

## Council discusses animal welfare

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*On May 17, Ministers discussed the establishment of an EU Platform on animal welfare following the publication of the Eurobarometer survey on Animal Welfare.*



**The Representative of the Netherlands Presidency** recalled that the Council discussed the establishment of an EU platform on animal welfare at the AGRIFISH Council of February 2016. There was broad support for the establishment of such a platform. The Commission confirmed that it will look at the establishment of the platform. Furthermore, the Commission has recently published the results of the second Eurobarometer survey on animal welfare.

Therefore, the Presidency considers that the Commission could inform the Council of both the results of the Eurobarometer survey and its consequences in terms of animal welfare policy and a state of play on the establishment of the EU platform on animal welfare.

He added that, that morning, he received a petition on the animal welfare of rabbits signed by 600,000 citizens and he promised the signatories he would inform the Council about it. He said that this highlights the high level of public interest in this debate.

**Vytis Andriukaitis, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety** noted that in February, they had an interesting roundtable on this matter and he wanted to update Ministers on the most recent developments. The Commission published the results of a special Eurobarometer survey on European citizens' attitudes towards animal welfare. More than 27,000 face-to-face interviews were conducted. The results show that animal welfare is considered to be very important for citizens. The majority of respondents believe that the protection of farm animals should be carried out at both EU and national levels and that the welfare of farm animals should be handled jointly by businesses and public authorities. More than 6 out of 10 citizens totally agree that imported products should respect the same standards as those applicable within the EU. He said that this result echoes the concerns Ministers expressed in February on the need to keep consistency between the EU internal and external approach to animal welfare. The key message is that there is strong public support to work on animal welfare.

He added that the debate also indicates support for establishing a mechanism that allows finding solutions under the current framework. The EU platform on animal welfare was the most often mentioned instrument. He gathered that most Member States do not see it as a place to propose new EU legislation. In his view, such a platform should be an opportunity to find synergies and share paths and agreements between all stakeholders rather than a simple forum for policy debate. Everybody is responsible and a platform should be an instrument to which all could contribute.

He then said that he recently met with NGOs and MEPs who gave him a book on the problems regarding animal welfare and transportation. He explained that there is a solid consensus that the main issues concern better enforcement and better implementation of the EU legislation. Everyone agrees that there is a lot to be done in this respect. He added that exchanging best practices, scientific knowledge and innovations is important. Promoting animal welfare internationally is also key. He explained that his services are working to give an answer to this call on an EU Platform on animal welfare by defining its scope, functioning and resources. He reminded the Council that the Commission has various experiences of EU platforms that could serve as inspiration. They also consider the possible synergies with a possible platform of animal welfare. He would be interested to hear the view and experience of Ministers in order to further feed this project, he concluded.

**The Danish representative** thanked the Presidency for organising this debate and the Commission for the survey. He explained that the vast majority of Europeans favour better protection of animals and this should not be ignored. He recalled the content of the Vught Declaration which underlines the need to adjust current EU legislation and to consider legislation for animal species other than those covered by legislation. This could be spelled out in a new EU strategy on animal welfare. He added that a platform would be a good starting point for better implementation and enforcement. It would be a valuable tool to develop common and transparent enforcement of existing legislation in this field. Denmark, he added, sees three headlines for the work of the platform: enforcement, the global perspective and stakeholder dialogue. Regarding enforcement, the issue of long transport would be a valuable discussion to have, as well as the harmonised interpretation of the existing legislation. On the global perspective Denmark finds that animal welfare should be promoted in the framework of international financial institutions that engage in the farming sector as well as in bilateral agreements. Regarding stakeholder dialogue, the issue of surgical castration of piglets could be a good topic of discussions. It could be fruitful to exchange experiences and best practices on how to phase out certain mutilations as well as how to promote better animal welfare through different labelling schemes.

**The Luxembourgish representative** asked for measures to protect animals to be strengthened. He noted that a majority of Europeans consider that the EU should impose protection measures on import products. With regards to TTIP and Mercosur, Luxembourg feels that the respect of animal

welfare is an EU specificity and is a fundamental part of EU agriculture which sets it apart from third countries. The EU should draw on the results of this survey and note that Europeans want rules to be increased if they are based on subsidiarity. He also noted that consumers are willing to pay a higher price for products with higher animal welfare standards and support specific labelling. As regards the EU platform on animal welfare, he explained that Luxembourg is in favour of the creation of this platform because it can contribute towards uniform implementation. This platform should indeed address the implementation of legislation and the development of guidelines. The survey also shows that inclusion is important for animal welfare standards. The platform could discuss the possibility for this inclusion. It should also consider the possibility of developing products which respect animal welfare and their specific labelling.

**The Spanish representative** said that the development of public opinion enables policy makers to assess how the policies are received by the citizens and whether they are understood or not. Animal welfare has a rising interest and citizens are not sufficiently aware of what is done by the EU. On the platform, she said that Spain would like the Commission to be more specific especially on implementation. It is important to talk about the scope before talking about measures. It is advisable that the work of the platform should increase the level of knowledge of citizens about animal welfare in the EU. She added that they should be cautious when it comes to making any new developments which may have an effect on the competitiveness of the sector especially if the EU does not have reciprocity in its FTAs.

**The French representative** said that everyone is aware that public opinion, and the Eurobarometer reminded everyone, is very sensitive to animal welfare. He mentioned the fact that currently a parliamentary inquiry is underway in France on slaughterhouses. He explained that France is in favour of this platform on animal welfare to exchange views. As of 2014, France worked on a national plan for animal welfare which covers all aspects. He would be very happy to coordinate at the European level, he said. He then stressed that the EU should look at the welfare of animals in terms of how they are raised. They need to be able to go outside the buildings. Animal rearing outdoors is an important aspect and he really wants to talk about animals living how they naturally live. He mentioned the example of laying hens and battery cages. He then explained that the EU should not lose sight of trade negotiations either. The more the EU can put forward what has been done in Europe, the more it can raise awareness among consumers. It is easier to make something cheaper if you do not respect animal welfare standards. Trade negotiations must have rules otherwise it is not fair. He explained that he keeps reminding the Commission this when they are talking about TTIP and Mercosur. The Commission cannot be talking about animal welfare and then said it is different when talking about trade. The Council has to be very firm and clear on that with the Commission and it is the French position.

(...)



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### **About the author**

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