

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

9<sup>th</sup> December 2021

## Freshfel Europe expresses deep concerns about the Belarus embargo on the import of European fruit and vegetables worth 300 million €

On 6<sup>th</sup> December 2021, Belarus decided to respond to the latest international sanctions by implementing an embargo on food import into the country for food products originating from the European Union but also the UK, Norway, Iceland, Switzerland, North Macedonia, Albania, the USA, and Canada. Fruit and vegetables are included in the list along with other food categories such as meat, dairy products, and confectionery products, while carefully excluding seeds. Freshfel Europe expresses concerns about this new restriction on international trade impacting primarily upon European fruit and vegetables and affecting around 10% of current EU fresh produce exports to third country markets.

Following the publication of Belarus Decree Nr 700, Belarus will impose - as of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2022 and for a period of 6 months - restrictions on its import of fruit and vegetables originating, among others, from the European Union. Freshfel Europe, on behalf of the European fresh produce sector, is expressing deep concerns about the far-reaching implications of this new restriction. This ban is challenging about 10% of current EU exports which are also under pressure due to multiple factors such as SPS hurdles and growing protectionism but also new COVID constraints leading with increased market access controls and other international logistics difficulties. Philippe Binard, General Delegate of Freshfel Europe, stated: *“Once again, European fruit and vegetables are the hostages of international geopolitical disputes. In 2014, the Russian embargo deeply hit the fresh produce sector, challenging a well-established business of more than 2 Mio T of export to a neighbor market. The European fruit and vegetables is already bearing about a third of the 7,5 billion € worth burden of the Russian embargo. Later in the decade, the Algerian embargo affected close to 300.000 T of export. Most recently, the USA also included fruit and vegetables in retaliation measures impacting in particular the citrus category. Freshfel Europe can only lament that fruit and vegetables are too often taken as bargaining chip for other disputes”.*

The Belarus embargo will concern around 400.000 to 500.000 T of fresh produce export from the European Union, affecting a wide range of fresh fruit and vegetables including primarily apples, pears, strawberries, and tomatoes. The new embargo will impact the whole European fruit and vegetables supply chain and a direct business value of around 300 Mio €. Philippe Binard added: *“Several European suppliers are on the frontline of the new restrictions. Poland is by far the main supplier to Belarus with more than 250.000 T exported in 2020 and 350.000 T in 2019. Other suppliers include Lithuania, The Netherlands, Spain, Greece, and Italy.”*

This embargo is coming on top of other market access challenges for EU export with SPS restrictions still applied around the world by protectionist approaches of several countries around the world. The European Union remains the single largest import market in the world, with the import of more than 16 Mio T. Freshfel Europe has also denounced on numerous occasions these

EUROPEAN FRESH PRODUCE ASSOCIATION A.I.S.B.L

Rue de Trèves 49-51, bte 8 - 1040 Brussels - Belgium  
+32 (0)2 777 15 80 - [info@freshfel.org](mailto:info@freshfel.org) - [www.freshfel.org](http://www.freshfel.org)



SPS restrictions imposed on the international trade of fruit and vegetables and the lack of reciprocity in market access conditions. Philippe Binard added: *“In the case of Russia and reciprocity, the fresh produce sector is still eager to see this neighbor market reopen soon. It is important to underline that in recent years, the European Union, while not allowed on the Russian market, started to witness Russian export of several vegetables to the European Union, namely cucumbers and tomatoes. The volume imported by the EU from Russia experienced a rapid growth and is now already reaching close to 40.000 T, mainly produce grown from seeds originating from the EU and carefully excluded by Russia and Belarus from their embargo list.”*

With this new episode of market restrictions decided by Belarus, Freshfel Europe calls again on EU authorities to protect and support the fruit and vegetables sector from the consequences of collateral damages caused by this and other disputes. Fruit and vegetables play an important role for sustainable food production, supply, and consumption. They actively contribute to healthy diet benefits for consumers in Europe and around the world. The role of fruit and vegetables was widely recognized throughout 2021 during the celebration of the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables. These achievements should not be jeopardized by political embargo.

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**Note to the Editors:**

*Freshfel Europe is the European Fresh Produce Association, representing the interests of the fresh fruit and vegetables supply chain in Europe and beyond. Freshfel Europe currently has over 200 members, including both companies and associations. For more information, please contact [info@freshfel.org](mailto:info@freshfel.org).*



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Rue de Trèves 49-51, bte 8 - 1040 Brussels - Belgium Tel: +32 (0)2 777 15 80 Fax: +32 (0)2 777 15 81  
e-mail: [info@freshfel.org](mailto:info@freshfel.org) - [www.freshfel.org](http://www.freshfel.org) - [www.freshquality.eu](http://www.freshquality.eu) - [www.freshcongress.com](http://www.freshcongress.com) –  
[www.enjoyfresh.eu](http://www.enjoyfresh.eu) – [www.kidsenjoyfresh.eu](http://www.kidsenjoyfresh.eu)

