

Prime Minister
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Mercosur and Portuguese EU-Presidency

Honourable Prime Minister, dear Antonio,

The global Covid-19 pandemic is afflicting all Member States of the European Union. We regret seeing increasing numbers of infections and victims within the EU. We hope you will be successful in containing and overcoming the pandemic in your country and we believe that Portugal's Presidency will play a pivotal role in the fight against Corona for the entire EU. I am equally confident that an appropriate global vaccination campaign can help overcome the worst effects of the virus worldwide in the course of the year.

I would like to address a special request to you as Prime Minister of the country currently holding the Presidency of the European Council. In the programme of the Portuguese Presidency you underlined the strategic interest in concluding the EU's trade agreement with the MERCOSUR countries.

Yet, the MERCOSUR-agreement is at odds with our efforts to address the economic crisis in a way that is compatible with environmental and climate ambitions and commitments, failing to build a more resilient economic system. Negotiations with MERCOSUR-countries were concluded in June 2019. Currently legal scrubbing, is being carried out by the European Commission. This will be followed by translation of the final text into the official EU languages and its submission to the European Parliament and the Council.

Against this backdrop, I would like to express my great concerns. The extensive forest fires in the Amazon region, also known as the lungs of the earth, in combination with an increase of intensive agro-industrial mode of agricultural production in Mercosur countries, will exacerbate global warming. If we go on boosting trade and economic growth without taking the impacts on biodiversity, ecosystems and natural resources into account, we will inevitably be heading towards a climate catastrophe. I truly hope we agree that we must prevent such a scenario and that we and the entire EU have a major responsibility and a pivotal role to play now, on behalf of future generations, our children and grandchildren.

It is for this reason that the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the Austrian Green Party have accorded in their governmental agreement to reject the EU-MERCOSUR trade agreement that is currently being concluded. The Austrian Parliament has also passed unanimously binding resolutions to this effect. Our rejection also refers to possible attempts to conclude a decision by means of a joint declaration or protocol annexed to the Agreement, or by splitting the agreement, and we will firmly oppose these attempts as well. For us, it is not acceptable that such attempts to bypass any resistance of a qualified group of Member States within the EU are made.

Instead, we must seize this opportunity to use the Green Deal to advance international climate protection and give new impetus to the Paris Climate Agreement. Signing the EU-MERCOSUR trade agreement would thwart such progress.

I therefore ask you, dear Prime Minister Costa, to ensure that the vote on the EU-MERCOSUR trade agreement can take place openly, without any political manoeuvre and with full public attention. For us, the impact of the EU-MERCOSUR trade agreement on the climate crisis is a deciding factor. Against this background, the Austrian Federal Government has agreed to do its utmost to oppose the signature of the agreement with the MERCOSUR countries.

Thank you very much for your efforts,

with kind regards

Werner Kogler

