

**Question for written answer E-002195/2019
to the Commission**
Rule 130
Daniel Buda (PPE)

Subject: Fake tomato crops, subsidised to the detriment of real tomato growers

A journalist's investigation has revealed a case of fraud related to subsidies for tomato crops in the Southern part of Romania. Five firms owned by several Italian citizens from Sicily leased lands in Oltenia, later stating to the Paying and Intervention Agency for Agriculture (APIA) that they grow tomatoes. Subsidies for a total amount of EUR 850 000 have been paid for tomato crops which never existed.

The state authorities did not detect the fraud, meaning that payments made to the rest of Romanian farmers, who did grow tomatoes in 2017, dropped dramatically. In the case of the coupled support payment, the allocated money is divided per cultivated area. Bearing in mind the fact that 537 hectares of fallow land had also been taken into account in the area of the four municipalities concerned in the Mehedinți county, the subsidy for tomatoes dropped to under EUR 1 500/hectare. While the Romanian capital tomato farms are on the verge of bankruptcy due to a drop in production caused by adverse weather conditions and by heavy exports, as well as by factors limiting development, five firms owned by Italian citizens, which did not produce any tomatoes, enjoyed the financial support that should have been directed to the real tomato growers.

What recommendations can the Commission make to the Romanian authorities to ensure that subsidies are only paid to those farmers who actually cultivate their land?