

COMMISSIONER ANDRIUKAITIS' SPEECH AT THE INTERGROUP ON THE WELFARE AND CONSERVATION OF ANIMALS - STRASBOURG - TUESDAY 12 DECEMBER 2017

State-of-play and latest developments on animal welfare

Chairman, Honourable Members of Parliament; Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to address – once again – this Parliamentary Intergroup on the Welfare and Conservation of Animals.

Indeed this is the third occasion on which I have had the pleasure to discuss animal welfare issues with this influential Group.

And I guess I no longer need to stress that animal welfare is very important part of my responsibilities and indeed one of my personal priorities as Commissioner for Health and Food Safety.

I want to use the opportunity of this third meeting to inform you of the progress we have made in the field of animal welfare, since we met in February of this year, and in particular as regards:

- EU reference centres for Animal Welfare;
- Completion of the Animal Welfare Strategy; and
- Activities of the Animal Welfare Platform.

EU Reference Centres

Let me start by updating Honourable Members on developments regarding the EU reference centres for animal welfare.

This initiative has its origins in the Official Controls Regulation, which foresees the designation of EU reference centres for animal welfare before the end of April 2018.

This first centre will be a milestone for animal welfare in the European Union and it will help us with the enforcement of the legislation but also with a better understanding of some of the challenges we face in this area.

This is reason why I decided that this first reference centre will focus its activities on the welfare of pigs, an area where we have an important *acquis* of rules and where much again needs to be done in terms of implementation.

It is important to be clear that animal welfare reference centres will be very different in nature from EU reference laboratories which are already in operation for animal diseases and food safety.

This is why we have decided to start with one centre. This will allow us to learn how activities can best be performed and further developed in future, before possibly launching further reference centres.

The centre will serve as the missing link between fundamental research and the practical enforcement of EU legislation. It will provide the necessary scientific and technical support to help competent authorities in undertaking official controls.

This will also include dissemination of information, education and training.

The Commission launched the call for the selection and designation of the first centre in mid-October. The deadline for applications has now passed and we are currently examining the applications received, with a view to designating the centre as early as possible to ensure it will become operational during the course of next year.

EU Animal Welfare Strategy

I would now like to provide an update on the progress made as regards implementation of the final actions under the EU Animal Welfare Strategy.

When we last met in February, there were six outstanding actions of the Strategy yet to be completed. Today, I am glad to inform you that the implementation of the Strategy is *almost* complete.

Of those six outstanding actions, three have now been completed and published. These are:

- the animal transport guides,
- a study on best practices at time of slaughter, and
- a study on the transport and killing of farmed fish.

I would like to draw your specific attention on the issue of animal transport which we all know it is currently one of the biggest challenges in the area of welfare. This is why we have dedicated a lot of attention to the work in this field.

Five extensive animal transport guides and 17 fact sheets focusing on the most critical technical issues were thus published in September. In addition, five short instructive videos are under preparation.

Furthermore, three draft Commission reports are now passing through our internal procedures and will be adopted soon. These concern:

- the application of the broilers Directive;
- the killing of fish; and
- international activities regarding animal welfare.

As you may have noticed, many of these actions focus on the development of best practice guides in important areas such as transport and slaughter.

I have no doubt that these actions will significantly support the implementation of our legislation in each particular field. Indeed we have already received very positive feedback from several stakeholders.

Furthermore, as a follow up to the Strategy, the Commission has produced a leaflet on live animal exports and educational materials on the welfare of pigs.

The latter, on the welfare of pigs, have been designed on the basis of the Commission Recommendation adopted in March 2016. Seven fact sheets and two videos have been produced.

Animal Welfare Platform

I would like now to turn to a key initiative and cornerstone of commitment as regards animal welfare – the Animal Welfare Platform.

Within a year of its creation, I am pleased to say that the EU Platform on Animal Welfare has already met twice, with its next meeting scheduled for June of next year. The Platform has certainly "hit the ground running".

Let me recall that the purpose of the Platform is to encourage dialogue among a wide range of interests – including Member States, businesses, civil society and scientists – on animal welfare issues that are relevant at EU level. This diversity is reflected in the broad scope of representation across its 75 members.

Given that the range of topics that the Platform might consider could be rather lengthy, there is a clear need to prioritise. Indeed I believe the Platform should devote its time and resources to a few important, common and achievable objectives.

This is why the work of the Platform has focused to date on:

- better application of EU rules on animal welfare, through exchanges of information and best practices and the direct involvement of stakeholders;
- development and use of voluntary commitments by businesses to further improve animal welfare; and
- promotion of animal welfare standards and consumer information to valorise the market value of EU products at global level.

The first meeting of the Platform in June enabled an extensive, active and productive exchange of views with all members. The Commission received very positive feedback from many participants.

The success of the first meeting was due to the constructive attitude and commitment of all members to the work of the Platform.

My intention is for each meeting to dedicate one session to an in-depth discussion of a particular topic, where voluntary initiatives could be encouraged. At the second meeting, held in November, we debated more specific topics, for example unwanted horses. This was presented from different perspectives – industry, civil society, government and scientific experts.

The very fruitful discussion saw many positive ideas emerging from all interests.

Another session of the second meeting was devoted to sharing knowledge through Members' initiatives, where, on this occasion, the European Food Safety Authority presented its network on animal welfare.

Also at the second meeting, the first sub-group dedicated to animal transport was established. This sub-group will assist the Platform towards better enforcement of EU legislation on animal transport.

Within this framework, the subgroup will be able to focus on more specific issues, with Platform members putting forward their contributions and commitments.

I should make clear, however, that the sub-group will not overlap with other Commission activities such as the National Contact Points and the Project on Animal Transport Guides, but instead will complement these activities.

The sub-group could focus on technical innovations, policy indicators and knowledge transfer. Such priorities are broad enough to allow members to choose the areas on which they wish to concentrate, always bearing in mind that the main focus has to be on delivering concrete results.

I have also announced for the next Platform meeting (June 2018) the establishment of a sub-group on the welfare of pigs, which will represent the natural complement to the establishment of the reference centre.

These two sub-groups indeed correspond to the enforcement priorities of the Commission with regard to animal welfare, where the Commission has been constantly reminding Member States of their duties in these areas, and offering support.

With this in mind, I believe that things have started to change for the better – even if there is still a still a long way to go.

Furthermore, next year will see the starting phase of a significant pilot project on the harmonisation of the internal market for pig meat from uncastrated pigs.

Before I close, let me say I am grateful to the Parliament for the additional financial resources made available in relation to proposals for pilot projects on animal welfare. I welcome our close co-operation in this regard.

Chairman, Honourable Members,

To finish, I would like to thank you once again for inviting me to address this Intergroup.

I will always be more than happy to keep you informed of developments and to exchange views with you on issues of animal welfare – a topic of high importance for me personally and strong and legitimate citizen concern.

Thank you.