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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: AOB item for the meeting of the “Agriculture and Fisheries” Council
on 30 March 2026:
Necessary amendments to the automatic safeguard clause in the GSP
Regulation
- Information from Italy, supported by Bulgaria and Hungary

The trilogues on the revision of Regulation (EU) No 978/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council, which establishes a scheme of generalised tariff preferences (GSP), concluded with an agreement that in Article 29c provides for the application of the automatic safeguard clause for rice originating from a beneficiary country when imports exceed, cumulatively and at any time during the calendar year, the yearly import volumes established for each beneficiary country, according to the methodology specified in paragraph 4, by at least 45%.

This methodology establishes that for the calendar year 2027 the import volumes will be determined on the basis of the arithmetic mean of the EU’s annual imports originating in each beneficiary country from 1 January 2015 until 31 December 2024. By 31 December 2027, and subsequently by 31 December of each year, the import volumes of the ten preceding calendar years will be considered, to which the 45% surge is to be added for the application of the automatic safeguard clause.

Based on the agreement reached and the current trend in import growth, it follows that the annual recalculation of the thresholds based on the import data of the last ten years will result in a progressive increase of the thresholds necessary for the application of the automatic safeguard clause.

By way of example, for the year 2027, the safeguard clause is expected to apply to rice originating from Cambodia if EU imports from that country exceed a volume of 313,268 tonnes, calculated by the European Commission on the basis of the annual mean of imports from Cambodia in the period 2015–2024 (216,047 t) with a surge of 45%. For the year 2028, considering that the annual mean of imports from Cambodia for the period January 2016–September 2025 is already 218,766 tonnes, adding 45% would result in a threshold of 317,211 tonnes.

It is evident that the calculation methodology for the activation of the automatic safeguard clause does not adequately protect either the European rice supply chain, which is already in serious crisis, or other products originating from beneficiary countries of the Generalised Scheme of Preferences, such as, by way of example, undenatured ethyl alcohol and sugar.

In the light of the above, it is considered necessary, at the stage of adoption of the final text, to amend Article 29c by extending the application of the automatic safeguard clause to the sectors mentioned above and, in light of the principle of the sliding ten-year reference period, which results in a continuous increase of the baseline levels, the provision of a further percentage increase is not considered admissible.

In this way, actually, the volume of imports would increase from year to year, risking putting European production sectors in crisis. We therefore believe that the calculation methodology for activating the automatic safeguard clause should not be subject to any further surge, certainly not to the extent of 45%, which is totally disproportionate, and that, if it cannot be completely eliminated, we should at least take action to mitigate its effects by making a correction to this percentage surge, which could, at most, be set at 20%.