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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Need to support agricultural sectors affected by recent frost events - <i>Information from the Greek delegation, on behalf of the French, Greek and Italian delegations</i>

Delegations will find in Annex a declaration by France, Greece and Italy on the above subject, concerning an item under "Any other business" at the Council ("Agriculture and Fisheries") on 26-27 May 2021.

Declaration by France, Greece and Italy on the need to support agricultural sectors affected by recent frost events

During the last week of March and the first of April, after some weeks of mild weather, exceptional frost events occurred in France, Greece and Italy. This adverse combination of factors has tremendous direct and indirect impacts on the agricultural productions in our countries. While the evaluations are not finished yet, the first preliminary estimations show unprecedented damages: this is especially true in the wine, fruits and vegetable sectors. In addition, the damages are expected to have a subsequent significant impact on the processing industry and inevitably on exporting activities.

We deem necessary that the European Union also shows solidarity to the farmers that lost a large part, in some cases the whole part of their crops.

This means that, for the wine sector that was already heavily impacted by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic that aggravated the blow on top of the tariff implemented by the United States. The frost events add one more burden on an already weakened economic sector. This is the reason why we reiterated the need for an exceptional support to this sector.

Moreover, the frost event impacted severely other sectors, in particular the fruits and vegetables, already damaged in the springtime of 2020. We call for the mobilization of article 221 of the single Common market Organization (CMO) Regulation, to alleviate the consequences for the farmers. This article has already been used for exceptional events, for instance in 2018 in the Baltic region: that is a proof that the legal basis for an intervention of the European Union exists and may be used.

National aid will also be needed, to provide swiftly some relief to the farmers. We will need, if necessary, that the Commission rapidly enable us to provide that help, should it be through article 221 of single CMO or state aid schemes.

While these and similar events, directly linked with climate change, are expected to challenge the agricultural sector more often and more intensively in the near future, we urgently need to discuss on a European level viable and future-proof mechanisms to better protect and support our farmers and producers.

In this context, an interesting solution to strengthen risk management tools could be the proposed amendment to Article 70 (8), which aims to enable those Member States that wish to do so to target a small share of direct payments available to each Member State, to create a safety net for all agricultural holdings, in the face of catastrophic events such as those that affected many European regions last April.

The farmers in the areas damaged by the frost event, that already took a heavy toll on the agricultural sector in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, need substantial relief. They took their part during the pandemic, ensuring the food supply of the European citizen through tough times. Now it is time to show solidarity to them and that the European Union stands with them to face this adverse event.
