

**JOINT DECLARATION OF AUSTRIA, CROATIA, CZECH REPUBLIC, GERMANY,
HUNGARY, POLAND, ROMANIA, SLOVAKIA, SLOVENIA AND SPAIN
on the future development of freshwater aquaculture in the EU after 2020**

In the view of current discussion on the future prospects of freshwater aquaculture in the post-2020 period, our countries hereby express position on the above mentioned issue.

The consumption of fish in EU has been constantly increasing, while there is a constant pressure on the living aquatic biological resources due to the impact of fishing activities. Aquaculture has proved to be a viable alternative to commercial fishing. However, the internal production of aquatic food struggles to satisfy the growing demand of EU consumers and to provide an adequate supply of quality fish products throughout the year. Consequently, this supply gap has to be covered by imports of capture fish and aquaculture products from third countries in which production conditions do not always reach the high standards of the EU production (low environmental footprint, high sanitary requirements, animal welfare, workers conditions, etc.). All imports should fulfil similar production conditions as fisheries for EU production. As ensuring food security should be one of the main ambitions of the EU, we believe it is of utmost importance to provide the appropriate conditions for further development of the sector in the EU.

We acknowledge that the political and financial support provided during the previous and current programming periods contributed substantially to positive trends defining the freshwater aquaculture as we know it these days. Nevertheless, we are convinced that the challenges related to sustainable development of the sector still need to be addressed as they require a long-term solution. Therefore we regard the continuation of the structural funding support to be a cornerstone for delivering of positive, socioeconomic and environmental impacts on our communities.

Although freshwater aquaculture contributes to over 20 % of aquaculture in the EU, there is still a considerable potential for sustainable growth of production and improvement of food security. Not to be forgotten are the environmental aspects including environmental sustainability, biodiversity, water management, shaping of the landscape, protection and retention. However, we substantially need to improve the awareness about the benefits of freshwater aquaculture and its role in social, economic and environmental development of rural communities. These communities feature the same socioeconomic characteristics as the coastal ones providing employment and social stability. Unfortunately, most of these benefits are still relatively unknown outside a narrow group of professionals and academics. This leads to a profound lack of recognition among the decision makers. For instance decision makers dealing with the environmental policy shall have more access and include into their policy more data from aquaculture. These data could be gathered within one framework. Marketing strategy to improve the awareness about wide benefits of aquaculture should be developed at the level of the Commission e.g. for five years. This strategy should be evaluated every year.

Aquaculture in natural environment is an important part of our history, culture and everyday life of rural communities. Therefore it is necessary to support further research of the sector and its benefits and to ensure the results, country specific and the similarities with other sectors (agriculture) are taken into the account when formulating the regulatory and financing framework of EU policies.