



"There is only one way to avoid being criticized: do nothing, say nothing and be nothing"
(Aristoteles)

Geopolitics is back. It is Belarus' turn

On January 1, Belarus' embargo on fruit and vegetable imports came into force. About **500,000 tons of European fruit and vegetables are exported to Belarus every year**. The embargo is planned for the first 6 months of 2022 and during this period about 60% of the annual export is exported, worth about 200 million euros. Apples, pears, stone fruit, persimmons, strawberries, citrus fruits and kiwis are the main products shipped to Belarus from Poland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Greece, Spain, Italy and Belgium.

This is not the first time that the European fruit and vegetable sector has been punished, no doubt undeservedly, by countries involved in geopolitical conflicts. In the last decade there have been other embargoes that are still in force. Let us recall the **Russian embargo**: affecting 2.3 million tons of European fruit and vegetables, with a value of close to 2 billion euros, affecting mainly suppliers from the "north" of the EU: apples, pears, tomatoes,.... from Poland, Belgium and the Netherlands. But also those from the "South", especially citrus fruits, stone and pome fruits, tomatoes and other vegetables from Spain.

Nor should we forget the **Algerian embargo**: 220,000 tons worth 150 million euros that mainly affect suppliers from the "South" of the EU: apples, table grapes, kiwis, oranges, lemons ... from Spain, Italy, France.

Opening new markets is a titanic effort that capricious geopolitics mercilessly and senselessly destroys in a few minutes.

FRENCH PRESIDENCY OF THE EU AGRICULTURE COUNCIL

At the Agriculture Council on January 17, French Agriculture Minister Julien Denormandie presented France's priorities for the French Presidency. The Presidency will also seek to advance work in interesting areas, such as the regulation on statistics on agricultural inputs and production, the review of the EU's agricultural product promotion policy, or the role of agriculture in decarbonization.

But among these work priorities, one stands out for its impact on our business: Reciprocity of trade rules, i.e.

ensuring (mainly through "mirror clauses") that agri-food products imported into Europe respect EU environmental and health standards, particularly with regard to the sustainable use of plant protection products.

As France has made clear, European farmers are required to meet higher safety and environmental standards than their foreign competitors, with the result that products that do not meet EU standards are imported into the EU. But France has also made it clear that the solution to this problem is not to relax current European regulations, but quite the opposite: it has made it quite clear that they need to be strengthened in many areas (especially with regard to pesticides and agriculture's contribution to decarbonization).

In parallel, France proposes a bold or innovative solution: to implement a coherent policy approach requiring third countries exporting to the EU to adhere to the same food safety, quality and environmental protection criteria as European producers: to achieve this, it proposes to include an instrument in trade agreements between the EU and these third countries: "mirror clauses" in trade agreements to oblige them to do so.

This is an ambitious approach that seeks to protect European farmers, but also EU consumers from consuming products (e.g. citrus fruits) that have been produced in Turkey, South America, Africa... through destructive and unsustainable agricultural practices that are banned in Europe.

In fact, many of the countries with which the EU is signing free trade agreements - including Mercosur nations such as Brazil, as well as the United States, Australia and New Zealand - use "pesticides, herbicides and genetically modified organisms that are strictly limited or banned in the EU and therefore **we are clearly facing a problem of unfair competition**.

In his book "Revolution" Emmanuel Macron already said that if we want to succeed in the twenty-first century on the economic level we must provide answers in the ecological challenge and in particular in food that affects our life and our health. To do this, he said, **we must ensure that retailers play its part in this game**. In addition to trade agreements and mirror clauses, it is essential that supermarkets make a clear commitment to European products.

