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SUGAR AND TRADE: THE EU STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND VALUES SHOULD BE BETTER REFLECTED THROUGH ENFORCEMENT AND ASSERTIVENESS

On 19 April 2021, the Civil Dialogue Group on SUGAR which meets twice a year discussed the trade dimension of the Green Deal and Farm to Fork Strategy. Earlier this year, CIBE (International Confederation of European Beet Growers), CEFS (Association of European Sugar Manufacturers), together with EFFAT (European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions) had the opportunity to comment on the EU Commission Communication on the Trade Policy Review from 18 February 2021.

A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD, SUSTAINABLE & FAIR TRADE, AND ENFORCEMENT OF FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS IS KEY FOR THE EU SUGAR SECTOR TO REMAIN COMPETITIVE

We welcome the new and clear strategy of the Commission towards restoring the necessary level playing field, strengthening fair and sustainable trade and defend vigorously and rapidly our interests when our partners are not playing by the rules. We urgently and rapidly need appropriate countermeasures to tackle unfair competition from our trade partners.

In January 2021, the Joint Research Centre released an updated study on the cumulative impact of Free Trade Agreements on EU agriculture. It concluded and confirmed that the EU sugar sector is one of the few sectors that have suffered negative consequences from existing EU Trade Agreements.¹

This trend must be stopped and reversed. Sugar beet growers and sugar manufacturers are asking for concrete and immediate action and enforcement to avoid negative and irremediable consequences on working conditions, employment, the environment and economic sustainability.

Where these conditions cannot be met, no market access concessions should be granted to third countries through preferential FTAs or through unilateral trade concessions. CIBE and CEFS note that the EU-Mercosur Agreement does not meet the above imperatives as far as sugar is concerned. Therefore, they remain opposed to this deal.

The European Green Deal – and the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies – strive to enhance the economic, environmental, and social commitments of EU operators even further and manifest the EU's pioneering role in mitigating climate change. The objectives of these initiatives must be integrated into the EU's trade policy to guarantee coherence and preclude that international trade undermines the accomplishments of the EU sugar sector in implementing sustainability goals. The respect of labour rights – including the ILO core Conventions – in line with EU standards must constitute an essential element of all current and future EU Trade agreements. Equally, imports of sub-standard means of production should not benefit or be granted preferential market access to the EU.

CIBE and CEFS strongly support vigorous assertiveness and rapid reaction from the EU in the international arena to stop illegal market-distorting export subsidies in India or the breach of obligations in Trade Agreements such as the EU-Egypt or EU-Canada Agreements. We support coercive legal actions as requested last week at the Committee on International Trade in the European Parliament by many MEPs to get enforcement of negotiated agreements or rules-based international trade.

Press contact :

Elisabeth Lacoste

CIBE Director

+322/504 60 90

elisabeth.lacoste@cibe-europe.eu

Marie-Christine Ribera

CEFS Director General

+322/762 07 60

Mariechristine.ribera@cefs.org

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/food-farming-fisheries/trade/documents/jrc-cumulative-economic-impact-of-trade-agreements-on-eu-agriculture_en.pdf