



European Commission - Speech [Check Against Delivery]



Address by Mr Janusz Wojciechowski on the adoption of the European Commission Communication "Safeguarding food security and reinforcing the resilience of food systems"

Brussels, 23 March 2022

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has shown us the importance of ensuring food security at all times, within the EU and across the globe. This objective, enshrined in our founding Treaties some 65 years ago, is today as important as ever.

For the **global food system**, the loss of grain exports from Ukraine means that **up to 25 million tonnes of wheat must be substituted in the current and the next season**. This is indispensable for overall world food needs, which are also affected by a likely reduction of Russian exports. Combined, Ukraine and Russia are responsible for over 30% of world wheat exports.

The strong price increase on cereal markets puts global food security at risk, affecting vulnerable people in food deficit countries.

We must shield vulnerable countries, notably in Africa, the Middle-East, and in the European Neighbourhood region, from pressures on food availability and prices.

In recent days, I have spoken with Ministers from the Ukrainian government, who have described the situation facing their farmers. They have spoken of destroyed land, of lost crops and livestock.

We had a discussion with the Ukrainian Minister for Agriculture during AGRIFISH on Monday. Minister Roman Leshchenko told us that Ukrainian 'farmers are fighting at day, and working to provide food at night'.

He also reminded us that the uncertainty of sowing and harvesting in Ukraine may continue for several years and that puts pressure on global markets.

I also spoke with Deputy Minister Taras Dzoba, who said that Russia is taking Ukrainian soil and using it **"as a weapon"**.

A weapon against its own people; a weapon of starvation.

In the face of this weapon, the European Union will not stand down. We will step up, we will defend our neighbours, defend the international community, and defend ourselves.

The Versailles declaration of the European Council called upon the Commission to take urgent action to present options to address the rising food prices and the issue of global food security as soon as possible.

Today, we have adopted the **Communication on "Safeguarding food security and reinforcing the resilience of food systems"**.

The communication sets out actions in **three** areas:

- First, it presents our immediate actions to **safeguard food security in Ukraine and around the world**.
- Second, we have addressed the challenge of **food stability in the EU's food system**, with a range of **measures to support our farmers and maintain affordability for our citizens**.
- Finally, we confirm our agenda to make our **food system sustainable and resilient in the years to come**.

Security, stability, and sustainability. These are the words that define our response.

Solidarity and humanitarian assistance

First and foremost, we will stand by the people of Ukraine and address the serious impacts of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on **food supplies in their homeland**.

To support the farmers of Ukraine, the Commission and international partners are working in ensuring that

necessary inputs, like seeds and fertilisers, can reach Ukraine,

and that transportation and storage facilities are maintained to enable Ukraine to feed its citizens.

One particular problem is the supply of diesel. I have spoken with the Polish Prime Minister and he assured me that Poland can provide diesel for Ukraine from their strategic reserve.

The Commission has rapidly mobilised **€93 million** in initial humanitarian funding for Ukraine and Moldova of which €90 million has **already been disbursed** to humanitarian partners (*€3 million for Moldova will be contracted shortly*).

Together with Member States, the Commission will also continue working with international partners to **coordinate policies and assess the risks to global food security**.

We will therefore:

- **reinforce our humanitarian aid assistance** to the regions most affected by food insecurity, and assist them diversify their sources of food supplies;
- we will ensure that trade can continue and avoid restrictions that prevent food and fertilisers being brought where it is most needed.
- and we will strengthen our cooperation on transitioning to sustainable food systems across the globe.

Food stability in the EU

The second area addressed in our Communication is the short-term actions to maintain the **food-system stability** in the European Union.

In the EU, we are largely self-sufficient for almost all agricultural products.

However,

- the EU is importing feed grains and oilseeds from Ukraine, and fertilisers and natural gas from Russia.
- Arable farmers feel the costs of high input prices.
- And the livestock sector – pig meat and poultry in particular – feel the strong impact of feed price increases.

Firstly, I am pleased to underline that our **European Food Security Crisis preparedness and response Mechanism (EFSCM)**, is up and running and will increase cooperation to mitigate food security risks, and monitor the situation. A second meeting of the Mechanism is taking place today.

To improve our monitoring ability, the Commission also proposes that **Member States communicate data on their private stocks of essential food and feed** to have a timely and accurate overview of their availability.

Let me be clear: currently, thanks to the work of our farmers, and the support of the common agricultural policy, food security in the European Union is not under threat. However, our food system is facing challenges.

For our **citizens**, it is not a question of availability, but of affordability.

While there is enough food in the EU, prices are rising. Food inflation reached 5.6%, compared to February 2021.

We must protect lower-income citizens and vulnerable families.

We must remember that, in the last 3 weeks, our population has grown by 3 million people; that is 3 million extra mouths to feed every day.

The Commission calls on Member States to use their **social policies** to protect vulnerable citizens from food insecurity.

Member States can also implement **reduced rates of VAT** on food, and use the **Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived**.

Agricultural support measures

For farmers, it is not a crisis situation, but a critical situation; especially for a number of specific sectors and smaller family farms.

Let me briefly outline what this Communication holds for farmers.

Firstly, the Commission has adopted **exceptional support measures of €500 million** to directly assist those farmers most affected by the higher input costs and the closure of export markets.

The Commission will submit its proposal to use the crisis reserve for this support package to both the European Parliament and the Council.

Member States can exceptionally complement this EU support by up to 200% with national funds.

In addition, the Commission will allow Member States to **pay increased levels of CAP direct payments in advance**, to address the cash-flow difficulties that farmers are facing.

We have also adopted an exceptional and temporary derogation to **allow the production of any crops on fallow land this year**, while maintaining the full level of greening payment for farmers.

In view of the particularly difficult situation of the **pigmeat sector**, the Commission will open a **new private storage aid scheme** to stabilise markets.

Member States can also take measures at **national levels**. A **Temporary Crisis Framework for State Aid** has been put in place to allow Member States to grant direct aid to producers affected by the crisis and to energy intensive undertakings, such as fertiliser manufactures.

Finally, some Member States have started to use specific **flexibilities** to existing import requirements related to pesticides for **animal feed**, provided that safety is ensured.

We must act with these measures in the short term to address food security and affordability concerns now.

Let me remind you that we do not currently face a food security threat in the European Union.

It is simply prudent that we support our farmers to produce more food sustainably while they can; that is why the Commission is acting with these short-term measures. Let me say one word also on **fisheries**, which is of course equally part of our food system.

The EU fishery, aquaculture and processing sector is also directly affected by the disruptions of the market. Contrary to agriculture, the EU is **not** self-sufficient when it comes to seafood. We are very much import-dependent, including as regards imports of raw materials for fish processing.

The sharp rise of marine fuel prices makes most fishing fleet unprofitable. The fisheries sector will benefit from some measures I just mentioned, including the Temporary Crisis Framework for State Aid.

Reinforcing the resilience and sustainability of our food systems

Let me say this clearly: fundamentally, the transition to sustainable agriculture, as envisaged in the Green Deal and Farm to Fork, is our only path to food security. This is strongly recognised and reinforced in our Communication.

We must also ensure that our food system is resilient to external shocks, like the one we are now experiencing.

That is why the **Farm to Fork Strategy** is an important part of our response.

It sets the path to reducing our dependence on inputs like fertilisers, without undermining productivity.

This will require a greater use of knowledge-sharing and **innovation** in areas like precision farming, organic farming, nutrient management and agro-ecology, which must be facilitated through CAP Strategic Plans.

On the subject of the **CAP**, the Commission will address the Russian invasion of Ukraine in its letters of observations on the CAP Strategic Plans, which will be adopted next week.

I have called on Member States to use their strategic plans to strengthen the sustainability and resilience of their agricultural sectors, reducing energy, pesticide and nutrient dependence and prioritise actions that increase yields sustainably.

The Commission will support Member States who, for example, use funding to boost sustainable biogas production, improve energy efficiency, foster bioeconomy solutions, convert into organic farming, protein crop production and develop their knowledge and innovation systems.

Conclusion

I am confident that while we face a significant challenge, we can overcome it.

We have been challenged before, most recently during the COVID pandemic. And let us remember what we have learned:

- In the years before COVID, many of us took our health and well-being for granted; when the pandemic struck, we were forced to realise the true value of these things.
- And before Russia invaded Ukraine, many of us in Europe took our basic freedom for granted; now, we value it more than ever.
- For too long, too many of us have taken our food for granted, we have taken for granted the work and the challenges facing our farmers to produce it. If we wait for a food crisis to change our mind, we will have waited too long.

That is why we are not waiting; we are acting. That is why the Communication has adopted today a set of actions to meet this current challenge, to achieve:

- food **security** in Ukraine & across the globe
- to achieve **stability** in the EU food system, for our citizens and our farmers
- and to achieve **sustainability**, for our long-term food security and farming resilience

But we need to act together, within the European Union and with our international partners.

We need to face this crisis together, to address the challenges we are confronted with and to persevere our long-term strategy of making our food systems more sustainable and resilient.

If we act together, we can meet our challenges.

I recall the words of Professor Walter Hallstein, our first Commission President. When he worked to bring European farmers together under the Common Agricultural Policy, he said: "the links we are forging here today will never again be broken".

These links have lasted us well. They have lasted us for 60 years. They were not broken during the Cold War, they were not broken during COVID pandemic; and let me say, in no uncertain terms: **they will not be broken now.**

Thank you.