Dear Madame President,

In my letter addressed to you at the end of September, I brought to your attention the situation in agriculture in various Member States. I pointed out the impact adverse weather condition had on several agricultural regions across the EU. Despite the negative impact on those agricultural regions the 2023 cereal harvest is estimated to reach a level of 267.5 million tonnes, and exports of wheat are expected to reach 31 million tonnes. Although this harvest is below average, with some differences across MS, it still does not appear that we have a critical situation at global or EU level.

Yet, France tabled an AOB point for discussion during our AgriFish Council meeting on 20 November, asking for a partially derogation from the Standard for Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition 8 (GAEC 8) under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in 2024. In this respect, France proposed to partially apply the GAEC 8 standard in force for the 2024 campaign, meaning that a 7% rate of elements favourable to biodiversity required by regulation 2021/20115 would be retained, whilst farmers would be allowed to achieve this rate solely by growing catch crops or nitrogen-fixing crops without using plant protection products.

France’s proposal was supported by IT, RO, FI, EL, BG, SK, SI, EL, LV, SE, EE, PT, PL, HR, HU. None of the remaining Member States opposed France’s proposal.

The underlaying essence of France’s proposal namely a derogation from GAEC 8 taken together with the fact that the majority of delegations supported France, is a signal to the Commission to consider a further analyse it in all its aspects, including the potential impact of the proposal on low prices for farmers, which are the real problem at the moment. We currently observe a decreasing trend of global prices we observe.

From the policy side, both nitrogen fixing crops and catch crops can bring certain environmental benefits and it is interesting to look at ways of promoting their use. Catch crops and nitrogen fixing crops can be valorised to fulfil respectively the requirement of soil cover and crop rotation under GAEC6 and 7. They can also be complemented by eco-schemes, which include practices like crop diversification, providing incentives to grow nitrogen fixing crops.

A preliminary assessment of the uptake of CAP Strategic Plans observed in the first implementation year in the various Member States showed that many Member States indicated that the requirements for GAEC 8 are too demanding and limit the production potential of farmers and consequently their income levels. This is problematic in a crisis context generated by the war in Ukraine and the soaring input costs.
The Commission should carry out a more in-depth analysis on France’s proposal and its consequences for prices for farmers.

Yours faithfully,

Janusz Wojciechowski

c.c.: Mr Wolfgang Burtscher, Mr Maciej Golubiewski,