



Report of the 270th Session

Thursday 7 April 2011, 10.00 - 11.00 hrs
Room LOW R 3.1 – European Parliament, Strasbourg

1. Introductory remarks

Departure of Intergroup Vice-President Catherine Soullie (EPP, FR)

Catherine Soullie has left the European Parliament following the claim of her seat by Brice Hortefeux who has resigned as French Minister for Home Affairs. The Intergroup thanked Mrs Soullie for her engagement and forwarded its best wishes for her future endeavours.

Letter to Commission President Barroso on animal transport

The Intergroup has sent a letter to Mr Barroso, President of the European Commission regarding a swift call for the revision of the Animal Transport Regulation. The letter has been co-signed by over 40 MEPs.

Motion for a resolution in support of the European Declaration on alternatives to the surgical castration of pigs

The Chairman reminded his Member Colleagues to co-sign the Draft Motion for a Resolution in support of the European Declaration on Alternatives to the Surgical Castration of Pigs.

2. Novel Foods and the cloning of animals for food supply: The outcome of the negotiations in the Conciliation Committee

The Intergroup Vice-President **Kartika Liotard (GUE/NGL, NL)** stressed that in first as well as in second reading the European Parliament was very determined not to include the cloning of animals for food supply within the scope of the Novel Foods legislation. It called for having separate legislation and regulations on this issue and a ban on the cloning of animals in Europe. The European Commission reacted by proposing to come up with a separate Regulation on cloning which would have taken four or five years before enforcement.

For the transitional period the Parliament called for a preliminary solution within the Novel Foods Regulation which should have included a ban for food from cloned animals and their descendants. A simple ban on the food from cloned animals would have been a mere symbolic act as they are too expensive to be used for food production. It is the products of the offspring which are of interest for the food market. Thus, in second reading the Parliament accepted by a large majority to ban the use of offspring from cloned animals.

In the negotiations with the Council cloning was one of the key political issues. Trade Commissioner Karel de Gucht said that a moratorium on cloned animals and their offspring would create a WTO war with the United States. The European Parliament countered by saying that cloning is an ethical issue and that the GATT rules foresee exemptions for products that are not accepted on ethical grounds. 77% of European citizens do not want meat or products from cloned animals and their offspring.

In the negotiations all Political Groups of the Parliament were united until the last moment. They had drawn a line underneath which they would not compromise any more. This red line was the ban on food from cloned animals and their products and a labelling scheme for the offspring and their products.

In the end, the Council only accepted a ban on food from cloned animals. It refused a traceability system for offspring and was against the inclusion of descendants into the ban. To only get a ban on cloned animals and potentially a future labelling system depending on a lengthy research effort by the European Commission was an unacceptable compromise. This would have included as well the renunciation of the 'delegated acts', a kind of veto on the listing approval of authorised food. Considering all these aspects the Parliament refused to reach an agreement after a long night of negotiations with the Council.

Bureau Members

President:

Carl Schlyter MEP

Vice-Presidents:

Kriton Arsenis MEP

Jacqueline Foster MEP

Elisabeth Jeggle MEP

Dan Jørgensen MEP

Jörg Leichtfried MEP

Kartika Liotard MEP

David Martin MEP

Cristiana Muscardini MEP

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Established in 1983

3. Live Feather Plucking of Geese

Marcus Müller, an expert of VIER PFOTEN/FOUR PAWS International said that every year approximately one million geese are plucked alive for their feathers and down in Europe. In Eastern Europe it is performed by so called 'plucking brigades', pieceworkers who move from farm to farm.

The process of plucking is extremely stressful for the birds. Their downs and feathers are torn out from their chest, belly, back and neck and this removal causes very frequently skin injuries. Some birds are severely wounded or endure bone fractures and a few of them even die. Larger wounds are sewn on site, without anaesthetics.

Live feather plucking is mainly carried out in Hungary and Poland but also in Germany, France and in other EU countries with breeding geese stocks. At international level geese are plucked especially in Russia, the Ukraine and China.

Geese are live-plucked because their feather quality is higher and the downs do not need to be cleaned. A goose can be plucked up to four times a year and can thus provide a four-fold feather and down yield.

The hand plucking of live animals constitutes a considerable risk for the spreading of infectious diseases. According to inquiries from FOUR PAWS the workers in plucking brigades do not abide to the EU hygiene rules. Thus pathogens are easily spread. In the last couple of years several outbursts of H5N1 have been recorded in goose farms that practice live plucking.

The legal situation

Council Directive 98/58/EC concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes requires from the Member States to make sure that owners or keepers take proper care of their farmed animals and to avoid unnecessary pain, suffering or injury. This is fully applicable to feather plucking. Thus plucking of live birds is prohibited in the EU, only the harvesting of feathers during the moult is allowed. The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)¹ considers harvesting as acceptable as the animals are less hurt and only loose feathers and down are removed. This has been misinterpreted by several Member States who saw in it a permission to live pluck geese. However, EFSA's recent report on this issue recognizes at the same time that the traditional live-plucking methods during the moult provoke serious body injuries to the birds as well as stress. Thus it is problematic method.

Also a Council of Europe "Recommendation on Domestic Geese"², which is part of the "European Convention on the Protection of Farm Animals kept for Farming Purposes"³ states that feathers including down cannot be plucked from live birds.

Hungary is the only country to have passed a legislative regulation on the live plucking of birds which foresees a humane plucking method of geese. This law is highly questionable as it is difficult to enforce.

Unfortunately the practice shows that a division between bad live plucking and good harvesting is impossible to maintain. Investigations conducted by FOUR PAWS unambiguously show that the animals are also being injured when they are plucked during the moult. The injuries range from follicle injuries to massive skin cracks and flesh wounds that have to be sewn, as well as wing and leg fractures.

Additionally, plucking during the moult causes as well massive stress to the animals, which increases the risks of injuries and death cases. FOUR PAWS has a comprehensive four-hour documentary on harvesting during the moult.

There are no reliable procedures that would allow a differentiation between feathers that have been live plucked and feathers that have been plucked after slaughter.

Combing/brushing is not an alternative

As an alternative to the plucking, the EFSA report proposes the combing of the feathers. However, it is an unrealistic and unprofitable production method as only a very small amount of down and feathers can be obtained from every animal. Pluckers will finally use more severe methods to increase the profit from feathers and down.

¹ SCIENTIFIC OPINION ON THE PRACTICE OF HARVESTING (COLLECTING) FEATHERS FROM LIVE GEESE FOR DOWN PRODUCTION
<http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/1886.htm>

² RECOMMENDATION CONCERNING DOMESTIC GEESE (*ANSER ANSER DOMESTICUS*, *ANSER CYGNOIDES F. DOMESTICUS*) AND THEIR CROSSBREEDS
Live feather-plucking is forbidden according to Art. 23 No. 3 which says that: "feathers, including down, shall not be plucked from live birds".

³ European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes CETS No.: 087
<http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/QueVoulezVous.asp?NT=087&CM=8&DF=&CL=ENG>

Training and controls

The training and controls that are demanded by EFSA face the difficulty that the plucking brigades are usually constituted by workers who operate on the black market. Efficient controls would mean that every single worker would have to be accompanied for a certain lapse of time by independent experts who monitor their work. Controls carried out by agencies related to the down industry (like the IDFL) are not credible and often biased.

Recommendations

- a) An EU-wide ban on any kind of feather or down removal from live animals
- b) The inclusion of geese and ducks⁴ in the scope of the Animal Welfare Action Strategy (2011-2015)
- c) Consider geese and ducks in the scope the planned EU Animal Welfare Law

4. Foie Gras Production

Foie gras means fatty liver and is produced by forced feeding ducks and geese twice or three times a day with large amounts of feed for a period of two to three weeks before they are slaughtered. Force feeding increases the size of the liver by six to ten times and the fat contained in the liver exceeds 50% .

The birds most commonly used for foie gras production are Mulard ducks a cross between the Muscovy and the domestic duck and the Landes goose. France is the largest producer of foie gras (83 % of all production in 2002) mostly from ducks 95 %. France also produces around 25% of the world's goose foie gras. Hungary is also a major producer (9% of world production) and is the main producer of goose foie gras (60% of world production). Bulgaria produces mainly duck foie gras, 5% of world production, most of which (88%) is exported to France. Over 400.000 birds are used annually for foie gras production in the United States.

Status quo of Foie Gras Production in Europe

- France: 50 million animals,
- Hungary: 3 million animals
- Bulgaria: 2 million animals
- Spain, Belgium: about 1 million animals

Still millions of force-fed ducks are kept in individual cages, although this practice will be forbidden as of 2012. A massive increase of cage systems in Hungary and France has been registered by animal welfare organisations.

Although the EU allows force feeding only in regions of the EU which can prove a tradition in this field, foie gras production sees a massive spread into regions and countries that have no such tradition, like Brittany and Bulgaria which has become a cheap "foie gras satellite" for French producers.

Massive job losses through Chinese production. Because of the increased outsourcing of European companies to Russia and China foie gras production in Europe is facing an existential crisis.

Welfare issues

The EU's Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare (SCAHAW) concluded in 1998 that "*force feeding as currently practiced is detrimental to the welfare of the birds*". The Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations - FAO stated in 2002 that the production of fatty liver for foie gras "*raises serious animal welfare issues and it is not a practice that is condoned by the FAO*"

Housing

During the rearing period, birds are usually kept in barns and may have access to the outdoors for part of the period but generally do not have access to sufficient water for preening and swimming. During the force-feeding period, the birds are confined in pens or group cages or, for ducks, individual cages may be used which are so

⁴ Ducks could be live-plucked as well but low prices for duck feathers block their use in the EU, as it is not profitable enough for the market. However, ducks are live-plucked in Asia.

small that the birds cannot turn around, stand erect or stretch their wings. The slatted or wire mesh floors can cause foot injuries. Birds may be kept in near darkness during the forced feeding period except when being fed.

The force feeding procedure

A feeding tube is inserted into the oesophagus and boiled maize mixed with fat is delivered by an auger (a screw which is operated by hand or by an electric motor) or a pneumatic or hydraulic system. Mechanised systems may deliver the feed in just two- three seconds, allowing one person to force-feed up to four hundred cage ducks in an hour. Ducks are typically force-fed twice a day for 12 to 15 days and geese three times a day for 15-21 days. The amount of feed in each meal is considerably greater than normal intake and is increased over the force-feeding period. If force-feeding is stopped, the birds greatly reduce their feed intake for several days. The birds move away from the person who force-feeds them indicating that the procedure is aversive. After force-feeding the birds are usually panting and have difficulties to move but they still move away or try to escape from the person who force fed them.

Health and welfare problems caused by force-feeding

Force feeding results in steatosis of the liver, a condition in which large fat globules accumulate in the liver cells, to an extent not seen in any normal bird, and which is considered pathological by most experts.

Health and welfare problems in force- fed birds include:

- Fear and distress caused by catching, restraint and the force-feeding procedure;
- Discomfort, pain and injuries, with the possibility of secondary infection, due to the repeated insertion of the feeding tube;
- Liver structure and function is severely altered and compromised;
- The enlarged liver may cause discomfort and malaise and forces the legs outwards so that the birds have difficulties standing and their natural gait and ability to walk are severely impaired;
- Increased incidence of bone fractures and liver lesions;
- Increased incidence of respiratory disorders;
- Obesity and panting;
- Loose faeces;
- Reduced activity;
- "Wet neck"- a condition where the neck feathers become curved and sticky.

H5N1

Most outbreaks of H5N1 took place in Hungary in the context of foie gras production. In the city of Kiskunmajsa hundreds of thousands of force-fed ducks and geese had to be killed. The danger of epizootic diseases outbreaks is huge in the critically ill and massively weakened foie gras geese.

Mortality

Mortality, during the force-feeding period is typically over 4% in geese and over 3% in ducks which is 10-20times higher than in non force-fed birds. If the birds were not slaughtered when they are, it is generally accepted that they would die from the effects of force-feeding in particular from failure of liver function.

Legal situation.

Force-feeding for foie gras production is specifically prohibited or prevented by general animal welfare legislation in several countries including Argentina, most provinces in Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the United Kingdom. The force-feeding of ducks and geese and the sale of products produced through forced feeding will be prohibited in the state of California from 2012.

In 1999 the Council of Europe recognised the welfare problems in the production of foie gras and the need to modify current practices. It recommended: "*Countries allowing foie gras production shall encourage research on its welfare aspects and on alternative methods which do not include gavage force feeding.*

"Until new scientific evidence on alternative methods and their welfare aspects are available, the production of foie gras shall be carried out only where it is current practice and then only in accordance with standards laid down in domestic law".

"Ducks shall not be kept in individual cages".

Progress in the retailer sector

Meat from critically ill force-fed ducks and geese is no longer on sale in the principal customer countries as there is a consensus among food retailers, that meat from force-fed birds should not be marketed.

Several leading retailer companies have announced a marketing stop for foie gras products. In Austria and Germany most retailer have already stopped commercialising foie gras.

Recommendations

For a decrease or stop in the consumption of foie gras public awareness needs to be fostered through information to consumers.

The buying behaviour of consumers plays an essential role in this regard.

If the EU wants to preserve credibility, the foie gras production needs to find an end. Cruelty to animals is forbidden in the EU, as well as to place abnormal organs on the market. It is time to stop this practice which is highly questionable on animal health and welfare grounds.

Nadja Hirsch (ALDE, DE) suggested sending a letter to the EP catering services calling on them to remove foie gras from their menus. The assembly agreed with this initiative and the Chairman announced that he would draft a letter.

5. Closing remarks

The next Intergroup meeting will be held exceptionally in Brussels on 4 May 2011 from 16.00-18.00 hrs and will focus on the enforcement of the animal transport Regulation.

ATTENDANCE**Members of the European Parliament (8)**

Glattfelder, Bela	EPP	HU
Hirsch, Nadja	ALDE	DE
Jørgensen, Dan (Vice-President)	S&D	DK
Leichtfried, Jörg (Vice-President)	S&D	AT
Liotard, Kartika Tamara (Vice-President)	EUL/NGL	NL
Rosbach, Anna	EFD	DK
Sârbu, Daciana (Vice-President)	S&D	GR
Schlyter, Carl (President)	Greens/EFA	SE

Assistants and Trainees to Members of the European Parliament (3)

Zsdka, Katalin	Trainee to Mr Glattfelder EPP, HU)
Gidoni, Michele	Trainee to Mr Vattimo (ALDE, IT)
Valtanen, Aino	Assistant to Ms Pietikäinen (EPP, FI)

Guest Speakers and Observers (8)

Grandmougin, Thomas	Communications Manager, PMAF
Miczki, Tamara	DG PRES, European Parliament
Moser Eleonora	Animal Behaviourist
Müller, Marcus	Expert Vier Pfoten International
Ohm, Sabine	Provieh
Schoch, Liliane	Comurnat
Swabe, Jo	Director HSI Europe
Wartenberg, Marlene	Director Vier Pfoten International

Intergroup Secretariat (1)

Erlar, Andreas	Political Officer, Eurogroup for Animals
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