

Subject: Portugal

Commission: Agriculture/ food sovereignty

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

The Republic of Portugal is a country located on the Iberian peninsula and it shares its only borders with Spain. It has a population of approximately 10.4 million people, and a territory of 92000 km². The territory is diverse, which allows for a varied agriculture, from olives, grapes, wheat, tomatoes, kiwis, sheep, pigmeat, poultry and other cattle farming, but also, thanks to its very large coastline, on the European continent and its islands in the Atlantic ocean, a well developed fishing industry. Today agriculture represents 2.19% of Portugal's GDP.

After several decades of harsh and brutal dictatorship under the rule of Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, in 1974 the Portuguese people overthrew the regime, and a democracy was put in place. The country, along with Spain, acceded to the European Community now known as the European Union in 1986, this being the 3rd enlargement of the European Union.

Today, Portugal is governed by the head of the government, the prime minister Antonio Costa, a member of the PS, the center left socialist party, and the president Rebelo de Sousa, who was part of the social democratic party. Portugal is a very pro EU country, on multiple levels, technological, political, military and agricultural, ever since Portugal published its first CAP policy. Portugal is described as an oasis of stability in the political world, thanks to the left-wing coalition and the relatively small amount of internal and external threats and issues the country is facing.

Nonetheless, Portugal is a deficit country, meaning that it relies on imports of natural resources from other countries. Portugal is specifically in need of cereals, but also non-renewable resources; petrol, gas. The Republic of Portugal also faces an important rural exodus, accompanied by the increasing aging of its population like many other European countries, and specifically in the more rural areas, which means that there are not only less farmers, but also less young farmers. Today, Portugal has the oldest farming population of the EU.

Even if 33% of Portugal's population lives in rural areas, and the large number of farms in the country, around 259 000 farms, 46% are run by families and only span 2 Ha, which means that they don't produce enough and cannot contribute as much to the Portuguese economy. Not only that, but Portugal has been recently experiencing droughts, which make farming even more challenging in some regions of the country. Portugal is also facing desertification, erosion and forest fires, a problem that is also heavily present in Spain.

In 2021, Portugal proposed its first CAP strategic plan, one year later in 2022, a new and revised version was released, and approved by the European Commission.

Portugal's position is similar to that of other EU members, that want to protect the environment, assure sovereignty in times of crisis, for example during the Covid-19 pandemic, but also guarantee the application of the rules created by the European Union regarding agriculture and sustainability, and furthermore Portugal is very advanced in more ecological agricultural methods, as well as the use of natural products when cultivating.

Portugal's CAP policy combines multiple issues, regional to national, and it is built around managing the active territory that is based on innovative and sustainable agriculture, food safety, development of rural areas, and support for small farms and innovation in the agricultural sector. Portuguese farmers are very conscious regarding a greener, more sustainable agriculture, pesticides, and other chemicals are banned from being used, and fresh produce that are directly cultivated from the farm are being sold to the population, a form of "short circuit" exchange that assures fresher and better quality produce.

The Republic of Portugal's first solution is to increase farmer's income to encourage farmers to work together and increase their production. This basic income support will cover 96% of Portuguese farmers, hopefully inciting more to join the workforce, and to help strengthen this socio/economic group that is still quite present in Portugal. One of Portugal's main aims through this program is to support farmers, by helping them with investments, and to prevent risks by inciting farmers to take out insurance. Portugal policy plans to increase the attractiveness of rural areas. Portugal will also support young farmers, to revitalize the sector.

To contribute to the European Green Deal, in 2030 around 19% of agricultural area will be farmed organically.

In Portugal, there are many non-profit associations, like the branch of the WWOOF, that facilitate creating and living and cultivating on homesteads and organic farms, and help people live a more sustainable and eco-friendly lifestyle.

To help create a more sustainable and eco-friendly agricultural sector, Portugal has to rework the AKIS (The Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System) Around 50 000 people will benefit from classes, advice, training and new knowledge in order to improve the performance of farmers, and 500 000 euro will be used to support agro-environmental and climate knowledge.

Climate change is also addressed, and Portugal plans to promote improvements of the soils, protection from fires and other natural disasters that may occur, and also better water management. For example, 2 000 Ha of land will be under support for the conservation of traditional stone walls in Azores, to protect vineyards. 62.5 million will be invested in restoring forests; against natural disasters like forest fires on the mainland and Madeira. Also the Portuguese plan will dedicate 150 million euro to supporting investments in bio-economy.

Portugal, although being a country on the extremity of the UE is one of the countries that is the most europhile, in many aspects, and specifically when it comes to agriculture, sustainability and more ecological agricultural methods. Portugal's farming industry is diverse, and the farmers are very conscious when it comes to products and methods that are used, and the Portuguese government is adamant in adopting, and investing in eco-friendly energies and agriculture. Reviving this important part of the Portuguese economy and population is paramount to help the country's sovereignty, and thus the EU food sovereignty, specifically in economical and political crises, like the war in Ukraine.