



Agrifood trade policies in Europe and Central Asia during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond

World Trade Organization
and
FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia

21 October 2020, 13.00-14.30 CEST

What: Virtual meeting (Zoom Webinar live streamed to YouTube)

When: 21 October 2020, 13.00-14.30 CEST

Language: English-Russian (simultaneous translation to be provided)

Purpose

This joint WTO-FAO Webinar provides a platform for sharing information and opinions on trade policies that seek to address the impacts of COVID-19 in agriculture in Europe and Central Asia. It takes stock and analyzes the different measures that have been implemented, with the aim of supporting an informed dialogue on trade policy at the multilateral level.

Background

Policy makers are grappling with uncertainties surrounding the impacts of COVID-19 on food supply, demand and trade, and identifying the most appropriate measures to ensure that this pandemic does not translate into a food crisis. Nonetheless, “*establishing barriers to trade or disrupting domestic and global food supply chains, as a part of COVID-19 control and mitigation measures, such as import or export bans on particular commodities, should be avoided. Where they are necessary, they should be consistent with WTO rules and be targeted, proportionate, transparent, and temporary.*”¹

The financial situation of the agrifood sector in the region is complicated. FAO has been continuously monitoring the functioning of food supply chains in ECA since April. Despite disruptions of food supply chains, food systems have shown resilience and a major food crisis has so far been averted. However, this

¹ <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/SG-Policy-Brief-on-COVID-Impact-on-Food-Security.pdf>



resilience is being stretched to the limit with what has become a protracted crisis, and the rapid deterioration of the financial situation of food supply chain operators. Governments are under pressure to adopt measures to support agriculture, notably through subsidies, and this pressure will most likely intensify with the expected downturn of the global economy that will put a downward pressure on food commodity prices. Near record production and high stock to use ratios, while encouraging from the point of view of food availability, will exacerbate the fall. Clearly, not all Governments are willing, able or capable of supporting agriculture, and when measures are adopted, they vary greatly from one country to another. Support, will therefore also depend also on the capacity of governments to transfer resources to agriculture from other sectors of the economy, and on the policy space that is available to countries once bilateral and multilateral commitments, including the WTO, have been taken into account. There is also a risk of subsidy competition that those with smaller treasuries are unlikely to win. It is noted that countries in the ECA region are parties of a multitude of bilateral and plurilateral trade agreements, while the majority of them are also members of the WTO.

A series of measures were adopted in the region and elsewhere, in response to COVID-19, many of which have been short-lived and have been lifted. In this context, some of the countries and/or economic communities in the region opted for domestic support measures by providing subsidies and hoarding stocks. The event will discuss the significance of trade in the region and the impact that different types of domestic support measures may have on trade in ECA, in particular as the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic raises questions about the significance of trade vis-à-vis self-sufficiency strategies.

Key Issues to be discussed during the webinar

- 1) Trade and domestic support measures implemented this year (of COVID-19), the problems these attempted to address, and their effectiveness.
- 2) The role of trade policy for tackling short-term impacts (i.e. coping with COVID-19) vs. long-term objectives (building back better the agriculture sector through trade).

Speakers:

- **WTO:** Ambassador Gloria Abraham Peralta, Chair of the WTO Agricultural Trade Negotiations
- **FAO:** Dr. Maximo Torero, Chief Economist
- **Government officials:** TBD (from Europe and Central Asia)
- **Academia:** Dr. Alan Matthews, Professor Emeritus of European Agricultural Policy in the Department of Economics, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

Target audience:

National stakeholders, including public and private sector, International Organizations, CSOs and academia in Europe and Central Asia region.