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European Union

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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Council

Subject: Severe drought situation in Cyprus
- Information from the Cypriot delegation

With a view to an 'Any other business' item at the Council ('Agriculture and Fisheries') on 27 May 2024, delegations will find in the Annex a note from the Cypriot delegation on the above-mentioned subject.

Severe drought situation in Cyprus
Information from the Cypriot delegation

Adverse climatic conditions have significantly undermined the EU's food production capacity, environmental sustainability, social stability, economic resilience, and the vitality of rural areas. The increasing prevalence of droughts and the accelerating impacts of climate change are driving desertification across various EU regions and Member States.

This trend severely impairs their ability to tackle current and future challenges, making it increasingly difficult to achieve anticipated climate goals. In addition, according with the recent “Qualitative assessment of food supply and food security in the EU within the framework of the EFSCM”¹, one of the main reasons jeopardizing EU food supply for year 2023 and 2024, is the impact of extreme weather events.

The hydrological year of 2023/2024 has posed significant challenges for Cyprus, particularly impacting the agricultural sector. The country has experienced a substantial shortfall in rainfall, which has adversely affected food production, environmental sustainability, and the resilience of rural areas.

Water deficiency has severely impacted agricultural production in Cyprus. For cereals, which occupy a significant portion of arable land, irregular and limited rainfall, especially during critical growth stages, has been detrimental to yields. Consequently, farmers have been compelled to shift to fodder production to mitigate losses. Additionally, abnormal rainfall in April caused extensive damage to both standing and harvested crops.

Vineyards and non-irrigated tree crops, heavily reliant on rainfall, also face similar challenges, and uncertainty on expected yields, since rainfall levels are hovering at around 69% of the expected amount.

¹ https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/document/download/a91b3841-6021-489e-b877-7f0f5278c88c_en?filename=efscm-assessment-spring-2024_en.pdf

Although Cyprus has heavily invested during the last 50 years in water preservation infrastructure, declining precipitation has reduced the stored water balance in dams and reservoirs to 44,1% of total capacity, compared to 67,2% at the same time last year, amplifying concerns. Water scarcity looms large, with impending restrictions likely to exacerbate the challenges faced by farmers, especially those reliant on irrigation. Following our National Drought Management Plan for 2024, irrigation should be reduced by 33,7% compared to the previous year's consumption.

The ramifications extend beyond immediate agricultural concerns, as below-average rainfall increases the possibility of forest fire outbreaks in Cyprus's forested areas.

In view of the exceptional circumstances described above, Cyprus invites the European Commission to specify the measures it envisages to deal with this problem. The spectre of land abandonment, soil erosion and desertification underscore the urgency of concerted action, to safeguard agricultural livelihoods, food strategic autonomy and the environment.

Cyprus remains committed to monitoring and evaluating the evolving situation, urging flexibility in adapting measures under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), to alleviate the financial strain on farmers and prevent irreversible consequences.
