

Commission: Agriculture and Food Sovereignty

Subject: Can the UE reassert its position as an agricultural power in order to ensure food sovereignty?

Author: Austria

Austria is a parliamentary republic with a population of approximately 8.9 million. The head of state is the Federal President (Bundespräsident) who is elected for a 6-year term. His current name is Alexander Van der Bellen. The federal chancellor, the head of government, holds executive power. This role is assumed by Karl Nehammer. Our government consists of a coalition of the ÖVP-Grüne, the Austrian People's Party and the Greens. It focuses on the issue of ecology and the fight against immigration.

Within the EU, food sovereignty is a permanent issue because it is not only linked to the primary need of the citizens but also to the affirmation of the EU as an agricultural power.

Europe had previously been a very prominent agricultural power on the international scene. The last few decades have called into question its agricultural sovereignty in these areas.

In a more global context of globalization, the war in Ukraine has shown the fragility of Europe's agricultural sovereignty and has highlighted various crucial issues.

Indeed, Ukraine being a major wheat producer, the current situation leads European political choices to tend towards an increase in production. This in order to cover the European needs currently lacking due to what was exported before the war.

The issues of food insecurity therefore revolve around the unequal distribution of resources and agricultural sobriety.

These issues are added to the condition of European farmers as well as to the technological evolution and the digitalization of production methods in a context of so-called "4.0" agriculture.

Before the war in Ukraine, the European Union already had to adapt to another challenge, that of sustainable agriculture. This one concerns Austria in particular, as opposed to the ones mentioned above which affect the whole of Europe. Organic farming is very important in Austria, since with 26.1% of its agricultural area labeled "organic", Austria is the European country with the highest proportion of organically cultivated land and in 2018 it achieved a turnover of 1.9 billion euros. This leads Austria in particular to reflect on its production methods. On the one hand, this is for ecological reasons, with the erosion of biodiversity and resources, and on the other hand, to contribute to its food security and that of Europe.

Having joined the European Union in 1995, Austria is committed to Europe and supports the implementation of the 2014 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). This is done with the aim of increasing support for climate actions, as well as innovation in rural areas.

In terms of sustainable agriculture, Austria has announced that it will continue to support mountain farming and organic farming as a priority. With our ÖPUL program, we are committed to a sustainable, high-quality and environmentally friendly agricultural policy. The ÖPUL 2015, which was extended in the following years, is financed by about 50% EU funds and about 50% national funds.

Austria has been a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) since its foundation in 1995. As such, it participates in standard-setting organizations recognized by the WTO SPS Agreement: the Codex Alimentarius, the International Plant Protection Convention and the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH). Austria is also a member of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Organization of Vine and Wine (OIV).

Austria is part of many free trade agreements as a member of the European Union. However, Austria has officially refused to support the EU-Mercosur agreement, citing the incompatibility of this trade agreement with the Paris Agreement, climate protection and biodiversity.

In order to respond to the various issues raised by the questions of food sovereignty and agricultural power. The implementation of the CAP in line with the European objectives is carried out

under different axes and measures. For the first pillar of the CAP, 710 M€, or 32% of the agricultural budget, have been allocated in 2020 to 104 375 farms and agricultural associations and 25 companies. For the second pillar devoted to the rural development program, €1.1 billion, or 51% of the agricultural budget, has been allocated to 105,171 farms. These farms are strongly supported by the implementation of massive subsidies, benefiting both producers and the development of its food sovereignty.

In terms of sustainability, we have established a program called ÖPUL. It focuses on the protection of natural resources such as water, soil, climate, biodiversity and the agricultural landscape. In 2020, 1.8 Mha, or 80% of Austrian agricultural land (excluding alpine pastures), was supported under ÖPUL. These policies for sustainable agriculture are important to us because they are the future of agricultural power. Therefore, this green growth has stimulated the creation of jobs in the environmental sector in our country.

In addition, at the end of 2021, the Federal Ministry of Agriculture presented a new strategy for the development of plant proteins. This strategy aims to halve the dependence on soy imports by 2030. This includes the development of local non-GMO production.

To counter an opposition initiative for a total ban on glyphosate in Austria, the ruling coalition (Austrian People's Party and Greens) resolved to adopt a partial ban, which came into force at the end of 2021 and does not apply to agriculture.

As far as forestry policy is concerned, the Austrian Forestry Strategy 2020+ serves as a guideline. The government has launched the €350 million "Forest Fund", to contribute to climate protection.

As a result, Austria is in favor of common European policies, as is the case with the CAP, where it adopts a position of defender of an environmentally friendly and high quality agriculture. It is one of the most important countries of the EU in terms of sustainable agriculture and will go in fervor to all countries wishing policies or agreements going in this dynamic. It is in this precise sense that we believe that Europe can become sovereign in food matters and assert its agricultural power.