

Dubious claims on the SUR undermine serious political debate on pesticide reduction



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The discussion of the EP rapporteur MEP Sarah Wiener's report in the European Parliament's ENVI Committee on March 2 2023, served as the basis for this fact check. The 'arguments' in the transcripts of the speeches by nine MEPs (six EPP, two ECR and one ID representative) who spoke negatively on the Wiener-report or the SUR-targets in general, were systematically analysed on content. The fact check shows that where these political claims were done without supporting facts, they can mostly be dismissed as not backed by, or outright contradicted, by scientific facts or research. Even in those cases where MEPs do mention 'supporting evidence' this is mostly done in a selective, and sometimes in a sloppy or even manipulative manner, for example by not quoting studies and figures correctly.

The top-3 of the most frequently cited and now debunked arguments against pesticide reduction (SUR proposal):

1. The (presumed) threat to food security (14 mentions);
2. Doubts about the ecological benefits (9 mentions);
3. Rejection of measures in sensitive areas (8 mentions);

On argument 1:

There is little evidence to support the narrative that reducing pesticides and greening agriculture threatens food security. On the other hand, there is a broad scientific consensus that, given the environmental emissions of nitrogen, greenhouse gases and pesticides, sticking to the current input-intensive agricultural system would contribute significantly to exceeding planetary boundaries and threaten food production. For these reasons most statements under scrutiny were factually incorrect and / or misleading.

On argument 2:

Many statements and examples given by MEPs could give the impression that agroecological practices, organic farming and / or the natural pesticides that may be applied there, have comparable negative impacts on health and the environment as their conventional counterparts. . This is not the case, which is why such statements are misleading. The available scientific literature provides little evidence of a relevant contribution of "organic" pesticides to the adverse effects of pesticides on ecosystems, pollinating insects, and other non-target organisms, or on acute and chronic health effects in humans. Moreover, in the specific case, none of the examples given in the present parliamentary debate to support claimed ecological advantages of conventional agriculture stood up to our fact-check. The examples given were either misleading or clearly contradicted the facts.

On argument 3:

Although the issue of sensitive areas has been one of the most hotly debated topics in the public debate on the SUR in recent months, the speeches by SUR critics did demonstrate a disinterest in or ignorance of the facts. The political statements make the political debate blurry, as it was not clear whether the criticism was directed against the original Commission's "total ban" (which no one is defending anymore), against Sarah Wiener's proposal or against something else.

The organisers of the successful ECI 'Save Bees and Farmers' point out that the vast majority of European citizens are in favour of significantly reducing pesticide use. These people expect and deserve that politicians deal with this issue responsibly and in recognition of the scientific facts. Using misleading and incorrect arguments in such a crucial political debate, is blocking constructive policy change and undermining the trust of citizens in the EU democratic process.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	02
Argument No. 1: "Pesticide reduction jeopardises food security".....	04
Argument No. 2: "Ecological benefit from SUR is doubtful".....	08
Argument No. 3: "Total ban" in sensitive areas.....	11
Argument No. 4: "Higher food prices".....	13
Argument No. 5: "High dependency on imports".....	15
Argument No. 6: "Impact assessment missing".....	15
Concluding Remarks.....	17
Annex: MEP Interventions subjected to the Argument & Fact Check.....	18

INTRODUCTION

The Sustainable use of pesticides proposal and, in particular, its pesticide reduction targets which the EU Commission wants to make legally binding for all member states, are being fiercely attacked by parts of the Council and the European Parliament.

Hopes that the presentation of Sarah Wiener's report in the European Parliament's ENVI Committee on March 2 - a report that amended the most heavily criticised points of the Commission's proposal - could appease the critics remained unfulfilled. The statements of the EPP shadow rapporteur Alexander Bernhuber ("we would have liked the Commission to withdraw the proposal"), of the ID shadow rapporteur Sylvia Limmer ("Mrs Wiener's proposal is out of touch with reality") and the ECR shadow rapporteur Alexandr Vondra ("the proposal is totally unacceptable") unfortunately left no doubt about this.

The arguments of the nine MEP (six EPP, two ECR and one ID representative) who spoke negatively on the report and / or the EU pesticide reduction targets in general were not new: With 14 mentions, the most frequently cited argument was the (presumed) **threat to food security**, followed by **doubts about the ecological benefits** of pesticide reduction (9 mentions); **rejection of measures in sensitive areas** (8 mentions), **warnings about higher food prices** (6 mentions) or **dependence on imports** (5 mentions). Insufficient or **outstanding impact assessments** were cited four times; twice, **bureaucratic effort** and once, unfair **reduction targets**. This was the result of a systematic analysis of the [transcripts](#) of the speeches, which can be viewed [here](#) (from 09:23 to 10:13)

In total, we identified 56 passages in the nine Conservative MPs' speeches analysed where arguments against the SUR were made. In many cases these arguments were redundant and therefore were clustered for this analysis. In those (predominant) cases in which the arguments were put forward without supporting them with concrete facts, we carried out a general evaluation of the arguments. In those cases in which an argument was supported by concrete figures, studies or other sources, these were subjected to a fact check.

ARGUMENT NO. 1: “PESTICIDE REDUCTION JEOPARDISES FOOD SECURITY”

With a total of 14 mentions in the 9 statements analysed here, the (alleged) **threat to food security** posed by the EU pesticide reduction plans was by far the most frequently mentioned argument.

This finding is not surprising. After all, the food security argument has dominated the political discourse around the F2F strategy and especially the SUR like no other since the announcement of the pesticide reduction plans. Initially, it was the pandemic that was used to justify why „now was not the right time“ for such measures; since February 2022, it has been the war in Ukraine.

With the narrative that **pesticide reduction would endanger food security**, the opponents of binding reduction targets managed a remarkable **reversal of the discourse**.

After all, the preservation of biodiversity, which in turn is a central basis for food security, is among the main goals of the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies (and the pesticide reduction targets they contain). And that “accelerating biodiversity loss seriously threatens food security” has been a broad scientific consensus at least since the publication of the [FAO report](#), “State of the World’s Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture” in February 2019.

The public outcry and criticism from the scientific community (see: [Potsdam Statement](#)) was therefore very clear when, in March 2022, some politicians from the member states and the European Parliament used the war in Ukraine as an opportunity to point at supposed food shortages and to demand the suspension of ecological measures from the Common Agricultural Policy and the postponement of the publication of the SUR scheduled for 23 March 2022 (with success). A second outcry from the scientific community (see: [letter from 730 scientists](#)) followed after [some](#) Member States, arguing again based on war and food security, called for a “complementary impact assessment” for the SUR in December of the same year (again with success).

In the ENVI Committee discussion under review, seven of the nine MEP’ statements analysed here referred to the topic of “food security”. In some cases, scaremongering scenarios such as “abolition of agriculture” (ID shadow rapporteur Limmer), “hunger”, “social unrest”, “destruction of the Amazon rainforest” (ECR shadow rapporteur Vondra) were put forward. The EPP shadow rapporteur, Alexander Bernhuber, referred to the topic most frequently. In his two-and-a-half-minute statement, he uses the term “European food security” three times and places it in the context of the “war in Ukraine” (also three mentions). Bernhuber attempts (as the only one) to substantiate the alleged threat to European food security as a result of pesticide reduction with a study. In doing so, he refers to a study that was commissioned by the pesticide industry that would confirm, according to Bernhuber, “a 20% decline in food production”. However, this claim does not stand up to scrutiny (see below: fact check box). The EPP coordinator in the ENVI Committee, Peter Liese, on the other hand, raises the issue of food security without actually mentioning the term itself, [echoing](#) earlier statements that the Ukraine crisis necessitates a postponement of the F2F strategy and its measures by stating “we are not convinced that now is the right time for such a proposal”.

So what is behind this argumentation used by opponents of binding reduction targets and restrictions on pesticide use to stall the legislative process for the SUR?

In the following paragraphs, we want to analyse the different aspects behind the argument of a possible threat to food security by the EU pesticide reduction targets or by the war in Ukraine in the sense of an **argument check**.

Since the possible influence of pesticide reduction and that of the war in Ukraine are independent of each other, we have considered them separately:

Assumption 1: “Halving the use and risk of pesticides by 2030 will lead to yield losses that endanger food security”.

Leaving aside the “impact assessments” commissioned by the pesticide industry, farmers’ associations and third countries, one study in particular has been at the centre of the political discourse on food security in the last two years: The study by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the EU Commission.

This study, which is also referred to as the **Commission’s impact assessment**, is modelling the environmental and socio-economic impacts of four selected quantitative F2F targets, namely pesticide reduction (- 50%), reduction of nutrient surpluses (- 50%), increase in organic farming area (25%) and increase in biodiversity areas (10%). Thus, the study approach is clearly **exceeding the scope of the SUR** alone, which includes achieving the 50% EU-pesticide reduction target and a relevant contribution to the expansion of organic agriculture (if farmers in sensitive areas go organic until 2030).

The JRC modelling across all four F2F targets shows “**significant environmental improvements**” but also **yield losses of up to 15%**. However, the study authors acknowledge that due to “limitations of the modelling approach used”, the calculated yield losses (of up to 15 %) should be understood as an “upper bound”, as expected positive effects on yields through improved biodiversity were not taken into account with the modelling approach used. Therefore, the present modelling “should by no means be understood as a final guidance for decisions or political processes”, the authors state.

In fact, one of the major weaknesses of the JRC study is that it did not take into account the scientifically well-documented yield-enhancing effects through an increase in pollination performance ([Samnegard et al. 2019](#), [Pecenka et al. 2021](#)), improvement in soil health and fertility ([Van Groeningen et al. 2014](#), [Gunstone et al. 2021](#)), as well as through increased resilience (Pisa et al., 2021; Isbell et al. 2011; Worm et al. 2006) to disturbances like increasing pest pressure or extreme weather events, as the authors themselves acknowledge. Regenerative soil-building practices and soil restoration are also associated with enhancements of nutrient densities of plants ([Montgomery et al. 2022](#)).

Another major weakness, in our view, is that the yield-reducing effects of a 50% pesticide reduction are grossly overestimated. The JRC modelling operates with a worst-case scenario, which calculates an average yield reduction of 10% for pesticide reduction alone across all cereals, oilseeds, vegetables, other arable crops and permanent crops grown in the EU, while ignoring the scientifically well-documented ([Bredeson and Lundgren 2015](#), [Furlan and Kreutweizer 2015](#), [Lechenet et al. 2017](#)) potential to reduce pesticides without having a significant impact on yields, as well as the recently presented findings from the EU-SPRINT project, according to which pesticides are currently being dosed on average 23 % above the specified maximum hectare application rates. Moreover, different studies point out the potential for increased profitability of farming systems through implementation of agroecological and IPM practices ([van der Ploeg et al. 2019](#)).

Also not considered in the JRC modelling, as the authors acknowledge, are the expected positive effects of the Organic Action Plan on yields and marketing, as well as initiatives to strengthen the position of farmers in the value chain and, last but not least, effects from demand-side initiatives of the F2F strategy, such as the reduction of food waste and the shift in diet towards more plant and less animal protein - a shift that is already well advanced, especially among the younger generation.

Since all of the above aspects are expected to have positive socio-economic impacts, and are not currently reflected in the JRC modelling, it can be assumed that the actual impacts of the F2F measures on crop yields (but also on farm incomes, food prices and dependence in imports) will be significantly more favourable than the bare figures of the JRC study indicate.

Assumption 2: “The war in Ukraine endangers European food security”

It's a fact that the war in Ukraine has sent shock waves through international grain markets, which have been further amplified by [speculation](#) on the stock market. Moreover, as long as Russian aggression continues, there will be no certainty as to whether and to what extent grain exports from Ukraine to the EU and other parts of the world will be possible.

In the European Union, however, there is no threat to food security due to the war in Ukraine, and there never has been ([link](#)). EU countries bordering Ukraine had in the past not nearly exhausted their grain cultivation potentials, which they could not compete on price with imports from Ukraine.

The report 'No Time to Waste', estimates that the EU wastes 153.5 million tonnes of food each year, much more than it imports. The amount of wheat wasted in the EU alone is equal to [roughly half](#) of Ukraine's wheat exports, and a quarter of the EU's other grain exports. Halving EU food waste by 2030 could save 4.7 million hectares of agricultural land ([link](#))

In addition, enormous reserves for covering the demand for food result from the fact alone that only 28 % of arable land in the EU is used directly for human consumption. More than half (56%) is used for the production of animal feed, and 7% for biofuels, [according](#) to the Commission.

As noted above, the only MEP who not only made the claim of a threat to food security posed by the EU's pesticide reduction plans, but tied it to a source that can be subjected to a fact check, was EPP shadow rapporteur Alexander Bernhuber.

FACT CHECK BOX

Claim: “The University of Wageningen has confirmed that it will lead to a 20% decrease in food production” ([Alexander Bernhuber](#), 09:30:51)

Fact Check:

The study to which the EPP shadow rapporteur referred in his statement is probably, the publication of Bremmer et al. 2021, that was commissioned and paid for by CropLife Europe and CropLife International. It was one of six “impact assessments” commissioned by the pesticide industry, big farming associations, and the US Department of Commerce, that were used in autumn 2021 to influence the vote in the European Parliament on the Farm to Fork strategy. The aim was to ensure that the Farm to Fork targets would not be supported by a majority in parliament, as research by Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) based on a leaked policy paper from the industry lobby and access to document requests had revealed ([link](#)).

This industry-funded study has major flaws and limitations. But Bernhuber MEP even exaggerated and wrongly cited the conclusions of the Wageningen study. In his speech he claimed that the study proves that the 50% pesticide reduction target will lead to a 20% decline in food production.

However:

(1) The press release by the Wageningen University refers to a “10-20%” decline in a worst-case scenario, not 20% across the board.

(2) That 10-20% scenario applies when not only a 50% pesticide reduction is introduced but also a reduction in fertiliser use, plus leaving 10% of agricultural land for nature.

(3) It talks about a “probable” decline in yield, not a certain one. That term was used, according to the study’s author Johan Bremmer, precisely because they hadn’t “included all relevant elements that will contribute to an estimation of the impacts”.

Jeroen Candel, sustainable food systems expert also at Wageningen University, commented in Nature Food, that Bremmer’s study ignores the primary objectives of the Farm to Fork Strategy, which are to reduce negative impacts on the environment, climate and public health. He pointed out how the WUR and other industry-funded studies were used as communication tools in the pesticide industry campaign: “Even when the studies themselves are relatively nuanced and explicit about their limitations, one cannot escape the bold headlines and political positioning for which their outcomes have been used, delegitimizing the Farm to Fork Strategy’s sustainability objectives”.

Conclusion: The above statement by Alexander Bernhuber is factually incorrect and highly misleading.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Although the F2F Strategy with its pesticide reduction targets is aimed at restoring and conserving the biodiversity that underpins the future of our food and livelihoods, proponents of the industrial agricultural model frame it as a major threat to food security. In this way, the opponents of pesticide reduction achieved a remarkable reversal of the discourse. There is little evidence to support this narrative, but there is a broad scientific consensus that sticking to the current agricultural system with its emissions of greenhouse gases, nitrogen and pesticides would contribute significantly to [exceeding](#) planetary boundaries.

ARGUMENT NO. 2: "ECOLOGICAL BENEFIT FROM SUR IS DOUBTFUL"

With a total of nine mentions in the nine MEP interventions analysed here, claims about a lack of ecological benefit or even ecological disadvantages as a result of pesticide reduction were the second most frequently used argument.

Unlike the argument of a negative impact of pesticide reduction on food security ("Argument No. 1"), which was mostly made without any attempt at factual substantiation (and does not stand up to our argument check; see above), the argument of ecological disadvantages of pesticide reduction - or a lack of necessity for the same - was often presented indirectly by means of concrete, sometimes plausible "examples". These include statements that deny the ecological advantages of organic farming (or organic plant protection) over conventional methods and means, such as: "natural does not mean non-toxic", "Organic farmers also use pesticides", "Organic pesticides are (also) extremely toxic to bees", "Organic agriculture is worse for birds than conventional ..." And it includes the narrative that conventional agriculture is far better than its reputation, how else can you explain for example the "great bird diversity in the conventionally managed protected area Hellwegbörde", or that there have been "no mass deaths of bees" in Slovenia in two decades". Another claim is that pesticide reduction in the EU leads to environmental destruction in third countries (e.g. deforestation of the Amazon rainforest). Such examples, if described in sufficient detail, can be subjected to a fact check (see box below).

But before we start checking those claims, we would like to offer a few thoughts on the reasoning behind them. There is no question that if you compare conventional "best practice" examples with organic "worst practice" examples, you'll have a good chance of identifying specific cases where conventional practice performs better than organic practice. However, it is neither wise nor serious to use such individual examples as a basis for generalisations or as a guideline for far-reaching decisions.

This applies in particular to examples suggesting that the use of natural pesticides permitted in organic farming (if other measures are not sufficient) is comparable **in terms of frequency and toxicity** to the use of synthetic pesticides in conventional farming. Such statements can be clearly refuted by a systematic comparison of the approved active substances ([Burtscher-Schaden et al.](#)). And there is a high degree of scientific consensus that organic farming, by basing its fertilisation on closed-loop production, by not using chemical fertilisers and synthetic pesticides, releases significantly fewer greenhouse gases, less phosphorus and less nitrogen (and, of course, no synthetic pesticides) into the environment, thus significantly reducing the toxic burden on ecosystems.

This is in line with findings from the scientific literature, global [insect mortality](#), the worldwide [decline](#) of amphibians or harmful [effects](#) on aquatic ecosystems, are not associated with natural but with synthetic pesticide active substances in the vast majority of published studies. Also, it is synthetic pesticides, not natural ones, that enter remote wildlife refuges and glacier ice via [pesticide drift](#) and [global distillation](#), and [enter the bodies](#) of animals and humans through the food chain that would not otherwise come into contact with these substances. Finally, it is not natural but synthetic pesticides whose [residues are detectable](#) in 85% to 95% of the fruit and vegetables from conventional agriculture.

Having said this, let us now take a closer look at the specific examples with which MEP have tried to substantiate their claim of ecological disadvantages of pesticide-free or organic farming.

FACT CHECKS

Claim: "We have 11,000 beekeepers, and there have been no mass bee deaths in the last 20 years" ([Franc Bogovič](#), 10:11:53).

Fact Check: First of all, even if this claim were factually correct, it would have to be considered misleading. Mass deaths of honeybees due to mass poisoning are only the most visible tips of the iceberg. The decline of wild pollinators - 16.5% of which are known to be globally threatened with extinction, while in some countries more than 40% are on the lists of [endangered](#) species - takes place widely unnoticed and poses an even greater threat to biodiversity and agricultural production. Unfortunately, the above claim on honeybees is not true either. It contradicts a plethora of publications on [massive bee losses in Slovenia](#) that a quick internet search brings to light. These include articles linking mass bee deaths to the [use of neonicotinoids](#) or [illegal pesticide use](#), which have also been confirmed by the German authority, [Julius Kühn Institut](#), among others. The largest mass killing occurred in the Pomurje region in 2011, when [2,600 colonies died](#), according to the University of Maribor. These bee losses even prompted the Slovenian Minister of Agriculture to ban the [neonicotinoid clothianidin](#) in 2011 - a full two years before the EU imposed its first partial bans on neonicotinoids.

Conclusion: The statement by the EPP shadow in the AGRI Committee, Franc Bogovič, is factually incorrect and highly misleading.

Claim: “The only other option is therefore to import from abroad, which will also lead to further destruction of the Amazon rainforest” ([Alexandr Vondra](#), 09:43:19)

Fact Check: This statement by the ECR shadow, Alexandr Vondra, builds on his basic assumption that “higher biodiversity and fewer chemicals in the fields naturally mean dramatically lower yields for farmers” that must be compensated by imports from abroad. Since this basic assumption is not substantiated by facts (Argument No. 1), the conclusion based on it lacks any basis. A very large share of imports of agricultural products from overseas is due to animal feed caused by overproduction of meat in the EU, which is accompanied by overconsumption and important exports to third countries. This not only contributes to the destruction of the Amazon, but is also one of the main causes of environmentally harmful nitrogen and greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture. In addition, overconsumption of meat is a major cause of cardiovascular diseases, metabolic disorders, diabetes and cancer. The F2F wants to combat this by promoting the cultivation of protein plants in Europe and a healthier diet with more plant- and less animal-proteins. Less meat production means more land for environmental friendly production and diversity, while reducing polluting emissions.

Conclusion: The statement from ECR shadow Alexandr Vondra is based on incorrect assumptions and thus misleading.

Claim: “I have a Natura 2000 fauna-flora-habitat (FFH) directive area in my constituency, where it is about protecting certain birds, the ground-nesting birds. 50,000 hectares of good farmland, and here the conservationists are also against this proposal and also against Sarah Wiener’s proposal, to be quite clear about that, because the birds have only settled there because agriculture is managing it the way it is managing it: grain cultivation. And with a ban on pesticides, other fruits would be cultivated, and then the birds would no longer have a habitat - and besides - the conservationists also say this - when we designated this area we said: ‘you have managed well, otherwise the birds wouldn’t be there - that’s why you don’t need to change’.” ([Peter Liese](#), 09:50:37)

Fact check: The description of this 50,000 hectare Natura 2000 bird sanctuary FFH area with intensive farming in Peter Liese’s constituency fits the Hellwegbörde in North Rhine-Westphalia. Peter Liese’s statements suggest that not only a pesticide ban, as envisaged in the Commission’s proposal, but also the conversion to organic farming (as envisaged in Sarah Wiener’s proposal) would have ecological disadvantages for bird protection. On the same day, the EPP shadow rapporteur Alexander Bernhuber argued similarly in an interview with Top Agrar, when he spoke of a supposed threat to bird protection in the Hellwegbörde, if only organic plant protection products were permitted (as envisaged in Sarah Wiener’s proposal). This is because in bird sanctuaries such as the Hellwegbörde, “plant protection products are absolutely necessary in order to have as little mechanical intervention as possible”, according to Bernhuber.

However, the claim of ecological disadvantages of organic farming in bird sanctuaries is refuted by a dozen scientific publications. These show that organically managed areas generally have a higher number of breeding pairs and often also a higher species diversity of ground nesting birds than conventionally managed areas (Illner 2009). This was also the result of a special study conducted by the University of Göttingen in the bird sanctuary Hellwegbörde itself: the researchers found almost twice as many bird territories on organically managed arable land (winter wheat) as on the conventionally managed comparison areas (Kleijn et al. 2006). These results are in stark contrast to the claim that conventional farming has an advantage over organic farming for bird conservation in Hellwegbörde and elsewhere.

Nevertheless, Peter Liese’s assertion that in the Hellwegbörde “even the conservationists” are against a (compulsory) conversion to organic farming applies to the “Arbeitsgemeinschaft Biologischer Umweltschutz im Kreis Soest e.V.”. Although the conservationists repeatedly have emphasised in the past the advantages of organic (cereal) farming for bird conservation ([link](#), [link](#), [link](#)), when confronted with Peter Liese’s statements, the management of the ABU largely confirmed them, among other things with the argument that “an immediate conversion would entail considerable cuts in the hitherto proven strategy of protected area development through cooperative offers of “contractual nature conservation”. According to our research, the aforementioned contractual nature conservation is based on the cooperation between the Chamber of Agriculture, the nature conservation authorities, farmers and the ABU. It is based on partly voluntary and partly obligatory measures for bird protection and financed with money from the state of NRW, the EU and from third-party funds.

Conclusion: Peter Liese’s statement that a local nature conservation association does not support the proposals of the EU Commission and the EP rapporteur on sensitive areas seems to be correct. However, the advantage of conventional over organic farming, as claimed by Bernhuber and suggested by Liese, is refuted by numerous scientific studies.

Different claims suggesting that pesticides in organic farming being no better than pesticides in conventional farming

MEP [Christine Schneider](#) (EPP; 10:04:42) demanded in her statement that *“there should be no playing off of conventional and organic farming”, because “both need plant protection products”*. [Sylvia Limmer](#) (ID; 09:40:05) argues similarly in content, when she opens up a *“hard-to-digest truth”* to those colleagues who *“only know science education from hearsay”*: *When it comes to the “supposedly evil chemical pesticides”, one should know that “everything is chemical in some way”*. And anyone who believes that *“everywhere it says organic, eco and natural, there are no poisons in it”* is subject to *“green rose deception methods and their absurd definition of natural equals healthy”*. She explains what she means with an example: *“Both azadirachtin from the neem tree and pyrethrins from colourful flowers”* would be, according to Ms. Limmer, *“extremely toxic to bees but organic by definition”*.

Fact check: It is undisputed that (also) natural substances can be toxic. Just think of the deadly poisons of some plants, snakes or fungi or arsenic in the Earth's crust. Therefore, most of the above statements are **not fundamentally incorrect**. However, their lack of nuance seems to purposely ignore the considerable differences between the natural active substances of organic agriculture and the synthetic active substances of conventional agriculture (in terms of mode of action and toxicity) and suggest that plant protection in both systems is comparable. But it is not. And that is why such statements - whether intentional or not - are misleading. For the conversion from conventional to organic is by no means a zero-sum game when it comes to the impact of pesticides on health and the environment. In organic farming, the use of pesticides is **practically dispensed** with on more than 90 % of the farmland (especially wheat, rye, barley, maize). In conventional agriculture, on the other hand, herbicides are routinely sprayed, usually also fungicides and, depending on the crop and the weather, insecticides. In addition, the natural organic pesticides are significantly less dangerous than the predominantly synthetic conventional pesticides, as a **systematic comparison** of the active substances based on their hazard classifications and health reference values from the authorisation procedure proves. Finally, pyrethrins are a good example to illustrate the toxicity to bees of naturally-occurring insecticides, but azadirachtin from the seeds of the neem tree is definitely not. Regulatory **authorities** have classified azadirachtin as “not dangerous to bees”.

Conclusion: The lack of differentiation in the above statements and examples given could give the impression that the natural pesticides of organic farming are as dangerous and toxic as the synthetic pesticides of conventional farming. This is not the case, which is why such statements are misleading. Factually incorrect is Sylvia Limmer's claim that azadirachtin is toxic to bees.

IN A NUTSHELL:

The available scientific literature provides little evidence of a relevant contribution of “organic” pesticides to the adverse effects of pesticides on soils, aquatic ecosystems, pollinating insects, and other non-target organisms, or on pesticide-related acute and chronic health effects in humans - at least at the levels at which organic pesticides are currently used. However, if one compares conventional “best practice” examples with ecological “worst practice” examples, one will still be able to identify concrete cases where conventional practice performs better than ecological practice. But such “outlier” comparisons should not be the basis for policy decisions. Moreover, in the specific case, none of the examples given in the present parliamentary debate to support claimed ecological advantages of conventional agriculture stood up to our fact-check, The examples were either misleading or clearly contradicted the facts.

ARGUMENT NO. 3: “TOTAL BAN” IN SENSITIVE AREAS

Background

The third most frequent topic on which objections to the legislative proposal were based revolves around the “total ban” on pesticides in sensitive areas envisaged in the Commission’s original proposal; meaning a **total ban** on the use of any kind of pesticides, including those from organic farming, on all nature conservation areas, landscape protection, nitrate protection and Natura 2000 areas.

This led to the objection that such a total ban on pesticides would make it impossible to continue some agricultural crops, such as wine, in sensitive areas, as these crops depend on the use of (natural) pesticides such as sulphur or copper, even in organic farming.

In response to this criticism, the Commission had presented a non-paper in Fall 2022 in which it outlined alternative scenarios to a total ban.

Sarah Wiener, in her report, softened the Commission’s proposal on sensitive areas in two ways. Firstly, she excluded landscape protection areas and nitrate protection areas from the definition of sensitive areas, and secondly, she replaced the total ban with a ban on pesticides excluding those permitted in conventional agriculture, thus allowing the use of approximately 150 naturally occurring substances, that are currently authorised in the EU for organic farming. These include 75 microorganisms, 43 active substances of plant, animal or microbial origin, 25 pheromones, and 16 inorganic, mostly mineral substances ([link](#)). Against this background, the question arose as to how those MPs who had rejected a complete ban on pesticides on sensitive land - since such a ban would indeed pose major challenges in particular to permanent crops - would react to the changes proposed by Sarah Wiener.

Argument Check

The issue of sensitive areas was addressed in seven of the nine statements analysed. It is striking, however, that in the majority of these statements no reference was made to the relaxations introduced by Sarah Wiener, and that some MEP continued to criticise a **total ban**, which did not exist in Sarah Wiener’s proposal.

For example, the EPP shadow rapporteur Alexander Bernhuber, stated in his reaction to the presentation of the Sarah Wiener report, that *“a total ban [sic] of PPPs in these sensitive areas is a real non-respect of the conditions under which it was agreed with the farmers how plant protection or how agriculture should take place here”*.

Similarly, ID shadow rapporteur Sylvia Limmer says: *“And anyone who persists in completely banning [sic] plant protection in so-called sensitive areas [...] is simply abolishing agriculture and with it domestic food production”*. Again, not a word about the fact that Sarah Wiener has already eliminated the total ban in her proposal.

The EPP shadow rapporteur Franc Bogovič also raises the issue of *“sensitive areas, where a ban [sic] should apply”*, in which according to Bogovič, as much as 45% of the whole agricultural land in Slovenia is located, without mentioning the proposed amendments in Sarah Wiener’s report.

More difficult to interpret are the statements of Peter Liese in this regard, although he devoted almost the entirety of his speech to the topic of sensitive areas. Liese began by stating that Sarah Wiener’s proposal *“takes away some problems, but is not at all sufficient”*, leaving open what, in his opinion, was *“not sufficient”* and why. Liese states that birds would *“only have settled there because agriculture is doing business there the way it does: growing grain. And with a ban [sic] on pesticides, other crops would be grown.”* Unlike the colleagues before him, Liese is not talking about a *“total ban”* but about a *“ban”* on plant protection products. Whether this wording was deliberately chosen by Liese to take into account the opening of sensitive areas to *“organic”* pesticides by Sarah Wiener’s proposal cannot be determined.

Also Norbert Lins avoids mentioning the amendments in Sarah Wiener’s report in his speech. Instead, he succinctly states that Ms Wiener would have had the chance to *“take the issue of sensitive areas completely off the table. Unfortunately, she did not succeed in doing so, which is why it is not a suitable draft report that goes in the direction of finding a compromise”*.

Zalewska (ECR), however, refers directly to Sarah Wiener’s report, but does not address the proposed amendments: Instead, she insinuates *“some absurdities”* and cites *“as an example”* that *“the definition of sensitive areas covers in many member states all agricultural areas”*. This statement, together with the statement of Sylvia Limmer, that in Germany the lion’s share of agriculture is located in sensitive areas, will be subjected to a fact check.

FACT CHECK BOX

Claim: “And anyone who persists in completely banning plant protection in so-called sensitive areas, which in Germany would affect the lion’s share of arable land, is simply abolishing agriculture”

([Sylvia Limmer](#), 09:40:05)

Fact check: If one excludes (as provided for in Sarah Wiener’s report) landscape conservation areas, then according to the calculation of two [German research institutions](#), the share of agricultural land in ecologically sensitive areas amounts to around 21,146 km² throughout Germany, of which 20,845 km² is arable land and 301 km² is orchard and vineyard land. The area that would be affected by a pesticide restriction would therefore be 17 % of the total arable land and 16 % of the orchards and vineyards. This does not represent the “lion’s share” (Löwenanteil), which in the German-speaking world, is usually understood to mean the largest share.

Conclusion: The statement by MEP Sylvia Limmer is obviously incorrect.

FACT CHECK BOX

Claim: “The report contains some absurdities. For example, the definition of sensitive areas includes all agricultural land in many member states”

([Anna Zalewska](#), 10:01:56)

Fact check: Unfortunately there is still no published source available, showing the percentage of agricultural land located in sensitive areas (as defined in the Commission proposal) is Slovenia with 45%. This proportion also decreases if landscape conservation areas are removed from the definition of sensitive areas, as Sarah Wiener proposed in her report.

Conclusion: The claim by MEP Anna Zalewska that according to the definition of sensitive areas in Sarah Wiener’s report, in many member states 100 % of the agricultural land is located in sensitive areas seems to be incorrect.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Although the issue of sensitive areas has been one of the most hotly debated topics in the public debate on the SUR in recent months, the speeches by SUR critics on this issue that we analysed tended to indicate disinterest or ignorance of the facts, or a refusal to debate. In some cases, this even made it difficult to verify the arguments, as it was not clear whether the criticism was directed against the Commission’s “total ban” (which no one is defending anymore), against Sarah Wiener’s proposal or against something else.

ARGUMENT NO. 4: “HIGHER FOOD PRICES”

Six of nine MEP did warn of higher food prices due to reduced yields if the EU pesticide reduction plans are implemented. Four of them derive their statement from the first postulated lower yields, without citing sources, while the EPP shadow rapporteur Alexander Bernhuber based his statement on the “*Commission’s feasibility study*” and his colleague Christine Schneider on an undefined “*Commission’s study*”.

The proportion of income that the average European spends on food has fallen sharply since the 1960s, and with it, presumably, the value we place on agricultural products. This may be one of the reasons why 153.5 million tonnes of food are thrown away every year in the EU ([link](#)). However, self-reported moderate or severe food insecurity in the EU increased between 2019 and 2020. The growing food price inflation because of the war in Ukraine has made the situation worse, and aggravates the increased pressure on households’ incomes, alongside energy costs, fuel costs, etc. The decline in income during the pandemic has contributed to this. The situation is exacerbated by the sharp increase in inflation, triggered by rising energy prices due to the war in Ukraine.

However, this lack of affordability is not a problem of availability and surely has nothing to do with pesticide reduction or other measures of the F2F strategy. It is a problem of social inequality, poverty, and unfair distribution of resources and opportunities, the causes of which are not to be found in efforts to achieve ecological sustainability. The Commission staff working document on the “[drivers of food security](#)” from January 2023 states that “food availability is not at risk in the EU today. The EU is largely self-sufficient for key agricultural products and achieves a stable overall food export surplus. It is a main wheat and barley exporter, and largely able to cover its own consumption needs for other staple crops, such as maize and sugar. The EU is also largely self-sufficient for animal products, including dairy and meat, with the notable exception of seafood”.

According to the JRC study (the Commission’s impact assessment) whose limitations were described above (see Argument No. 1), the four quantitative targets of the F2F strategy could lead to increased food prices in the short term. Since in the modelling approach, numerous important aspects that are expected to have positive socio-economic impacts, are not reflected, while negative impacts of pesticide reduction seem to be overestimated, it can be assumed that the actual impacts of the F2F measures on food prices are equally overestimated.

Though endangered by the ongoing climate change, biodiversity loss and soil degradation, the EU (still) has enough valuable agricultural land to produce enough healthy food for all people in Europe. The greening of agriculture to restore biodiversity and soils is a prerequisite for keeping it that way. There is [broad scientific consensus](#) that environmental degradation and climate change are among the biggest threats to the resilience of the EU food system and thus to the availability of food in sufficient quality and quantity. If these crises cannot be contained, agriculture will effectively disappear from large parts of our planet. In this case, food security would no longer be “just” a problem of lack of access to food in poorer regions of the globe, but one of general availability.

FACT CHECK BOX

Claim: “The Commission’s feasibility study also describes higher food prices”

([Bernhuber](#), 09:30:51)

Fact check: The modelling of the JRC study arrives at a theoretical increase for the foodstuffs considered of between 2% (milk) and 40% (pork), and for cereals, oilseeds, fruit and vegetables of between 5% and 10%. However, these assumptions are partly based on worst-case scenarios (as explained in detail in Claim No. 1) and on the failure to take into account a wide range of influencing factors with expected positive effects on the yields and affordability of agricultural products, as the authors themselves admit.

Conclusion: MEP Bernhuber’s claim that the Commission’s JRC study describes higher food prices is factually correct.

FACT CHECK BOX

Claim: “you only have to read the Commission’s study and it clearly states that if the Commission’s proposal is implemented in this way, it will lead to a certain population group no longer being able to afford a certain diet”.

([Anna Zalewska](#) 10:01:56)

We assume that by “Commission’s study”, MEP Zalewska meant the Commission’s analysis of the drivers of food security, since it deals with availability and affordability of food. This study indeed describes a threat that “**endangers food affordability for the most vulnerable households**”. As a result, households spend, according to this study, “*a larger share of their budgets on food, potentially compromising the diet quality if they switched to products that contain more calories while being poorer in micronutrients*”. However, it is neither the F2F nor the SUR that are responsible for threatening affordability of food, but the current food price inflation, estimated at 18% in October 2022. We are not aware of any publication of the Commission that concludes that implementing the SUR would lead to “*a certain population group no longer being able to afford a certain diet*”. Moreover, one of the objectives of the F2F is to preserve affordability of food.

Conclusion: This statement by Zalewska is therefore (according to all information available to us) not correct.

IN A NUTSHELL:

The assumption of rising prices due to pesticide reduction is essentially based on the assumption of declining yields and higher production costs. Thus, all limitations of the latter (see Argument No. 1) apply to projections of rising prices, such as those modelled in the JRC study for four F2F measures (including the halving of risks and pesticide use by 2030).

ARGUMENT NO. 5: “HIGH DEPENDENCY ON IMPORTS”

As stated before, with the exception of seafood, the EU is largely self-sufficient for key agricultural products and achieves a stable overall [food export surplus](#). However, the argument against the EU pesticide reduction plans and other elements of the F2F strategy is often based on an alleged risk of increased import dependency due to declining agricultural yields.

Five of the nine MEP whose opinions we analysed did warn of such an increased dependency on imports from abroad. EPP shadow rapporteur Bernhuber was the only one to refer to a source with his claim, namely “the Commission’s feasibility study” that according to Bernhuber describes “more imports from third countries”.

Like the (alleged) increase in food prices, the (alleged) increase in imports is directly related to the assumption or modelling of significantly decreasing crop yields due to the reduction of pesticides. As we have explained in detail in the food security section (Argument No. 1), this basic assumption is not very robust due to methodological limitations and the use of worst-case scenarios.

IN A NUTSHELL:

Analogous to the considerations regarding possible impacts on food prices (Argument No. 4), the assumption of increasing dependence on imports due to pesticide reduction is essentially based on the assumption of decreasing yields and higher production costs. Therefore, all of the limitations listed above (see Argument No. 1) apply here as well.

ARGUMENT NO. 6: “IMPACT ASSESSMENT MISSING”

Opponents of the SUR have in the past (see Argument No. 1 Fact check) [referred to](#) (dubious) Impact assessments commissioned by the industry, while accusing the Commission of not having presented a thorough comprehensive Impact assessment, or arguing that the situation in Ukraine has made another impact assessment necessary.

The Council’s decision, adopted on 19 December, requiring the Commission to submit additional data (“complementary impact assessment”) by 27 June at the latest, is delaying the political process in both the Council and the Parliament (as some observers had expected from the beginning). Scientists are critical of the demand for an impact assessment, [saying](#) that “the gain in knowledge of the required additions to the thorough Impact Assessment performed by the European Commission is highly questionable, as the long-term challenges facing the EU food system and state of biodiversity have not changed since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine”.

Only three of the nine speakers addressed the “missing” impact assessment. It was noticeable that the statements on this topic were not consistent among themselves and were also contradictory.

Bogovič (10:11:53) complains that one does not know “how much food will be accessible and at what price in Europe, whether we will be dependent on the imports of food from the parts of the world where standards regarding pesticides are much lower than here” All this is not known because an impact assessment on the effects on food security is missing.

Vondra (09:43:19), on the other hand, seemed to know all the answers already. There was a threat of “hunger”, “social unrest”, “dramatically lower yields”, “import from abroad”, “destruction of the Amazon rainforest”, “further increase in food prices” if the pesticide reduction plans were implemented. However, after stating all these pie-in-the-sky scenarios as a given, he said: “we need to have access to an impact assessment and real studies, so we can make the right decision”.

Zalewska (10:01:56), in turn, said that the work on the SUR should be stopped immediately “We should stop this work. We should have the necessary analysis promised by the Commission,” an analysis that Zalewska says the Commission should have already presented on 19 December last year, and failed to do so. Whether the Commission was indeed guilty of an omission here is the subject of the following fact check.

FACT CHECK BOX

Claim: “On December 19 the Commission was to propose, publish an analysis and they didn’t do it”

([Anna Zalewska](#), 10:01:56)

Fact check: We are not aware of any impact assessment, other study or analysis related to the SUR that the Commission should have presented on 19 December 2022. What is known, however, is that 19 December 2022 was the date on which the Council agreed on a Council decision requesting the European Commission to provide a complementary study to its existing impact assessment on the SUR. This complementary study should be presented by the Commission by 27 June at the latest.

Conclusion: We therefore suspect that the above claim by MEP Anna Zalewska is based on confusion and is incorrect.

IN A NUTSHELL:

The impression of some observers that the demand for an impact assessment was far more a desire to slow down or [derail](#) the political process than a desire for more information (as a basis for informed decision-making) could not be dispelled by the MEPs’ interventions.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

One thing right from the start: mistakes can happen. If, for example, a politician wrongly says that a certain pesticide is toxic to bees, this does not necessarily have a negative effect on the political course of action, if the mistake is corrected once facts are known. Much more problematic would be a situation where systematic ignorance or neglect of the facts leads to repeatedly spreading misinformation and where refusal to engage in constructive exchanges leads to a political blockage in which the necessary work for the protection of human health and the environment is put to a halt. That is poison for the political decision making process and the problem-solving it seeks to achieve. Moreover, it is detrimental to democracy because, by blocking dialogue it destroys any chance of cooperation, reasonable compromise and progress. One must not forget in the context of current heated discussions in the European Parliament and Council, that much of the SUR intends to make sure that current legislation, the sustainable use of pesticides directive, is finally properly applied ([link](#)). In this light the calls for the withdrawal of the proposal and refusal to engage in constructive dialogue by some political actors can be seen as a refusal to uphold due legislative process.

What our check unfortunately shows is that the arguments analysed in this document and put forward by the SUR critics on 2 March during the presentation of Sarah Wiener's report were as follows:

- Ignoring the content of Sarah Wiener's report, including the fact that her report already addresses previous criticism of the Commission's proposal (e.g. relaxation of the total ban on sensitive areas)
- Arguing based on emotions and generalisations, instead of on objective, verified facts.
- Scaremongering with absurdly exaggerated and grotesque scenarios of hunger, of farmers going bankrupt en masse, and of an European Union that would outsource huge environmental problems to the Global South, if the use of pesticides was reduced.
- Exaggerating or misrepresentation of amendments that could be interpreted as tightening (80%), ie a very sloppy way of handling facts;
- Ignoring science-based evidence and warnings by the broad scientific community, including on the very negative effects of exposure to pesticides.

Facts are apparently not considered as a basis for opinion formation (or correction of the political speech), but rather as an instrument for confirming a preconceived opinion or ideology. If the facts are not suitable for this, they are twisted.

It is essential now, that having been provided with the information contained in this document, a majority of political decision makers from all political colours stand courageously together defending the SUR proposal and fighting misinformation. It is essential that this loud majority commits to working together constructively, without further delays, on this political file, having as a starting point the report tabled by the rapporteur, Sarah Wiener. What is at stake here is our health and the health of our environment, and therefore our future.

ANNEX

MEP Interventions* Subjected to the Argument & Fact Check

(on the occasion of the presentation of Sarah Wiener's report on the SUR of 2 March '23)

The video of the political discussions can be watched [here](#) (from 09:23 to 10:13)

Alexander Bernhuber (EPP-Shadow Rapporteur)

(in German language)

"Mr. President, thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to speak here in the Environment Committee on the regulation on the sustainable use of pesticides. Many thanks also to my colleague Sarah Wiener for presenting her report here. As the EPP, we want to take a constructive approach that is realistic and practical. Especially against the background of the war in Ukraine, we need to focus on European food security more than ever before." We have criticised numerous points in the Commission proposal from the outset and, firstly, we hoped that the Commission would withdraw this proposal and, secondly, I would have hoped from my colleague that some points would be taken up in her report, which unfortunately was not the case. The proposal in its present form is not appropriate. The European Commission wants the Member States to reduce the use of pesticides by 50% by 2030. My colleague has proposed even stronger reduction targets here. We in the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats are calling for a sensible approach to the reduction targets, which must also be feasible and practical. This weakens European food security. Particularly in view of the war in Ukraine, we must not allow European food security to become even more dependent, and this really must be a priority in this report. And it is a fact that these proposals also have a really negative impact. The University of Wageningen has confirmed that it will lead to a 20% decrease in food production" (EP statement) and the Commission's feasibility study also describes higher food prices and more imports from third countries, without taking into account the war in Ukraine. Furthermore, the Commission has had to admit that unfortunately some points have been insufficiently implemented. A total ban on PPPs in these sensitive areas is a real failure to respect the conditions under which it was agreed with the farmers how PPPs or agriculture should take place here. As the EPP, we are in favour of a reduction and we clearly stand by this, but neither the European Commission's proposal nor Sarah Wiener's proposal is realistic and practical. As the EPP, we will work to ensure that European farmers can continue to maintain their high-quality products and that we do not become completely dependent on imports from third countries. Thank you very much. And I look forward to exciting work in the coming months. Thank you very much."

Sylvia Limmer (ID-Shadow Rapporteur)

(in German language)

"Where to start with the EU Commission's proposal, which is not only hard to digest for farmers, to simply ban 50% of the necessary plant protection by 2030? Perhaps with the rapporteur Sarah Wiener's proposal to replace the technical term "plant protection products" used in German with "pesticides". This shows that this is not a technical debate, but that the journey deep into a green fairy-tale forest is to be started - at the expense of farmers and also consumers, who will then have to buy scarce and expensive food not necessarily from an organic farmer Sarah Wiener, but also from third countries with perhaps dubious origins. And two truths that will now be very difficult for all discussants who only know scientific schooling from hearsay. Firstly, when it comes to allegedly evil chemical pesticides, one should know that everything is chemical in some way. Water is a chemical substance. Secondly, anyone who believes that anywhere that says organic, eco and natural does not contain poisons is simply subject to green rose deception methods and their absurd definition of "natural equals healthy". Both azadirachtin from the neem tree and pyrethrins from variegated flowers - a neurotoxin, by the way - are extremely toxic to bees, but organic by definition. The latter, by the way, is not even cultivated sustainably in Africa. And anyone who persists in completely banning plant protection in so-called sensitive areas, which in Germany would affect the lion's share of arable land, is simply abolishing agriculture and with it domestic food production - and with it the livelihoods of farmers who are already in the barn at six o'clock and also produce their Voken mueslis. Just two highlights in the short time available: In future, a farmer who wants to use chemical pesticides is to submit a justified application to an authority, which is then to decide within two weeks what I think of it. [failed giggle] Or this: Retail companies are to report to authorities on the progress of their suppliers' pesticide reduction targets. Dear Ms Wiener, you forgot to explain how on earth this is supposed to work. However, I have to agree with Mrs Wiener on two sentences, namely when it comes to costly bureaucratic and compulsory advisors for farmers. The advisors must be independent. They must not be financially dependent on the crop industry. I wish this were also true for politicians who are significantly involved in the legislative process. How much of your not inconsiderable additional income, dear Ms Wiener, do you actually draw from your organic farm in Brandenburg? And finally: The Commission's proposal is unacceptable. The one presented by Ms Wiener is completely out of touch with reality."

Alexandr Vondra (ECR-Shadow Rapporteur)

(in Czech language)

"Good Morning, you've all sort of resigned to your native languages. So I'll be speaking for my own voters. This proposal is totally unacceptable. It has major weak spots. All of us want less chemistry in nature obviously all of us want to have a larger space and potential for biodiversity but obviously if we are to succeed it must not mean that there will be hunger, there will be social unrest, and that we just turn our back on our progress. If we want to have areas with higher degrees of biodiversity and less chemistry on them, then obviously for farmers that will mean dramatically lower yields and that needs to be compensated elsewhere, where there will be more intense farming where we also use GMO-based technologies which you also don't want. So the only other options is import from abroad, which will also lead to further destruction of the Amazon rainforest, which is also something we don't want - and all of this will also lead to a further increase in food prices because obviously with the war going on the ideal world no longer exists where everybody wants to help each other. So we really do need to take a very good look at some of the information contained in the rapporteurs proposal because some of them go far further than the Commission proposal - instead of 3 m we have 15 m, instead of 50 % we have 80 % so where is

the impact assessment on that – we haven't really seen one. And by the way all of these systems will bring extreme costs for farmers and a lot of business for a lot of environmental NGOs. So what will be the end result? The end result will be a lack of food in Europe, a lot of alternatives such as artificial meat, and I don't want to live in such a world. I still remember the Communist times, and I don't want to live in a world where you're fed not red shit but green shit. So I believe this proposal really does need to be changed dramatically. We need to have access to an impact assessment and real studies, so we can make the right decision. And we don't want to do more harm than good – and we have to focus on health as well. Because if flowers are contaminated with rat droppings, obviously there will be less chemistry which will be better for our health but then for other diseases it will be spread due to the fact that there will be far more frequent occurrences of pests."

Peter Liese (EPP)

(in German language)

"The EPP supports the goal that we reduce PPPs, but we are not convinced that now is the right time for such a proposal - and many provisions in the proposal are simply unacceptable. Due to time constraints, I would like to limit myself to just one issue, namely the issue of sensitive areas. Sarah Wiener's proposal takes away some problems, but it is not enough at all, and I want to illustrate this with an example from my constituency - I think almost everyone has similar issues in their constituency - I have a Natura 2000 FFH area in my constituency, where it is about protecting certain birds, the ground-nesting birds. 50,000 hectares of good farmland, and here the conservationists are also against this proposal and also against Sarah Wiener's proposal, to be quite clear about that, because the birds have only settled there because agriculture is managing it the way it is managing it: grain cultivation. And with a ban on pesticides, other fruits would be cultivated, and then the birds would no longer have a habitat - and besides - the conservationists also say this - when we designated this area we said: "you have managed well, otherwise the birds wouldn't be there - that's why you don't need to change". Mr. Chair, I know time is short, but the issue is too important, so please give me half a minute as coordinator in English. I want to address the time table. I'm grateful that finally the shadows have agreed on a timetable. But we have to admit that this is only [discussion with the chair regarding speaking time] Uno secundo! We have to agree with AGRI, that's the point. We have an ENVI proposal now, but AGRI has exclusive competences, so please rapporteur and chair: talk to AGRI. Thank you!"

Norbert Lins (EPP)

(in German language)

"Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, I would like to clarify briefly that Mrs. Aguilera was invited to speak here on Monday evening, which is of course much too short notice. And that is why she had to apologise here. I am pleased that the internal blockade of the ENVI has been broken as far as the timetable is concerned shadow rapporteurs. And I am looking forward to the negotiations with the AGRI, and that we will find a common timetable and that we will find ourselves somewhere in the middle, as we agreed in our agreement under Rule 57 of the Rules of Procedure. Mrs Wiener, first of all, I must thank you for your report. Mrs Wiener is not responsible for the European Commission's poorly drafted proposal, she is not to blame for that, but she would have had the chance to take the issue of sensitive areas, this approach, completely off the table. Unfortunately, she did not succeed in doing so, which is why it is not really a suitable draft report that goes in the direction of finding a compromise. Thank you."

Anna Zalewska (ECR)

(in Polish language)

"If farmers listen to us every week they must get very anxious. Because we must be very careful about what we are saying. On December 19 the Commission was to propose, publish an analysis and they didn't do it. So, I don't know what's behind the report of our colleague. There are some absurdities in the report. For example, the definition of sensitive areas covers in many member states all agricultural area. Binding quotas and additional taxation, this is not our competence, to begin with. So I'd like to appeal for responsibility. We should stop this work. We should have the necessary analysis promised by the Commission. When we talk about educating farmers on new instruments and new ideas, I think I would send every other member of this committee to training."

Christine Schneider (EPP)

(in German language)

"Yes, we all want to strengthen our biodiversity. And yes, we all want to reduce the use of pesticides. But the problem is - and this was the case again today - that agriculture is being held unilaterally responsible for the loss of biodiversity and that there is no recognition of what agriculture has already achieved in recent years. And yes, it is also about the preservation of our food security and you only have to read the Commission's study and it clearly states that if the Commission's proposal is implemented in this way, it will lead to a certain population group no longer being able to afford a certain diet. And that is something we cannot support. And it is also about trust in politics. When the protected areas were designated - and this was mentioned - it was promised that there would be no management requirements, and now there are to be such requirements. And the third point is that conventional and organic farming must not be played off against each other. Both need plant protection products. That's what the word says: plant protection products; to protect plants from diseases and pests. The proposals definitely need to be revised."

Daniel Buda (EPP)

(in Romanian language)

"I have to say that both proposals, the Commission's proposal and the rapporteur's proposal are unacceptable. And not only for the farmers, they are unacceptable for the consumers. Dear colleagues, we lose sight of a very important thing, namely that reducing pesticides will affect the profitability and sustainability of farmers on the one hand, and on the other hand will reduce the quantities of food available to consumers who do not have the salaries as we in this room have. This is what we have to understand, we need to have this discussion in terms of quantity but also in terms of affordability for the consumers. Without providing the farmers with alternatives

they will just go bankrupt, and the European union will depend on imports from outside the union. Regarding the targets, there is a big logical fracture here. Other countries use 8000 grams of pesticides per hectare which is a lot more than us. This proposal is unacceptable we need to reframe it, with the amendments. Thank you."

Franc Bogovic (EPP Shadow Rapporteur in the AGRI Committee)

(in Slovenian language)

"I come from Slovenia where over the last 30 years we have halved our pesticide consumption. We have 11.000 beekeepers - and over the last 20 years there were no mass dying of bees. I support this trend to reduce pesticides but I believe that the proposal of the Commission is very deficient. First there is no impact assessment of impacts on the food security And we don't know whether this was because of the war in Ukraine we don't know how much food will be accessible and at what price in Europe, whether we will be dependent on the imports of food from the parts of the world where standards regarding pesticides are much lower than here. Another important danger are sensitive areas. In Slovenia as much as 45 % of the whole agricultural land is sensitive areas, where a ban should apply, and a third big problem is administrative burden hurdles and small farmers are particularly impacted and they are becoming more and more eurosceptic and I think we have to be responsible enough to flag that in our report."

* Please note: The German-language speeches were translated into English by ourselves. For the other languages, the translations into English or German provided by the Parliament served as a basis. If we have made any translation errors, we apologise.