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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations
Subject: Current practices related to the marketing of frozen products
- Information from the Croatian delegation

Delegations will find in Annex a note from the Croatian delegation on the above mentioned subject which will be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Council meeting ("Agriculture and Fisheries") on 30 May 2023.

Current practices related to the marketing of frozen products*Information from the Croatian delegation*

The issue of the competitiveness of agricultural producers in the EU today is more important than ever. Current crisis, provoked by the Russian aggression on Ukraine as well as cross-border animal diseases like African Swine Fever or Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza cause significant market disturbances in agriculture, meat being one that is particularly affected. In this situation, any initiative leading to strengthening the position of our farmers on the single European market is more than welcome. We must also take account of our consumers, for whom the access to safe, high-quality food at reasonable prices was and will stay a priority.

The Republic of Croatia believes that we must pay special attention to the quality of products of animal origin, especially meat, regardless of whether they are fresh or frozen. For a long time, there has been a great concern among the public and among our consumers regarding the shelf life of frozen products of animal origin. Food business operators evaluate certain food safety and quality criteria themselves and, in this way, confirm that the product maintains the required level of safety. The fact is that there is no uniform practice on the common European market related to the maximum shelf life of frozen products, and Member States establish non-binding recommendations to operators in the food business. Such uneven practice leads to different approaches by operators, including retail chains. Legal doubts also exist among the competent authorities of the Member States as to how the maximum deadlines should be determined at the national level, after which frozen products must be withdrawn from the market. In this sense, it would be essential to have binding rules that would apply to all products that are placed on the common EU market.

It is of crucial importance for our consumers to have full and comprehensive information about the food they purchased. Therefore, new and innovative digital solutions aimed to inform buyers could be significant improvement as simple, user-friendly and cost-effective tool for all actors in the chain, including operators in food business.

The Croatian Parliament has recently proposed to the European Commission that appropriate activities should be undertaken to regulate the issue of shelf life of frozen meat. In this way, the position and competitiveness of European agricultural consumers would be strengthened, as the placing on the market of products that have been frozen for a long time in European stores would be reduced.

We believe that this proposal, which is fully in line with the objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy, and the Farm to Fork Strategy, should be supported. We invite the Commission to consider the proposal.
