirements, to allow the use of PPPs for nitrogen-fixing crops in the EFAs and further expand the use of available land: to include in production the grasses on arable land and catch crops – in addition to land lying fallow in the EFAs. We further DRAW ATTENTION to the potential land reserve in the form of permanent grassland and non-agricultural land outside the LPIS. The advantage of the use of fallow land and permanent grasslands is the accumulation of organic matter in this soil and thus a considerable replacement of fertilizers, especially in the first year of plowing.

# Considering the necessary increase in agricultural production, we ASK FOR the application of temporary derogations for agri-environment-climate measures in II. pillar.

# With a view to ensuring the quantity and quality of domestic production, we ASK FOR the advance payments for direct payments on land and animals to be paid out before 16 October of particular year. Given the complexity of current situation for farmers, we CALL FOR a reduction of sanctions for non-compliance in rural development measures and direct payments – in the case of small or minor infringements. We also ASK FOR an extension of the deadline for applications and an increase in the maximum levels of eligible expenditure in the case of productive investments on agricultural holdings.

# *As regards the CAP Strategic Plans 2023-2027, we*

# FOLLOW the principles of the Bratislava Declaration, which we signed in almost identical representation in 2017: fair and equal conditions of competition for farmers in all Member States, fair functioning of the food supply chain, securing farmers' incomes, maintaining agricultural production in EU rural areas and CAP simplification.

# ARE CONVINCED that the new green architecture of the CAP, even if modified, will make a significant contribution to strengthening the environmental and climate sustainability of food systems and will further considerably strengthen the EU's position as a world leader in this field.

# DECLARE that in our strategic plans we pledged to spend on average significantly higher percentage of the EAFRD contribution to environmental and climate-related specific objectives than the required minimum of 35%.

# SUPPORT the adjustment or temporary postponement of parameters that limit food production and ASK FOR derogations from the conditionality rules for GAEC 2, 4, 7 and 8. Temporary reduction of requirements in these standards (crop diversification instead of rotation, grazing of non-productive areas, etc.) considerably increases production capacity without significant impact on the environment and climate.

# UNDERLINE that the areas of eligible landscape features should not be expanded further due to the need to compensate for the production loss in the current situation as well as due to the applicability and controllability.

# In order to motivate farmers to increase strategically important production, we ASK FOR a temporary increase in the volume of coupled payments. The total volume of voluntary coupled support should be temporarily increased to 20% (max. 4% for protein crops) and not only redistributed within the current 15% (e.g. to 11+4%).

# REQUEST to enable the Member States to transfer part of the allocation for environmental, climate and other management commitments towards the allocation for areas with natural constraints (ANCs). Support for areas with natural constraints contributes to balanced territorial development and dispersed production in all rural areas, which has a positive impact on the environment, biodiversity, rural settlement as well as production capacity.

# NOTE that governments in countries near the border with Ukraine must particularly deal with the consequences of the war and POINT OUT that the time frame for implementing the new CAP rules is already very demanding (less than 6 months) and we expect implementation risks on the side of farmers as well as state institutions. Therefore we ASK FOR the implementation of the new CAP to be delayed by one year to 1/1/2024.

# CALL ON the European Commission to reduce the administrative burden in the forthcoming secondary legislation of the CAP as much as possible.

# EMPHASIZE that the setting up of the CAP Strategic Plans must take into account the current situation – especially in terms of strengthening the EU's food security and food sovereignty, and CALL UPON the European Commission to take these into account when evaluating the strategic plans.

# *As regards the input and commodity prices, we*

# CALL ON the European Commission to monitor the prices of selected agri-food products in order to identify the margin distribution between farmer, food producer and retailer.

# ASK FOR measures to mitigate the rise in energy prices in agri-food – as rising energy prices will become one of the main economic challenges arising from the war and the burden will be most significant for countries in our region (through high direct dependence on energy imports from Russia, through rising gas, oil and coal prices on world markets, through a high percentage of household energy expenditure and the high energy intensity of these economies). Rising energy prices in Europe have a particularly significant impact on the agricultural sector.

# Regarding the revision of RED II Directive we HIGHLIGHT its direct impact on the future of EU’s fertilizer production and prices. Farmers are currently exposed to up to 300% year-to-year price increase of fertilizers already, therefore we are observing with serious concern any regulatory decision in RED II that would result in further price increases and availability of fertilizers in the EU in the future and would further increase EU’s dependency on fertilizers imports and seriously threaten EU’s food security. We strongly OPPOSE any proposals to Article 22a introducing new objectives of 50% use of green nitrogen in fertilizers production by 2030. In addition, this technology of fertilizers production to our financial estimates would lead to unacceptable further increase of fertilizers costs for European farmers by 300%-700% and increase of EUs dependency on third countries imports. EUs food security and affordability critically depend on fertilizers availability and affordability to EU farmers.

# *As regards the strategies of the European Green Deal, we*

# AGREE that agriculture should contribute to the EU's environmental and climate objectives, however this should not jeopardize food security, the competitiveness of the sector and farmers' incomes, while ensuring sustainability in its three pillars (environmental, social, economic).

# Therefore EMPHASIZE an urgency to reconsider the objectives of the European Green Deal (EGD) strategies and change their timing, especially those that will significantly reduce food production (reduction in use of pesticides and fertilizers, increase of non-production area, increase of organic farming area). The objectives of the EGD strategies were proposed before the cumulative crisis (Covid-19, war) and all the impact studies of the Farm to Fork strategy point to a reduction in EU production, increased EU dependence on imports from third countries, but also to a clear food and sustainability risk for third countries. Very ambitious policy goals cannot become legally binding without proper support in scientific assessments of the practical possibilities of achieving them. Farmers know how to ensure both – sufficient production and a well-maintained country – provided there is a sufficient support and an adequate distribution of measures over time.

# ASK to postpone the establishment of a regulatory framework for carbon sequestration, removal and recycling (carbon farming) due to potential financial and administrative burdens, potential production reductions and shifting weight from actual emission reductions to natural carbon capture (which only has a complementary role).

# CALL UPON the European Commission to take this joint communiqué into account when implementing measures to promote food security as well as in the process of evaluating CAP Strategic Plans.

In Bratislava, 1st April 2022

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| ……………………………………….  Emil Macho  President SPPK | ……………………………………….  Balázs Győrffy  President NAK |
| ……………………………………….  Robert Nowak  Member of Board KRIR | ……………………………………….  Jan Doležal  President AK ČR |

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| ……………………………………….  Arūnas Svitojus  Chairman ZUR |  |