



COMECE Statement on 2024 farmers protests

“A sustainable future of our food system and a secure and flourishing future for farmers can coexist”

In these days we are confronted with major farmer protests across the European Union. Even if some of the current protests have been triggered by envisaged cuts of subsidies or tax breaks, the discontent in the agricultural sector with policies tackling climate change and environmental crises has been growing for a while – such as in the Netherlands in 2022-2023.

As COMECE, we feel the need to take part in the public debate taking shape in this delicate moment. While strongly supporting the objective of a sustainable future for all in the European Union, we share the farmers' concerns for the sustainability of small and medium-sized farms and the future of our rural areas.

The agricultural sector plays an essential role in providing us with affordable, high-quality food, giving life to our rural areas and managing our landscapes.

At the same time, statistics show an ongoing decrease in the number of small and medium-sized farms, coupled with the risk of an ageing population of farmers.

Farmers today face comparatively low incomes and long working hours, competition on the market (including with non-EU imports), high energy costs and inflation, growing uncertainty due to changing climate patterns, but also what is perceived as over-regulation and an influx of new policies with concrete financial consequences.

Many of the farmers taking to the streets today feel their very existence threatened. It is well known that, for farmers, farming is more than simply work, it lies at the heart of their identity.

We believe that a sustainable future of our food system and a secure and flourishing future for farmers can coexist, they do not exclude each other. Solutions must be found that guarantee both and overcome partisan divisions: this will only be possible if farmers are placed in the centre of these considerations.

Only through listening and an honest eye-to-eye dialogue we might grasp a better sense of the reality of farmers in the European Union, a greater recognition for their hard work, an understanding for their concerns, and, most importantly, an appreciation for those who nourish us.

In this sense, we welcome that the Strategic Dialogue between the EU and key stakeholders from across the whole agri-food chain was formally launched on 25 January 2024, as announced by the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, in the State of the Union 2023 speech.

We hope that this or similar dialogue formats continue and will mark the beginning of a new way of doing politics in Europe.

We call on the policymakers to put the human person in the centre of their political considerations, ensuring a greater transparency of the decision-making processes, taking into account the potential consequences for those impacted by it, and, finally, allowing for more involvement of all relevant actors.