



Brussels, 30 September, 2011

cc: Mr. Marek Sawicki, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

Dear Minister Fedak,

With great concern we have taken note that the Council of Agriculture Ministers of 20 September has failed to find a solution for the future of the food aid scheme for the most deprived in the European Union. Currently, 18 million Europeans are dependent on this aid. Due to legal problems the scheme is under threat to be terminated abruptly. A political solution to this immediate problem is so far averted by a blocking minority of countries.

The food aid program has its origins in the agricultural surpluses. Due to several reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy these surpluses are disappearing. In order to maintain the level of food aid for the most deprived, the European Commission has proposed to use food purchases on the market to cover for the shortages in the intervention stocks. We understand that this practice is problematic since the initial connection of the food aid scheme with the CAP becomes weaker, and is thus essentially becomes a social measure, such as the European Court of Justice has rightly observed.

However, the immediate consequences of these legal concerns are hard to explain to the 18 million Europeans who now rely on food aid provided by the European Union. It is estimated that 43 million people in the EU live at risk of food poverty. In times of tough budget cuts and higher unemployment as a result of the crisis, it is likely that more people will have to rely on food aid. We cannot allow this programme for the most vulnerable citizens of the EU to be stopped abruptly while we have spent billions to save our financial institutions. A solution must be found that is acceptable for both Member States supporting and/or using the food aid scheme, and those that are concerned about market purchases becoming a permanent practice.

We therefore call on the Council to listen to the urgent concerns of the food aid receivers and to find an emergency solution for the food aid scheme, while at the same time starting a discussion on a fundamental reform of the scheme. Our suggestions for those are the following.

The European Commission already proposed an adapted regulation that allows the food aid from intervention stocks to be supplemented by market purchases. We share the view that this may not be a desirable situation in the long term. However, for continuity it would be sensible to embrace such solution only for the remaining years of the financial framework (2012 and 2013). This way, food banks and other social services would be given the necessary time to adapt before the most deprived scheme is ended in its current form.

With a new financial framework from 2014, the European answer to food poverty should be modernised. After 2013, there will unfortunately still be Europeans relying on food aid for their daily needs. All EU countries have committed to the objective of reducing poverty in Europe by 25% by 2020. Simply ending the EU program is therefore irresponsible. Instead, the Union should contribute in reducing dependency on food aid.

A new anti-food poverty program should be set up. Financial resources currently devoted to food purchases could in the medium term be used to support food banks with a transition from Europe's intervention stocks to other sources of supply. Food banks that do not use EU aid mainly get their supplies from supermarkets, manufacturers and farmers. Building and maintaining a network of food suppliers and logistics for the collection and storage of food require knowledge and infrastructure that some food banks still lack. A new fund would be temporarily deployed to various existing food banks to learn from each other through exchange and for building infrastructure. On an EU institution level, the transfer of operations from one DG of the commission to another must not result in a drop of effectiveness; there should be a smooth handover and maintenance of skills. Also, any shift of the Food Aid scheme from CAP to ESF should not result in cuts to existing ESF funds and operations.

In the longer run, European measures should focus on lifting people out of poverty and reducing their dependency on food aid. National welfare systems should ensure a life with dignity and a European Union without hunger. This could include providing assistance at food distribution points when applying for a job coaching, social security or other assistance.

Simultaneously, combating poverty and malnutrition also involves reforming the Common Agricultural Policy. Effort is needed to fundamentally change the food production and supply systems, significantly re-establishing the link between food and people. Persons experiencing poverty have a right to healthy and nutritious food. Only with a truly sustainable CAP, can we ensure that less Europeans have to rely on food aid.

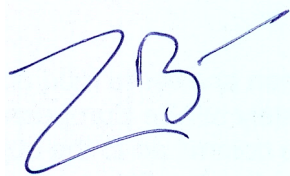
Such an integrated approach to combat poverty, including food poverty prevention measures, would be the appropriate answer to combat poverty in the 21st century. You will agree with us that hunger has no place in a rich continent like Europe, where up to half the food produced is discarded. We cannot let 18 million of the poorest and most vulnerable EU citizens down amid the worst economic crisis in decades. We count on the Polish presidency to find an emergency solution.

Kind regards,

Marije Cornelissen, Member of the European Parliament, Greens/EFA

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'MC', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

José Bové, Member of the European Parliament, Greens/EFA

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'JB', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.