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4 June 2026

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

Minutes

of the hearing on “Ensuring sustainable food security in times of crisis: strengthening resilience and access to food” on Thursday, 23 April 2026, in Strasbourg

Ms Carmen Leyte, Chairperson, opened the hearing and welcomed Mr Fabien Santini, Head of Unit, Governance of agri-food markets, DG AGRI, European Commission.

The Committee **heard** Mr Santini, Head of Unit, Governance of agri-food markets at the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Commission.

Mr Santini began by recalling that, until recently, food security had been taken for granted within the European Union. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) had ensured a high level of food security thanks to the richness of European agricultural systems, the diversity of products, the various forms of supply chain organisation – whether short or long – and the availability of high-quality, safe, abundant and accessible food. He also underlined that the EU had become one of the world’s leading net exporters of agricultural and food products, having consolidated its structural position as an agri-food power.

According to the expert, the Covid-19 crisis had acted as a real wake-up call. The very idea of queues forming at supermarket entrances had previously seemed unimaginable. The crisis had highlighted certain structural dependencies which had turned out to be vulnerabilities, particularly with regard to agricultural inputs, animal feed and additives, as well as the complexity of supply chains. He referred to shortages of packaging, mistakenly considered non-essential, which had affected the distribution of basic products such as eggs. This awareness had been described by the Commission as a “wake-up call”, revealing critical dependencies, notably on fertilisers, soy for animal feed, vitamins and amino acids.

In response, the European Commission had adopted, on 12 November 2021, a food contingency plan aimed at ensuring food supply and security in times of crisis. This plan had not created a centralised stock management mechanism at EU level but had established a permanent framework for preparedness, coordination and rapid response between EU institutions, Member States and private actors in the food chain.

The first pillar of this framework was the continuous monitoring of risks likely to affect food supply: logistical disruptions, input shortages, animal or plant diseases, geopolitical tensions, extreme weather events or sudden increases in energy costs. This monitoring relied on strengthened systems of monitoring and foresight, enabling anticipation of shocks and identification of vulnerabilities upstream.

The second pillar was operational coordination through the European Food Security Crisis Preparedness and Response Mechanism (EFSCM). This mechanism brought together representatives of Member States, third countries linked to the European market, as well as private actors from across the food chain: input suppliers, farmers, processors, transporters, distributors and consumer representatives. In practice, this involved ad hoc meetings the situation demanded. Under normal circumstances, periodic meetings allowed the sharing of risk analyses, national best practices and the updating of crisis scenarios. When a shock occurred, the Commission could quickly convene extraordinary meetings in order to obtain a clear picture of the situation, identify bottlenecks and coordinate the necessary responses. This mechanism was designed as a reinforced public-private cooperation tool aimed at addressing the coordination gaps revealed by the Covid-19 crisis.

¹ The minutes were approved and declassified by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development at its meeting on 4 June 2026.

The third pillar consisted in activating concrete tools when necessary: mobilisation of CAP instruments, exceptional aid, facilitation of cross-border transport, maintenance of the free movement of goods within the single market, exchange of information on stocks, and even joint procurement for certain critical products. The objective was to avoid uncoordinated national reactions, such as export restrictions observed at the beginning of the pandemic.

Mr Santini recalled that it was impossible to predict the exact nature of the next crisis. He mentioned the war in Ukraine, the resulting increase in costs, disruptions linked to attacks by the Houthis in Sudan, as well as tensions in the Middle East and with Iran. In such situations, the main challenge was the early detection of difficulties and the acceleration of the European response. In this regard, he cited the example of the solidarity lanes set up following the invasion of Ukraine. During the first weeks of the conflict, the initial priority was the evacuation of refugees. The question of transporting agricultural production and removing food stocks stranded in Ukraine had then arisen. The establishment of these solidarity corridors had significantly accelerated Ukrainian exports by land and river, through the rapid mobilisation of European logistical capacities. These measures illustrated the EU's ability to adapt quickly to unforeseen systemic shocks.

Mr Santini also stressed the importance of placing the observed tensions in their proper context. He cited in this regard the example of the concerns that arose at the beginning of the war in Ukraine regarding sunflower oil supply, given that Ukraine was one of the world's main producers. This situation led, in several Member States, to precautionary purchases and stockpiling by households, even though no real threat had weighed on European food security and substitute products had remained available. Similarly, the disruptions caused by the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea did not have an immediate impact on EU food supply. However, regarding fertilisers, difficulties could have arisen more significantly by 2027 than in the short term. He emphasised the role of EU monitoring mechanisms in correcting misperceptions and limiting panic or overreactions in markets.

More broadly, he considered that food security should be integrated into a comprehensive European preparedness strategy, alongside other dimensions of security. Food planning should not be limited to sectoral plans but should be treated as a matter of national and European security. This approach could have been reinforced within the framework of the reform of the Common Market Organisation (CMO), national strategic plans and cooperation mechanisms. He recalled that the added value of the Union lay primarily in coordination rather than in replacing national competences. This approach was part of a broader "preparedness union" strategy aimed at integrating resilience into all sectoral policies.

Regarding response tools, **Mr Santini** referred to the IMERA initiative (Internal Market Emergency and Resilience Act), a new European framework designed to preserve the functioning of the internal market in times of crisis. Adopted in 2024 and applicable from 2026, this instrument has drawn lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the energy crisis. Its objective was to prevent uncoordinated national reactions from fragmenting the single market and exacerbating shortages. In this context, IMERA could notably provide for a ban on unilateral export restrictions within the single market, in order to avoid a repetition of the measures observed during the health crisis. Other instruments were considered: priority orders for certain strategic products, obligations to share information on stocks, and joint European procurement. This framework also introduced more binding crisis management tools inspired in particular by public health responses during pandemics.

As regards reconstruction, **Mr Santini** recalled that the new CAP already allowed for the deployment of crisis payments to support the agricultural sectors most affected by shocks. These financial instruments offered increased flexibility to Member States to support recovery and stabilise markets after major disruptions.

Finally, regarding long-term resilience, **Mr Santini** emphasised that the European food system has to date demonstrated its robustness in the face of successive crises, notably thanks to the strength of the single market and the diversity of agricultural models. However, he underlined that the challenge was no longer only to withstand shocks but also to transform crises into drivers of structural change. In this context, he referred to the protein plan aimed at reducing the EU's dependence on imports of plant proteins by strengthening local production and structuring more resilient European supply chains, particularly for animal feed. He also mentioned the fertiliser action plan, which formed part of a broader strategy for sovereignty and sustainability of agricultural inputs, aiming to reduce dependence on fossil-based fertilisers, promote recycled nutrients, improve input efficiency and support low-carbon solutions.

In conclusion, **Mr Santini** stressed that there was no one-size-fits-all response to crises: each crisis was different and required different tools, but each provided an opportunity to update the cycle of preparedness, response, reconstruction and resilience.

Discussion

Baroness Coffey asked about long-term risks to food security, particularly climate change and biosecurity issues. She also referred to the UK's experience with gene editing to improve crop resilience.

Mr Santini indicated that the Commission had mapped the main risks and vulnerabilities of the European food system. According to stakeholders, climate change remained the most significant threat, despite current geopolitical crises. Biosecurity was also identified as a risk, including bioterrorism and animal or plant diseases. He added that the EU had recently made progress on new genomic techniques to support the development of more resilient varieties.

Mr Reader stressed that food security did not depend solely on primary products but also on essential inputs such as fertilisers, additives, vitamins and preservatives, and asked about early warning systems.

Mr Santini confirmed that vulnerabilities mainly concerned certain strategic inputs, notably fertilizers, plant proteins intended for animal feed, as well as several components for which the Union remained heavily dependent on external suppliers. He recalled that member States retain primary responsibility for national security, while the Commission promoted the exchange of best practices and consistency with the internal market. As regards early warning systems, he referred to the European mechanisms for monitoring agricultural yields, market surveillance, and the biannual reports on the state of food security, while acknowledging the absence of a single alert-level indicator.

Mr Gevorgyan raised the issue of the impact of the conflict in the Middle East on global and European food security.

Mr Santini explained that the region played a central role in global energy and fertiliser markets, with direct effects on prices and agricultural costs. He noted that while the EU remained diversified in its supply, no global shock was without medium-term effects.

Ms Bilozir welcomed the Commission's action, notably the establishment of the "Solidarity Lanes" to maintain Ukrainian exports despite the blockade of the ports. She asked how food resilience could be strengthened in the event of conflict or a major disruption to supply chains.

Mr Santini reiterated that that no crisis could be managed according to a predefined model and that each situation required specific responses. However, it was essential to prepare for different scenarios. He recalled that before 2022, the risk of armed conflict in Europe had been considered marginal in assessments. He cited the example of Ukraine, which had come to present to the Member States how it maintained the continuity of agricultural production, the supply of vulnerable populations, and the balance between civilian and military needs. He also mentioned the upcoming organisation of a joint exercise between the European Union and NATO, including a component dedicated to food security. In conclusion, the expert observed that a significant shift was underway: food security was increasingly being regarded as an element of national security and the strategic resilience of States.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Santini and closed the hearing.

List of presence / *Liste de présence*

(The names of members who took part in the meeting are in bold /
Les noms des membres ayant pris part à la réunion sont en caractères gras)

Chairperson / *Président·e*:

Saskia Kluit (Netherlands / <i>Pays-Bas</i>)	
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Yuliia Ovchynnykova (Ukraine)	
Sophia Chikirou (France)	

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Mr Cerni Escalé	Andorra / <i>Andorre</i>	Mme Bernadeta Coma
Mr Armen Gevorgyan	Armenia / <i>Arménie</i>	Ms Hripsime Grigoryan
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Mr Andreas Minnich	Austria / <i>Autriche</i>	Ms Agnes Sirkka Prammer
Mme Anne Lambelin	Belgium / <i>Belgique</i>	Mr Andries Gryffroy
M. Benoît Lutgen	Belgium / <i>Belgique</i>	Mme Véronique Durenne
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Ms Maya Dimitrova	Bulgaria / <i>Bulgarie</i>	Mr Ilian Iontchev
Mr Marko Pavić	Croatia / <i>Croatie</i>	Ms Rada Borić
Ms Christiana Erotokritou	Cyprus / <i>Chypre</i>	Mr Constantinos Efstathiou
Ms Ivana Mádllová	Czechia / <i>Tchéquie</i>	Mr Ondřej Šimetka
ZZ...	Czechia / <i>Tchéquie</i>	ZZ...
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Ms Hanah Lahe	Estonia / <i>Estonie</i>	Ms Kadri Tali
Ms Minna Reijonen	Finland / <i>Finlande</i>	Mr Pekka Aittakumpu
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M. Alexandre Dufosset	France	Mme Liliana Tanguy
M. Alain Milon	France	M. Alain Cadec
Mme Maud Petit	France	M. Jean Laussucq
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Mr Vinzenz Glaser	Germany / <i>Allemagne</i>	Ms Christin Willnat
Ms Inge Gräßle	Germany / <i>Allemagne</i>	Mr Julian Joswig
Mr Serdar Yüksel	Germany / <i>Allemagne</i>	Ms Franziska Kersten
Mr Georgios Stamatis	Greece / <i>Grèce</i>	Mr Dionysios-Charalampos Kalamatianos
Ms Maria Syrengela	Greece / <i>Grèce</i>	Ms Maria-Nefeli Chatzioannidou
Ms Mónika Bartos	Hungary / <i>Hongrie</i>	Mr Zoltán Bóna
Ms Mónika Dunai	Hungary / <i>Hongrie</i>	Mr István Hollik
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Mr Joseph O'Reilly	Ireland / <i>Irlande</i>	Mr Rónán Mullen
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Ms Aurora Floridia	Italy / <i>Italie</i>	Mr Giuseppe De Cristofaro
Mr Alessandro Giglio Vigna	Italy / <i>Italie</i>	Mr Graziano Pizzimenti

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Mr / M. David Thunder, Researcher and political philosopher / *chercheur et philosophe politique*

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