
Farmer protests: COMECE's invitation to dialogue and to overcome "partisan divisions". "Put the person in the centre of political considerations"

An invitation to "listening", to "an honest eye-to-eye dialogue", and to overcoming "partisan divisions". "We call on the policymakers to put the human person in the centre of their political considerations, ensuring a greater transparency of the decision-making processes, taking into account the potential consequences for those impacted by it, and, finally, allowing for more involvement of all relevant actors". This appeal was made by the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) in a statement issued today following "major farmer protests across the European Union". The Bishops wrote that the protests triggered by envisaged cuts of subsidies or tax breaks are also the result of widespread discontent in the agricultural sector with policies tackling climate change and environmental crises. "As COMECE – the statement reads –, we feel the need to take part in the public debate taking shape in this delicate moment. While strongly supporting the objective of a sustainable future for all in the European Union, we share the farmers' concerns for the sustainability of small and medium-sized farms and the future of our rural areas". The EU's Bishops acknowledge that "the agricultural sector plays an essential role in providing us with affordable, high-quality food, giving life to our rural areas and managing our landscapes". But at the same time, they also express concern about the "ongoing decrease in the number of small and medium-sized farms", and the risk of an ageing population of farmers, as the statistics show. The list of problems experienced by farmers is long. According to the Bishops, "farmers today face comparatively low incomes and long working hours, competition on the market (including with non-EU imports), high energy costs and inflation, growing uncertainty due to changing climate patterns". Farmers also lament "over-regulation and an influx of new policies with concrete financial consequences". "Many of the farmers taking to the streets today feel their very existence threatened", COMECE wrote, adding the following: "We believe that a sustainable future of our food system and a secure and flourishing future for farmers can coexist, they do not exclude each other. Solutions must be found that guarantee both and overcome partisan divisions: this will only be possible if farmers are placed in the centre of these considerations". The call is therefore for dialogue, to come to a better understanding of "the reality of farmers in the European Union, a greater recognition for their hard work, an understanding for their concerns". For this reason, the Bishops welcome the strategic dialogue between the EU and key stakeholders from across the whole agri-food chain that was formally launched on 25 January, as announced by the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, in her State of the Union 2023 speech. "We hope – COMECE wrote – that this or similar dialogue formats continue and will mark the beginning of a new way of doing politics in Europe".

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