

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for your invitation to this conference. It is an honour for me to participate and to be given the opportunity to present my views and reflections inspired by my experience in European Parliament.

Let me begin by introducing myself. My name is Janusz Wojciechowski, I am a MEP from Poland, from the Lodz region, located in the central part of Poland. I was elected from the list of Polish People's Party, which is traditionally supported by Polish farmers. In the European Parliament, I work in the Committee of Agriculture and Rural Development. I am one of the three vice-chairmen of this Committee.

Poland is one of the 10 new Member States, and is a country for which agriculture has great importance, from economical, social, and political point of view. Personally, I am not a farmer now, but my parents were farmers and years ago I used to work hard on their farm and I know what it is like to work as a farmer. This day, my brother is taking care of our family farm. The farm is 17 ha in size, which makes it probably very small with respect to Swedish farms. In Poland this is considered medium size.

Returning to the topic of our discussion - I would like to present my general impressions after two and a half years of my experience in European Parliament.

In the beginning of my work in the European Parliament, I expected a hard battle between the interests of farmers in the new Member States and the interests of the agricultural sector in the old Member States. I was surprised as it turned out that such a battle was not the main issue. The main line of conflict is not between the interests of old and new Member States, but between the interests of all European farmers and the interests of the rest of the World. In general, the European farmers share a common interest and should defend it together.

The first common challenge is the political attitude towards agriculture. It does not seem to be good. We often hear opinions that too much money is spent on farmers and the agricultural sector. Over 40% of EU budget is consumed by farmers, who make merely 6% of EU population. This argument is often used to support the proposal to reduce or liquidate CAP, but it is invalid. Yes, the EU does spend 40% of its budget on agriculture, but that is only 0,40% of EU GDP, as the EU budget is one percent of its GDP. Support for farmers is not really required for farmers, as 6% of European population are farmers who produce food, but 100% of population are people who consume food. CAP is absolutely necessary to save food production in Europe. Without support, European agriculture will not be able to effectively compete with the rest of the world. The final result would be the bankruptcy of the European farming and, in the more distant future, an increase in food prices.

There is one crucial issue related to this subject -- food supply safety in Europe. For now, Europe has this safety, but it is being gradually reduced. This is unacceptable. We do not have energy supply safety, we should save our food supply safety. This is a challenge we all share.

Another challenge are market relations with countries outside of Europe. The interest of European agriculture does not have a strong position in WTO negotiations, because the European Commission considers agricultural interest less important than the interest of the industrial sector. The EU Commissioner Mandelson directly expressed this opinion in the Parliament.

My point of view, shared by the majority of members of the Agricultural Committee, is fully against that opinion. Numerous times the Committee has requested the European Commission for stronger defence of the interest of the agricultural sector.

Third important challenge is the increasing strictness of production standards enforced by the EU. Sanitary standards, environmental standards, social standards and animal welfare standards defined by European law are becoming more and more strict. I am not against strict animal welfare standards -- in fact I strongly support it. I believe we should treat animals in a humane manner -- this is a challenge for our civilisation in the 21st century. But we should keep a balance -- strict standards should be enforced on both European producers, as well as producers who export their products to the European market. This idea was expressed last year in a resolution related to animal welfare standards for chicken-broilers farms.

In my opinion, we should establish a simple universal rule: we accept free market, we accept equal competition, but every trader on the European market is obliged to meet the same high standards that are obliging for our producers.

The fourth challenge is defence against dumping. I'd like to present this issue using the example of the situation of soft-fruits sector in Poland. Polish production of soft (also called red) fruits, like berries, strawberries, black currant etc. makes over 60% of all European production. After Poland joined EU, the situation in this sector has been going dramatically worse, especially for strawberries. This was caused by large dumping import from China. The price of strawberries in Poland has dropped below the costs of production. After two years of our (Polish MEPs) pressure on the EU Commission, the special antidumping tax has been put into effect in October this year. This is our biggest success in the Parliament, especially important for Polish producers.

The fifth issue is particularly important for our two countries, Poland and Sweden -- the definition of vodka. Both our countries are interested in the limitation of the definition to alcohol produced from potatoes and cereals. In this case, the Committee of Agriculture has passed the opinion accepting our point of view, but the battle is not yet won in the Committee of Environment and the Committee of Internal Market.

Ladies and Gentlemen! Summarizing, I'd like to say that our first, and most important challenge is to change the political attitude towards agriculture in Europe. The European agriculture, the European farming can hope for a successful future, but people in Europe need to understand that support for agriculture is not the interest of farmers only, but the interest of all European society.