

Copy of ONLINE DISCUSSION ON THE EU AND THE CRISIS OVER FOOD AND FUEL PRICES

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"Now - Interacting with the European Parliament!" - 30 July, Wednesday, 2008 - chat.europe.bg
- participants: European citizens from all Member States. Special guest: Petya Stavreva, MEP (EPP-ED-GERB-BZNS-NS).

We are presenting you a summary of the basic points of the discussion. Its full text is published under the heading "Interactive" in the Bulgarian version of the specialized site parliament.europe.bg.

A lot of the questions posed during the discussion concerned the production of biofuels and the problems in food production caused by it. Petya Stavreva explained that there is a widespread debate in all of the EP Committees concerned with the issue. "We have adopted a Resolution in the Agricultural Committee referring to the increase of food and animal feedingstuff prices. "The proposal is that the limitation of 10% of cultivated lands let to lie fallow becomes irrelevant", the MEP said.

"In fact, world demand has got ahead of world supply. We have to consider also the climate change, as well as the shifting of part of the food production towards biofuel production", Petya Stavreva commented. "In the EP we have discussed a package of measures intended to gain reasonable control over the growing share of biofuels". On the question of "PTS" if, in her opinion, the share of biofuel production in Bulgaria was sufficiently developed, Petya Stavreva answered that, according to a World Bank report, 75% of food prices rise was due to the growing share of fuels produced from bioproducts. She added that there were other views on the subject, as well. "Yes, our country has the potential to produce biofuels, but it is good to take into account the upcoming changes in the Common Agricultural Policy which provide for some restriction of subsidies for such products. Of course, this has not been decided yet, but there are such suggestions", the MEP also said. "When we talk about rapeseed as product for biofuel production, we have to bear in mind something else - today we are talking about promotion of second generation biofuel production", Stavreva answered the question of "Country_folk" referring to the introduction of rapeseed as a mass crop in Bulgaria and the turning of North Bulgaria into a "risky monocrop area". "Please, inform us about the level of readiness of the Ecopetroleum bio-diesel plant in Vidin and about the risk that the whole Northern Bulgaria becomes an area for cultivation of genetically modified rapeseed which can deprive the Bulgarian market of wheat", Country_folk appealed to the MEP. Following the retort of "Country_folk" on the question of "PTS" saying that counting only on Ecopetroleum would mean monopolization of the market, Stavreva summarized that monopoly always presented a danger.

"Country_folk" informed the participants in the online discussion that their municipality was among the first 12 which have called for a "Zone free from genetically modified products". "Now they are trying to convince us that only genetically modified rapeseed is economically beneficial. This is

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the worst experience - my honey, which is free from genetically modified products, is now threatened by this genetically modified rapeseed - probably you know that rapeseed is also a honey-producing crop", the User stressed. The Europe.bg team explained for those unfamiliar with the subject that the rapeseed (*Brassica napus*) is a plant with bright yellow blossoms. It is used mainly for fodder, vegetable oil and bio-diesel production. The great demand for it at the European market and the relatively favorable climatic and soil conditions in Bulgaria define this plant as indispensable in modern grain-growing. It blossoms in Middle and North Bulgaria from around 15 April to 5-10 May i. e. it is a relatively early source for pollen and nectar in large amounts.

Question by "PTS": "At the EU level, political measures were proposed for coping with the world food crisis; what is the situation at home?" Here is Stavreva's opinion: "During their last meeting, the leaders of G-8 discussed this issue again and sent an explicit message - the rise of prices must be put under control. It is another question how this is going to be achieved in practice. The crisis over food prices has many aspects. What is important, however, is that such measures are taken so as to bring prices to normal in a long-term aspect."

An English-speaking participant in the discussion - "joseph_cogen", posed a question: "While globally the prices of energy resources arise, European Union fails to provoke serious debate with its Iranian counterparts. You as a representative of your country, how do you see the further development of the political dialogue between Brussels and Tehran in the perspective of the common policy of the Union for energy diversification? Where is your country within this discourse?". "Joseph_cogen" further explained - "... following its own agenda, every member-state of the EU tries to assure itself with analogue energy contracts, lets assume Italy and France as very good examples. Please, specify the basic points of the Bulgarian energy strategy, where it is noticeable that one can observe two basic "camps" - anti - and pro - Russian, in terms of energy deliveries?". MEP Stavreva gave the following answer: "Bulgaria as EU Member-State takes part in the discussions on energy diversification - we have to take into account the rise of oil prices and the dependency, which Bulgaria currently has, upon gas deliveries from Russia. Bulgaria is trying to play a constructive role in the debates within the EU concerning the gas supplies for Member-States", Stavreva commented further.

On the question in French posed by the User "Julie" - "Till when will the EU shut its eyes before the problems in Russia only because of the country's large oil and gas reserves? If, on the other hand, they conclude an agreement with Russia, wouldn't it free more land for food instead of biofuel production?" - Petya Stavreva answered: "Yes, the relations with Russia are always interesting when it comes to fuel supplies. The EU should have a common policy in this aspect. I think that Europe must not allow monopoly over gas and oil supplies - this would be a dependency." According to Stavreva, the EU should not fall into dependency from Russia, and the release of more lands for food production was not a direct guarantee for lowering their prices.

"PTS" asked: "We have a national strategy for the use of RES but are biofuels having the greatest share?" Stavreva replied that strategies were written all the time in Bulgaria but the question was whether they were facing the reality of the situation. "RES can be very well developed in Bulgaria, we do have conditions but we must act at random as with wind power stations, for instance", she added. The same user posed another question on the same subject - "Are there any State measures planned to encourage Bulgarian manufacturers to export biofuels, the price of which is considerably

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higher than the average?" The MEP commented that the EU was preparing a new regulation concerning the export of biofuels by Member States which also related to Bulgaria. "The EU has a position which, given the present circumstances, provokes widespread debate - it concerns the proposal that by 2020 10 % of the fuel produced for transport should be from renewable energy sources", Stavreva replied.

The official suspension of EU funds under SAPARD and the protests of Bulgarian farmers were also among the most discussed items during the online debate. According to the right-wing MEP, representatives of the Commission's Directorate-General on Agriculture were expecting Bulgaria to issue its Action Plan on SAPARD "but this won't be enough to make them release EU funds under the programme. The EC would like to see if measures on paper actually work in practice" - Stavreva emphasized.