



**MINISTÈRE
DE L'AGRICULTURE
ET DE LA SOUVERAINETÉ
ALIMENTAIRE**

*Liberté
Égalité
Fraternité*

Paris, le 10 mai 2023

LE MINISTRE

Commissioners,

Following the meeting of the Council of Ministers of Agriculture of the European Union on 25 April 2023, we, the Ministers of Agriculture of France, Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands and Slovenia wish to express our concerns and questions regarding the recent proposals of the European Commission concerning imports of agricultural products from Ukraine.

First of all, we would like to reiterate our strongest condemnation of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and our full and complete solidarity with the Ukrainian people. We would also like to welcome the renewal of the autonomous trade measures until June 2024. In particular, we welcome the inclusion of the expedited safeguard in the Regulation, the regular monitoring of its impact of the regulation, the assessments of the situation of the Union market for competing products following a request from a Member State and the possible

Since the outbreak of this war, the European Union has reacted in unity and solidarity with Ukraine, in particular by facilitating the exit of Ukrainian cereals through the Solidarity Lanes. These corridors are vital both for the Ukrainian economy and for global food security.

However, we recognise that the imports of Ukrainian products into the European Union, particularly cereals and oilseeds, may have destabilised the markets of the Member States neighbouring Ukraine due to an increase in the quantities stored, leading to a fall in prices and farmers' incomes.

Faced with this situation, the Commission implemented a first support package financed by the agricultural reserve of the Common Agricultural Policy, amounting to 56.3 million euros. The Commission also undertook to improve the functioning of the Solidarity Lanes and to facilitate the transit of Ukrainian products to third countries. Regarding the improvement of transit of Ukrainian products to third countries, we would request further details on the planned measures.

In mid-April, unilateral measures banning the import of Ukrainian agricultural products have been put in place by some of Ukraine's border countries which, while allowing transit, nevertheless undermining the integrity of the EU internal market.

Further, we also wish to recall once again that any unilateral and uncoordinated measures undermine the credibility of our support to Ukraine and our joint efforts to preserve food security on a global scale.

As in all dimensions of our support, it is imperative to ensure that the European Union is united and that our differences do not play into Russia's hands, especially on this particular issue, where Russia is threatening not to extend the Black Sea Grain Initiative.

We are in favour of finding European solutions to take account of the difficulties encountered by certain Member States. However, the integrity of the internal market cannot be an adjustment variable.

In this respect, even taking into account their temporary (until 5 June) and exceptional nature, the measures adopted on 2 May by the Commission without consulting the Member States, related to the selective limitation of imports from Ukraine, raise serious concerns because they lead to differentiated treatment within the internal market itself. They also raise questions about the future treatment of cases of a comparable nature or scale that could be raised by one or more Member States.

At the very least, clarification is needed as to how these proposals and measures relate to the rules and operation of the internal market and the Union's commercial policy in particular with regards to the EU's obligations towards Ukraine stemming from the Association Agreement. Further it is of interest, how the impact on the national markets of other Member States will be taken into account, the flows concerned and the practical arrangements planned to ensure the transit of goods. This lack of transparency is critical, in a context where the Commission says it is ready to maintain these measures once the new regulation is in place.

While we take note of the Commission's proposal of 2 May for a new financial support package of €100 million using the agricultural reserve for the border Member States, we would like to point out that further discussion with the Member States is necessary. In this context, it is imperative that the criteria used to propose the amount of the €100 million package, as well as those used to allocate it among Member States, are explained as soon as possible, in order to enable the Member States to take an informed decision.

Faced with this unprecedented situation, we are convinced that European solidarity with Ukraine and with the farmers throughout the European Union who are affected must continue to guide our actions.

The response to such a situation can only be a European one, and it must respect the maintenance of European unity and the preservation of the policies that make us strong, notably the CAP. Whatever measures are to be taken, they must be based on the existing European framework. We urge the Commission to return to a transparent procedure along established rules within the functioning and working of the EU and their Member States.

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Norbert Totschnig
Federal Minister for Agriculture, Forestry, Regions and Water Management of Austria

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Jacob Jensen
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