

# Quo Vadis the Common Agricultural Policy amid Tomorrow's Challenges?

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*Abstract: Under the current economic environment, shaped by the widespread consequences of the war in Ukraine, the European Union's agricultural sector and its rural development policy are facing numerous challenges with significant impact on agricultural production, food security and the welfare of the European farmers. This research paper aims to investigate the Common Agricultural Policy's (CAP) response to those challenges in the current financial framework (2023-2027) using a comparative analysis based on the published CAP Strategic Plans (CSP) of the Member States. To this purpose our methodological approach will use a series of indicators selected for highlighting the measures proposed in various Member States to increase food security, to boost sustainable agricultural production and to protect the farmers' income. Our main objective is to illustrate the future of CAP funding using as case study Romania's approved CSP, while presenting the specific measures proposed in this country to support its agricultural sector among the challenges brought for its farmers by the current economic international context.*

*Keywords: Common Agricultural Policy, European Union, CAP Strategic Plan, food security, the war in Ukraine*

*JEL Classification: Q1, Q10, Q13, Q15, Q19*

## 1. Introduction – the war in Ukraine and its consequences for the Common Agricultural Policy

The war in Ukraine became not only a disruptive factor for the international geopolitical stability through the numerous sanctions imposed on the aggressor state (the Russian Federation), but also a major game changer for the evolution of the global value chains. For the purpose of this research, our analysis is limited to highlighting its impact on a specific sector - the European Union (EU)'s agricultural sector through a mixed research design. On the one hand, we will present a comparative analysis of the CSP approved in the EU (between September 2022 and April 2023), and, on the other hand, we will highlight through a case study the challenges that Romania intends to address through its own CSP for protecting its farmers and its agricultural sector in the current international economic turmoil generated by the war in Ukraine.

Presently, there are numerous studies underlying the consequences of the war in Ukraine for the international economic environment (Guenette et al., 2022; Orhan, 2022; Kammer et al., 2022). While many of these studies are related to the sanctions impacts (imposed to Russian Federation) on energy and financial sectors (Žuk & Žuk, 2022; Benton, 2022; Girardone, 2022; Khudaykulova et al., 2022), there are some (Glauben et al., 2022; Chepeliev et al., 2023) depicting the consequences of war for the international trade and for specific economic sectors (such as service, agricultural and even IT).

The war in Ukraine has generated a geopolitical volatile world, where the EU must find the optimum approach to protect its interests while remaining faithful to the preservation of principle of international law (in this case the respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Ukraine). The war in Ukraine's impact for EU's agricultural sector is presently flowing through many channels: higher commodity prices for energy (with impact on agricultural production), disrupted trade and supply chains (for essential inputs such fertilizers) and higher investor uncertainty preventing some farmers to access loans or grants for developing their farms.

As a major game changer the war has shaped also the core interests of EU's largest and most powerful common policy, namely the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). For the EU's agricultural sector the war has brought significant changes that the CAP must now address as many recent studies in the literature have underlined (Détang-Dessendre, 2023; Rabbi et al, 2023; Galanakis, 2023).

It should be noted that while the current financial framework of CAP (2023-2027) must also address the post-pandemic induced vulnerabilities of the EU’s rural areas *we believe that there are three major challenges brought by the war that will significantly shape the future CAP.*

*Firstly*, the war has created a supply shock for agricultural markets. Many agricultural business must now find alternative energy sources if they relied previously on Russian energy imports and hence agricultural and farms production has significantly decreased.

*Secondly*, the calculation of the shock magnitude and effect on upstream production shows the occurrence of cascade effects. Because of the increased energy prices many agricultural products have now higher prices hence leading to a trade deterioration regarding the agricultural products.

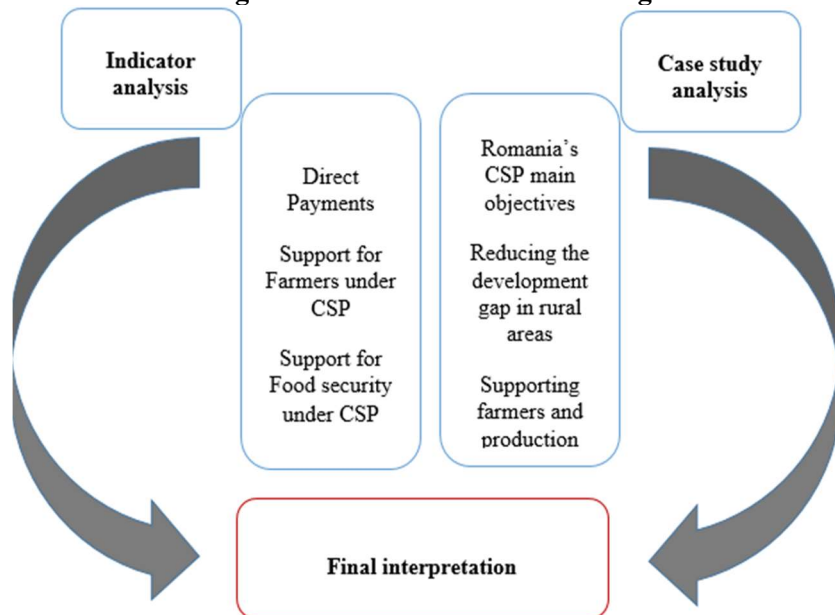
*Thirdly*, the farmers’ incomes have been also severely deteriorated.

In view of all mentioned previously, we believe that while remaining faithful to its green ambitious the future CAP must now take into consideration the new challenges brought by the war in Ukraine in two key fields: food security and famers’ income. Luckily tough thoroughly regulated, as stated by some recent analyses (Hasler et al., 2022), CAP is now also proposing a flexible and adaptive approach (Labarthe & Beck, 2022) through its newest financial tool – the CSP. This tool allows to all the Member States a balanced approach between sustainable rural development and food security while enhancing the support for agricultural production.

## 2. Methodology, objectives and limitation of the current research

Our research design is a mixed one (Figure 1) using a comparative analysis and a case study. The comparative analysis uses the data published by the DG Agriculture and Rural Development regarding the approved CSP of all the Member States during 2022 – 2023. The selected data will be grouped in two categories related to the two pillars of CAP and our analysis aims to depict how the finance has shifted in order to increase production, support for farmers income and food security. The case study relies on Romania’s CSP.

**Figure 1: Embedded research design**



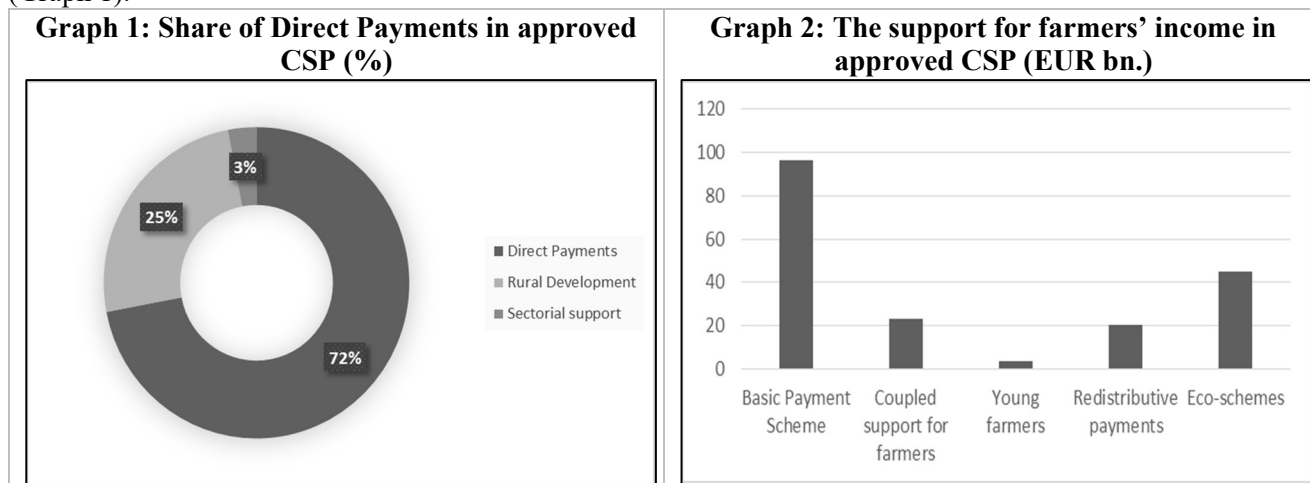
Source: Author representation.

The limitation of the current research is linked to the flexibility of the CSP approach. According with CAP legislative framework, Member States can easily switch funds between the two pillars, hence the published data from current CSP could change amid new crisis or external shocks. According with Commission Delegated Regulation 2023/370 the Member States can amend their CSP in case of emergencies due to natural disasters and catastrophic events without any administrative burden (EC, a, 2023).

## 3. CAP Strategic Plan – a comparative approach across the Member states

According with the most recent data published by DG Agriculture and Rural Development (2023) the first CSP started to be approved on August 2022 and the latest on April 2023. Currently all the Member States

have their plans approved. A comparative analysis of the approved CSP shows a balanced approach between green ambitious and food security objectives. The war in Ukraine has led to an increase interest from the majority of EU countries for production support and farmers' income support. Those two objectives will be financed mostly through the I Pillar using the Direct Payments tool. Funding from the CAP Strategic Plan is carried out from both pillars through the EAGF and EAFRD and must follow the principles of sustainability, but can also be directed towards specific objectives and challenges existing in the rural areas of the Member States. The Direct Payments remain in all the approved CSP the preferred tool for financing agriculture and rural areas across EU (Graph 1).

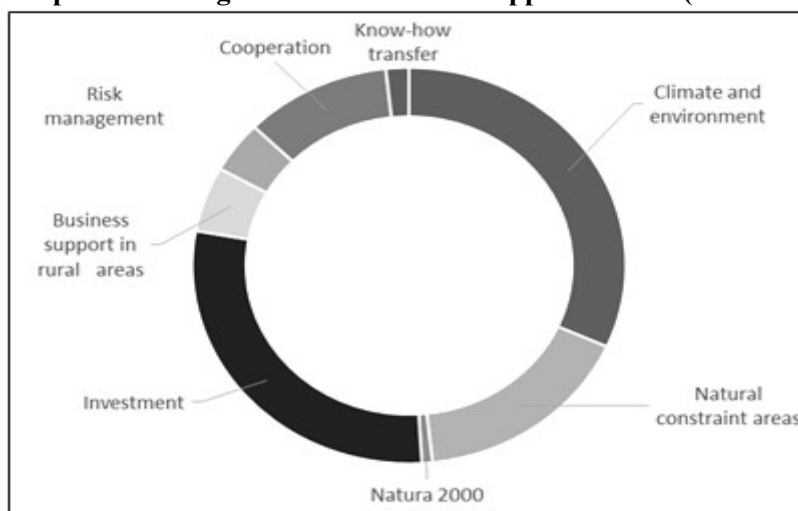


Source: Author based on data published by DG Agriculture and Rural Development, 2023, [https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/cap-my-country/cap-strategic-plans/approved-csp-0\\_en](https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/cap-my-country/cap-strategic-plans/approved-csp-0_en) (2023).

Within Direct Payments, the funding goes to a series of specific objectives such is the basic payment per hectare, couples support, farmers support and eco-schemes (designed to sustain green objectives such as ecological agriculture, organic farming, and grassland preservation).

We may see in Graph 2 that while the support for farmers' income remain important, the Member States have also choose to prioritise the green objectives using eco-schemes. In the second pillar of CAP the majority of funding goes on green objectives hence contributing to a more sustainable rural development, but significant funds are also allocated to investment and know-how to boost the European agricultural production (Graph 3).

**Graph 3: Funding in the II Pillar in all approved CSP (EUR bn.)**



Source: Author based on data published by DG Agriculture and Rural Development, 2023, [https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/cap-my-country/cap-strategic-plans/approved-csp-0\\_en](https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/cap-my-country/cap-strategic-plans/approved-csp-0_en) (2023).

The comparative analysis of all approved CSP shows a mixed approach between a greener CAP and a fairer CAP, all the Member States granting important funds for attracting young farmers in rural areas, reducing farming income gap, but also supporting the green development through eco-schemes (Graph 3).

The approved CSP are also showing an increased interest for increasing the competitiveness of European farms allowing farmers to work together to strengthen their position in the food supply chain. This new approach will include derogations from higher sustainability standards as well as possibilities for supply regulation for foodstuffs with protected geographical names, hence encouraging European agricultural production.

This new paradigm clearly shows that while the green path of CAP remains important, its future is also undeniably linked to a strong support for production, farmers and food security hence delivering one of the first commitments of this common policy: to provide quality food at affordable prices for all the EU's citizens.

The tomorrow's CAP has at its core the interests of EU's farmers, while the income support ranks high in all Member States funding in both pillars. Through the current CAP regulation reducing the income gap become possible firstly through Basic Payment Scheme but also through other types of Direct Payments. Firstly, the Member States may apply up to 85% reductions for amounts exceeding EUR 60,000 applicable to the basic income support received by a single farm. Secondly, Member States may allow the subtraction of farm salary costs - including unpaid (family) work - from the amount of direct support to ensure that farm employment is not unduly affected and thirdly while they may also impose an upper cap on the amount received, at EUR 100,000 any savings from reduction/capping will stay within their national CAP budgets.

As shown by the comparative analysis regarding all approved CSP the Member States prioritized agricultural production and support for farmers' income without jeopardizing the green development objectives. Such a balanced approach was possible due to the new flexible architecture of CAP that enables a funding design according to each state specific challenges and objectives for agriculture and rural areas.

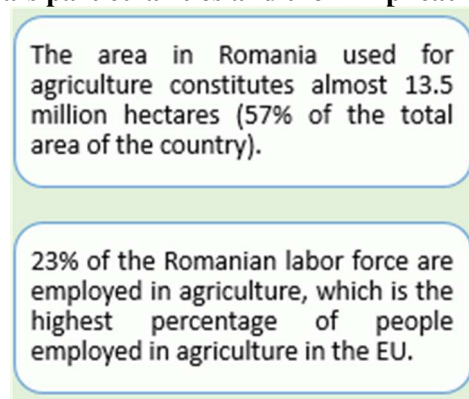
A preliminary assessment of the published CSP also shows an increased support for the fair funding and social cohesion in rural areas. Such objectives are key for a sustainable and equitable development of rural areas across EU especially since the post-pandemic era saw a sharpening of development gaps against the background of certain imbalances that were exacerbated due to the limitations and restrictions imposed during the pandemic period. Even if the rural communities' response to all the post-pandemic challenges shows a strong resilience, new crises such as the one generated by the war in Ukraine require new support measures for EU's agricultural sector.

Some demand-supply imbalances that started during the pandemic are now worsening against the disrupting effects of the war on the global value chains. A recent study published by the European Commission shows that the war in Ukraine continues to impact EU farmers amid uncertainties about energy supply for the next winter and recent financial market tensions. (European Commission, b, 2023). Although fertilisers, especially nitrogen-based ones, could become more available and affordable compared with 2022, the prices are still high compared with the previous situation before the war, hence farmers must adapt by opting for crops with lower fertiliser needs. Financial support for farmers is needed also for countering high input costs and farm income loss.

#### **4. Measures to support the farmers and the agricultural production under CSP – the case of Romania**

The analysis of Romania's CSP shows that in this state where the agricultural activity is still a very large part of the economic activity attracting a large but aging work force (Figure 2) there is a mixed approach for sustainable development and support for national production.

**Figure 2: Romania's particularities and their implication for national CSP**



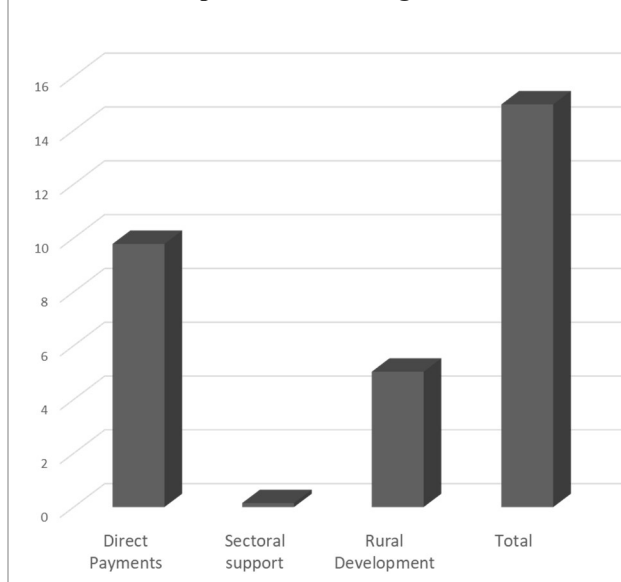
Romania is also one of the countries with the highest share of farmers over 65 years (44.3%).

Source: Author based on Romania's CAP Strategic Plan.

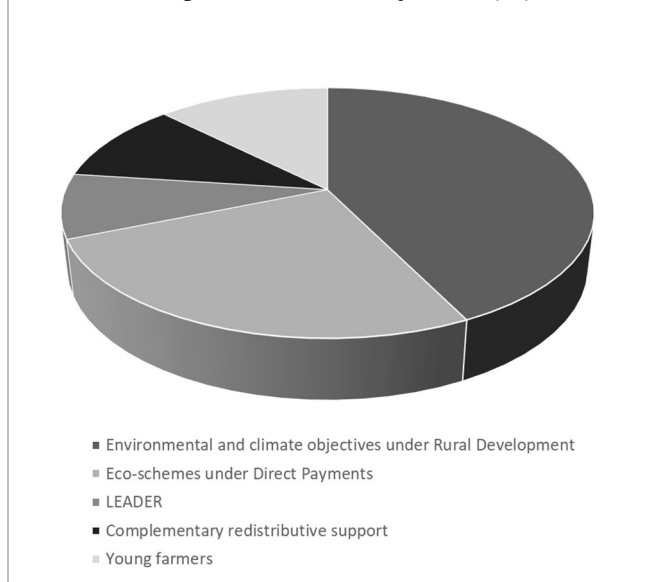
Romania has some vulnerabilities regarding its agricultural sector (aging farmers, lack of significant farm modernization, fragmentation of rural propriety, the large number of subsistence farms), but also opportunities (large fertile land, important workforce). Hence Romania's Plan aims to address these challenges through targeted measures to support both rural development and agricultural production. Some studies (Stângă et al., 2012; Filimon et al., 2024) have underlined that any strategic approach concerning the fair and sustainable development of Romania's rural areas should focus on boosting the competitive and green agriculture while also encouraging the diversification of rural economic activities (e.g. rural tourism, rural business based on traditional crafts).

The strategic objectives of Romania's Plan are to develop through Direct Payments a resilient and sustainable agricultural sector by increasing the economic viability of farms, reducing income disparities between farms and increasing the market orientation and competitiveness of the agricultural sector as a whole (see Graph 4). The plan will also support farmers who contribute to protecting the environment, increasing the welfare of farm animals and ensuring a coherent socio-economic development of rural areas (Graph 5).

**Graph 4: CSP funding EUR bn.**



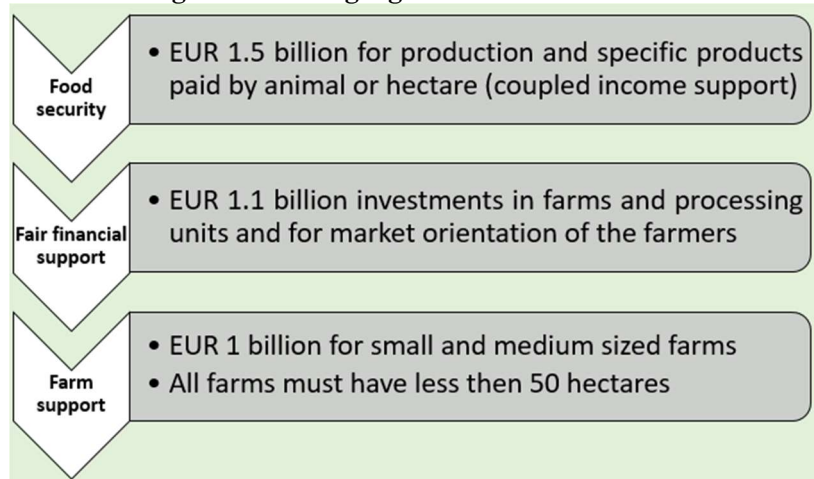
**Graph 5: CSP main objectives (%)**



Source: Author based on Romania's CSP.

According with the amounts allocated in Romania's CSP for the major objectives we may see a balanced approach between food security and farm support (Figure 3). The farm support is vital for increasing both the agricultural production and reducing farmers' income gap at national level, while granting funds for young farmers could help mitigate the challenges created by the ageing population trend in Romania's rural areas. As some studies have revealed (Kulcsár & Brădăţan, 2014) creating financial opportunities for young farmers could be a solution to reduce the negative impact of the ageing population on rural community well-being while also improving the social cohesion in rural areas of Romania. Preserving food security amid current geopolitical turmoil represents also a strategic objective in national CSP (Figure 3). Such approach is all the more justified since, as recent studies (Sohag et al., 2022) have shown the Russia – Ukraine war has impacted both food prices and food security in neighbouring countries and at global level. Moreover, while the war in Ukraine unfolds without any hope for a potential end in the near future, farmers must be protected against some of its major consequences such as increased energy prices, lack of fertilizers, disruption of logistics and food supply chains, access to agricultural inputs (Jagtap et al., 2022).

**Figure 3: Strategic goals in Romania's CSP**



Source: Author based on Romania's CAP Strategic Plan.

Through its CSP Romania will allocate important funds for green development in its rural areas. According to its CSP 25% of the Direct Payments will go to the eco-schemes, which represent incentives to farmers that go beyond the legal requirements or usual practice in terms of climate and environment.

Significant support (41% of the rural development budget) will also be used to encourage environmentally friendly practices for areas with high natural value, for example areas that are important for the life of birds and butterflies. Annually, farmers are expected to apply these practices on 611,000 hectares of land. Moreover Romania's Plan will support the creation of more than 12,000 jobs in rural areas. Entrepreneurship in rural areas will be promoted through support for farmers that want to diversify their activities (also through non-agricultural activities). LEADER, which is a community-led local development approach bringing together public, private and civil-society stakeholders to find shared solutions for rural areas, is one of the key interventions of the Plan.

In this framework, 206 local development strategies will be put in place (with a support of EUR 500 million), reaching 86% of the rural population.

Considering the size of the livestock sector in Romania, the CSP sets very ambitious targets for the improvement of animal welfare. The support will concern the rearing of pigs, poultry, laying hens and reproductive hens, milking cows and calves with funding up to EUR 884 million for all the dedicated interventions under eco-schemes and rural development measures.

Almost 5 million livestock units will benefit from enhanced animal welfare standards, such as increasing the space of animals in stables, providing better bedding materials and increasing the quality of air.

The analysis of financial allocations in Romania's CSP highlight a fair and equitable distribution of funds (see Figure 3). The Plan is designed not only to accelerate the transition to a sustainable and resilient agricultural sector but also to fairly distribute funds for small farms and young farmers. Romania's CSP also support farmers to adopt innovation from precision farming to agro-ecological products. Through its proposed measures Romania's CSP may become a cornerstone for food security and for farming communities.

However, as shown by the European Commission's observation letter concerning Romania's CSP (European Commission, b, 2023) the support for climate ambitions could be increased while the fairer distribution of Direct Payments (especially from bigger to smaller and medium-size farms, possibly through the use of capping) could also be improved.

Also there is still need for increase funding for organic farming while only 3.53% of the Utilised Agricultural Areas (UAA) is allocated to this objective according with Romania's CSP.

While Romania's commitment to increase its green architecture in the CSP could increase, the European Commission's evaluation shows that Romania should aim at a closer fit of LEADER (the community-led local development) with the identified needs of socio-economic fabric of rural areas.

The evaluation of Romania's CSP also shows that while the animal welfare interventions under both pillars cover a wide range of species with an ambitious target in number and budget there is still need for improvement especially since many objectives are too generic. Romania could also include specific interventions and detailed actions to address the need to increase biosecurity in the entire animal sector, in particular in small

and medium commercial farms (for instance increased control actions for the prevention, control, and eradication of African swine fever (ASF)).

Also another vulnerability of Romania's CSP is the lack of a strategy for better supporting the digitalisation in farming and rural areas. Some studies (Ilie et al., 2022) have highlighted that the smart village could be the answer for many of the rural areas vulnerabilities related to economic growth and employment. While the local initiatives could bring significant progress in the field of digitalisation in farming and rural economic activities, it should be noted that the lack of a national coordinated approach prevents reaching the real development potential in this field (Matei & Iordache, 2016).

Finally, we believe that a comprehensive rural development strategy should address all the current challenges (the existing imbalances on cereal market caused by the war in Ukraine), but without abdicating from the *no-backsliding principle* related to the green ambitions of the CAP. As the war in Ukraine poses significant challenges for agricultural trade and food security (Ben & El Bilali, 2022), Romanian authorities must find the best solutions for protecting the national agricultural production while supporting Ukraine's just cause (currently Romania is allowing only the transit but not the import of wheat, corn, sunflower and rape originating in Ukraine).

The rural areas may bring a huge potential for Romania's future economic growth while the flexible approach facilitated by the EU's regulations on the CSP presents significant opportunities for an equitable and green national agenda for agriculture and rural development.

## 5. Conclusion

The war in Ukraine was definitively a game changer not only for the geopolitical framework but also for the economic strategies in EU and in all Member States. CAP has also shifted its approach to better support the EU's agriculture and the European farmers through the current economic turmoil.

Our main finding is that the war in Ukraine has underlined the importance of preserving food security and stable value chains for the agricultural products hence many Member States have designed their CSP accordingly, providing specific support for production, young farmers and small farms.

Our second finding is that, in Romania's case the new CAP bring important opportunities for the long term development of its agricultural sector and rural areas. While pursuing the important objective of greening its rural policies, Romania may also grant significant support to young farmers and small farms while targeting a fairer and socially sustainable incentive policy for its rural areas. Romania's approved CSP aims to increase the profitability of the agricultural sector (that is lower compared with other MS) by increasing farms' profitability, productivity, market orientation and encouraging younger generations to take up agricultural activities.

Also, the analysis of Romania's strategic objectives for 2023-2027 is showing that the CSP is targeting the development of a resilient and sustainable agricultural sector by increasing the economic viability of farms, reducing income disparities between farms and increasing the market orientation and competitiveness of the agricultural sector as a whole. Romania's CSP will also support farmers who contribute to protecting the environment, increasing the welfare of farm animals and ensuring a coherent socio-economic development of rural areas, hence contributing to the broader green ambitions of CAP in the current financial framework.

The future of CAP funding in Romania will be shaped by the green ambitions and food security desiderates, while significant challenges remains due to the dual structural character of agricultural holdings in Romania (where an extremely high number of small farms coexist, with large competitive farms). In our opinion some targets regarding the green ambitions could be improved, while specific measures and interventions may be added in the animal welfare sector. While Romania's CSP aims to contribute effectively to the strengthening of the socio-economic fabric of rural areas, there is not very clear how this objective may be achieved while the proposed measures are targeting only partially the identified needs of rural areas. The flexibility of the new CAP will most likely allow a better tailored approach in the following years while Romanian authorities could improve some of the initial measures of the CSP.

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