Shorter supply chains could be key to ensuring Europe's food security

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As Russia's ongoing aggression in Ukraine is putting global food supply at risk and European consumers are already experiencing a rise of food prices, many believe that Europe's food system could be made more resilient against crisis by investing on sustainable local quality production and shortening supply chains. The European Committee of the Regions is currently preparing an opinion on Safeguarding food security and reinforcing the resilience of the EU food system. Members of the NAT Commission discussed this highly relevant topic in the external meeting held in Santiago de Compostela on 2 June.

Piotr Całbecki (PL/EPP), rapporteur of the upcoming CoR opinion and President of Kujawsko-Pomorskie Region, pointed out that hundreds of millions of people across the world risk facing hunger because of Russia's aggression. In many parts of the world the situation is made worse by climate-related hazards, such as the current drought in India.

"This war is not only about tanks and cannons. Today, food is used as a silent but powerful weapon in the ongoing war. Disrupted supply chains, the issue of food exports and rising prices will lead to the global fear, migration and a hunger crisis. Together, we are doing everything we can to ensure the food security and increase the resilience of food systems in the European Union and Ukraine. We strongly support Ukraine’s membership application to the EU", Mr Całbecki said.

The NAT Commission's shadow-rapporteur Christophe Clergeau (FR/PES), Member of the Pays-de-la-Loire Regional Council, regretted that the European Commission "underrates the vulnerability of food supply chains subject to climatic hazards, geopolitical instabilities and health crises". Therefore, he's urging for a profound reform of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy towards a model that

encourages relocation of production, reduces environmental impact and guarantees fair income to farmers. "The specialization of agricultural regions accentuates the distance between production and consumption, which reinforces vulnerabilities, weakens food security and harms natural resources", he argued.

The deputy director-general of European Commission's DG AGRI Michael Niejahr expressed his support for reinforcing local supply chains, while insisting that "it should not happen at the cost of free trade and markets". He stressed that the objectives of the Green Deal and the Farm to Fork strategy must be pursued and underlined that the Commission is working to explore different routes for Ukrainian exports, to facilitate Ukrainian exports to the EU and to support the agriculture sector.

Galicia's regional minister for Rural Affairs, José González Vázquez, pointed out that the crises of recent years have reinforced the conviction about the importance of having a powerful and locally-based primary sector and revitalising rural areas. The Government's initiative has already helped to recover more than 5000 hectares of unused agricultural land for production, while respecting the requirements of the European Green Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategy.

Mr Vázquez and the NAT Commission chair Ulrika Landergren (SV/Renew Europe) also welcomed the Council conclusions on the 8th report on Cohesion that were adopted on the same day. The municipal councillor of Kungsbacka underlined that territorial cohesion in Europe is only possible if sufficient attention is paid to the needs of rural areas and to urban-rural connectivity. "We need to define concrete targets and indicators and use all available funds to ensure that no region is left behind. It is equally important to strengthen the involvement of the local level in the design and implementation of the Rural Pact", Ms Landergren said.

Another topic of discussion with DG AGRI's Deputy Director General focused around geographical indications, which will be subject of an upcoming opinion drafted by Karine Gloanec-Maurin (FR/PES), Deputy Mayor delegate of Couëtron au Perche. The rapporteur emphasised that geographical indications contribute to the quality of agricultural products and to the preservation of biodiversity, landscape and territorial heritage.

The day in Santiago de Compostela finished with a tree-planting ceremony as part of the Trees for Life initiative, which is taking place currently around the European Green Week. The CoR supports the initiative which aims at planting 3 billion additional trees in Europe's cities, towns and villages, in order to increase biodiversity and fight against climate change.

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