Slaughter of animals without prior stunning.
Exceptions to European legislation on animal welfare
Introduction

European legislation requires that all animals to be killed for human consumption must be stunned before they are slaughtered, meaning that they should be unconscious when they are killed to avoid suffering.

There are, however, some exceptions to this rule, founded on the cultural traditions or religious rites of a number of sectors of the populations; these exceptions are particularly cruel and cause enormous suffering for the animals. Moreover, the products obtained from some of these methods of slaughter enter the food chain without the necessary labelling, meaning that consumers are denied their free choice to reject these products for ethical reasons.
EUROPEAN REGULATIONS AND EXCEPTIONS

• First legislation in this respect: Council Directive 74/577/EEC of 18 November 1974, concerning the mandatory stunning of animals before slaughter\(^{(1)}\). It defined “stunning is considered to be any procedure involving a mechanical instrument, electricity or anaesthesia with gas, having no repercussion on the food safety of the meat or the offal, that when applied to an animal immerses it in a state of unconsciousness which endures until the moment it is killed, to prevent, in all cases, any unnecessary suffering for the animals.”

Possibility of granting exceptions in certain cases: religious rites, emergency killings or slaughter by the farmer for his own consumption.\(^{(1)}\)

• The (EC) Council Regulation no. 1099/2009, remained in force since 1 January 2013 \(^{(1)}\), maintains the exceptions for religious rites.

Slaughter of animals according to certain religious rites

- Method used in the slaughterhouse: once the animal is stunned the throat is slit, severing the blood vessels on both sides of the neck (carotid arteries and jugular veins) with a single cut which does not damage the spine. The trachea, oesophagus and nerve package are also severed.

- Ritual sacrifice performed in some religions\(^\text{(2)}\) such as the Jewish or Muslim require that the animals be in a perfect state of health at the moment of their sacrifice. A stunned animal could be deemed to be “ill,” according to some interpretations of the rule, and the consequence of this is that stunning is not applied before the animal is killed.

- Different schools of thought within the religious groups state that there are no specific prescriptions in the sacred texts referring to the prohibition of stunning before slaughter, and they believe that a stunned animal is perfectly acceptable as the requirement that the animal does not die before being bled or slaughtered is satisfied. The World Muslim League have made it clear since 1986 that stunning the animal through electronarcosis before slaughter does not raise any problems or religiously motivated objections.

Slaughter of animals according to certain religious rites

When cutting the main blood vessels, the animal loses consciousness gradually, but during this process, it can experience anxiety, pain and stress.

If the cut is performed effectively, the animal will begin to lose consciousness within 10 to 15 seconds, but the absence of signs of life has to be checked up to 30-40 seconds later in sheep and goats and up to 2-2.5 minutes later in the case of cattle. (3)

If the cut is not performed correctly and only the jugular veins are cut, and it may take up to 5 minutes before the animal loses consciousness. (4)
If both carotids are not severed at the same time the severed arteries may become occluded (aneurism) resulting in pain during and after the cut. Aneurism of the carotid artery around the edges of the cut is a quite common occurrence in cattle.


Labelling and marketing of meat from slaughtered animals without prior stunning and without consumer knowledge

Within the context of the EU 2012-2015 strategy for the protection and welfare of animals, the European Commission included among its measures, a “Study on the possibility of providing consumers with relevant information about the stunning of animals”.

The report\(^{(6)}\) on the study’s conclusions, published in 2015, indicated that this labelling would lead to “a high risk of stigmatisation of the religious communities, especially in the current political context,” making it therefore, unlikely that the European Commission would submit a proposal for legislation requiring the labelling of meat specifying whether the animal it came from was or was not stunned.

\(^{(6)}\) Study on information to consumers on the stunning of animals. European Commission, DG Health and Food Safety, 23.02.2015.
Labelling and marketing of meat from slaughtered animals without prior stunning and without consumer knowledge

Several European countries have already prohibited the slaughter of animals for human consumption without prior stunning: Sweden, Norway, Austria, Estonia, Switzerland, Lithuania, Iceland and Denmark\(^{(10,11,12,13)}\), as well as Walloon \(^{(17)}\) and Flanders \(^{(18)}\) (Belgium).

However, in other countries, the slaughter without stunning procedure, considered as exception, are becoming the norm due to commercial and industry interests in the meat sector.

- The BVA has expressed its “grave concern” at a sharp rise in the number of animals being slaughtered without stunning in the UK (*)
- In Spain there are 180 slaughterhouses authorized for slaughter without stunning. Currently, almost half of calves and lambs in Catalonia are slaughtered in this manner.\(^{(20)}\)

The consumers are unaware of this abuse, since the legislation does not make it compulsory for butchers to inform them about the method of slaughter.

\(^{(10)}\) Isabel Ferrer. El Congreso holandés prohíbe el sacrificio ritual de animales por motivos religiosos. Article published in El País on 28 June 2011
\(^{(12)}\) Albéitar Portal Veterinario. Polonia es el primer país de la UE que prohíbe el sacrificio religioso de animales sin aturdimiento previo. 22 July 2013.
\(^{(13)}\) Dinamarca se suma a la lista de países que ilegaliza el sacrificio ritual judío kosher. Article published on the blog Europa Hoy on 19 February 2014
\(^{(17)}\) PlayGround. Bélgica acaba de prohibir la carne halal y kosher en su región más grande. Published on 8 May 2017.
\(^{(18)}\) El parlamento flamenco vota para prohibir el sacrificio ritual sin aturdimiento
Slaughtering animals without prior stunning outside of slaughterhouses

Article 3 of Council Regulation no. 1099/2009: “In the case of animals subject to particular methods of slaughter prescribed by religious rites, the requirements of paragraph 1 shall not apply provided that the slaughter takes place in a slaughterhouse.”

Conflict with traditional Muslim sacrifice celebration (Eid al Adha, Aid al-Adha or Aid-al Kebir) which takes place in Ceuta and Melilla, Spanish Autonomous cities located in North Africa: animals are killed with no previous stunning process and outside a slaughterhouse (in public roads or on private facilities).\(^{(5)}\)

In Ceuta and Melilla more than 10,000 male sheep and goats are slaughtered every year (*):
- Many animals are killed with shackled legs.
- Sometimes, two cuts are used to cut the throat of the animal.
- There is no postmortem inspection. The intestines that are not consumed and other slaughter waste goes to the general waste containers.

Severe suffering is caused to the animals, and the Spanish national Law on the Care of the animals at slaughtering (Law 32/2007) is generously disregarded. Additionally, severe breaches of Spanish national hygiene rules are committed. (*)

The authorities are aware of this fact, but they are not searching for an acceptable solution. (*)

\(^{(5)}\) Pepo Jiménez ¿Es la fiesta islámica del sacrificio del cordero compatible con nuestra legislación? Published in Vozpópuli on 12 September 2016.

(*) Animal Angels and ANDA. Report about investigation into transports, slaughter and connected operations during the Muslim Holiday “Aid Moubarak Said” at Melilla, Spain, 15th to 16th October 2013
Positioning of the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE)

Regarding the scientific opinion, issued in 2002 by the most important European professional body working for animal health and welfare, the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE), it believes\(^{(9)}\) that through respect for animals as sentient beings, the practice of slaughter without prior stunning is unacceptable under any circumstance.

The FVE adds that while any derogation of the regulation persists, this method of slaughter shall only be permitted on those animals which are to be consumed by the members of the communities which adhere to this practice. The food chains and all the by-products obtained in this manner must be properly labelled, indicating whether the animal was stunned prior to slaughter.

\(^{(9)}\) Federation of Veterinarians of Europe. Slaughter of animals without prior stunning. FVE position paper (FVE/02/104 Final).
THE USE OF THE “PUNTILLA” AND OTHER KILLING INSTRUMENTS WITHOUT PREVIOUS STUNNING IN BULLFIGHTS

A puntilla is a 10 cm-long knife which is inserted between the occipital area of the animal’s skull and the first cervical vertebra (atlas) to destroy the brainstem. Injury to this important nerve centre, which regulates the heartbeat and breathing, produces the animal dying through asphyxia while conscious and feeling pain, so is not considered a method of causing certain death and it results in needless suffering.

Scientific studies have shown that 90% of bulls slaughtered in this manner show neurological signs of being conscious, compatible with life during the bleeding. (22)

Spanish law prohibited the use of the puntilla in slaughterhouses since 1987, through the Royal Decree 1614/1987 of 18 December (transposition of the Directive 74/577/EEC relating to the stunning animals prior to their slaughter).

The use of the puntilla in slaughterhouses has not been tolerated by the World Animal Health Organisation (OIE) since 2006. (23)
THE “PUNTILLA” IN THE BULLFIGHTS

More than 5,000 bovines are slaughtered every year in the bullfights of two European countries (Spain and South of France).

Not only the legal exception is given at the time of death of these animals; during their transport from the farm to the bullring also the European legislation on welfare (EC No.1/2005) is clearly unfulfilled (see AVATMA report).

During the bullfight, the action several instruments of torture cause them deep wounds, significant bleeding, intense suffering and painful death:

- **Divisa**: 8 cm harpoon that is inserted in the neck
- **Puya (A)**: destroy muscles, tendons, ligaments and various bone and nervous structures, and make the bull lose an important amount of blood (up to 13%)
- **Banderillas (B)**: 6 harpoons that cause even more pain and blood loss in the area previously injured by the puyas
- **Estoque (C)**: 80-88 cm sword that punctures the thorax and causes a slow asphyxia due to internal hemorrhage
- **Descabello or pithing (D)**: section of the spinal cord between 1\(^{\text{st}}\) and 2\(^{\text{nd}}\) cervical vertebrae with a sword called *verduguillo*, that leave the animal quadriplegic (unable to move) although conscious.

And then, after about **15 minutes of suffering**, they are killed with the **puntilla** (E) as the end of the performance.

**AVERAGE TIME TO DIE**: between deployment of the first *estoque* and the death of the bull > 2.4 minutes, but sometimes it exceed of 4.42 minutes

THE “PUNTILLA” IN THE BULLFIGHTS

A study (25) confirmed that the puntilla does not result in the immediate death of the bulls killed in a bullfight: the 85% of them showed behavioural signs of distress, such as voluntary movements of the head, signs of asphyxia or disproportionate opening of the eyeball (26) after its use. In some cases, this agony can last for more than 2 minutes. Often, the bull still feels pain when they cut his ears, which are a reward for the bullfighter.

There are bulls that still come alive to the slaughtering room of the bullring and that are finished off by the slaughterers by sticking a knife in their hearts.


(26) Westney, C. “Cow’s eyes betray stress.” Published online 30 September 2002 | Nature | doi:10.1038/news020923-16
COMMERCIALIZATION OF CARCASES AFTER BULLFIGHTS

After having been subjected to the suffering of the bullfight, the carcasses of these animal then enter the food chain for human consumption, despite the fatigue, injuries, bleeding and the unhygienic conditions in the bullring and the septicaemia that can result from these injuries. In addition to being a contaminated product (27), this meat is classified as DFD (dark, firm and dry), meaning the meat originates from an animal that is stressed, injured or ill before its slaughter, as indicated by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). (8)

Although this meat, due to its particular nature and characteristics, cannot be labelled with the customary health label, the EU does not require that it comply with the regulations with the same degree of stringency, and Spain sell it with a different health label for its consumption. This may only be sold fresh (refrigerated or frozen) and may not be used for mincemeat or processed of use in other products of animal origin (Royal Decree 260/2002 of 8 March which establishes the conditions applicable to the production and sale of meat from fighting bulls).
WHAT ABOUT EU AND THE BULLFIGHTS?

• We are aware about the exception backed by Article 13 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (24). Likewise, article 1.3 of the (EC) Council Regulation no. 1099/2009 state that its regulations do not apply to animals killed during cultural manifestations.

• AVATMA is actively working for the abolition of this spectacle, and also has tried to propose changes in the Spanish regulations that avoid, in part, the intense suffering of bovines in bullfighting. However, the Spanish Government is trying to shield an activity that is actually supported only by a minority percentage of the population (19% according a recent survey*) and that is economically surviving thanks to big amounts of public money, part of which come from European Union through livestock support of the Common Agricultural Policy.

• We consider that we are in XXI century and the European Union should involve in this issue and take steps to brake this cruel tradition.

(*Ipsos Mori Survey, 2016)
CONCLUSIONS

It is unacceptable that in an advanced society such as Europe legal exceptions still exist that permit the avoidable suffering of animals. Animal welfare must always come before any cultural, artistic or economic consideration, and religious traditions must be reconciled with animal welfare in a way that animals do not suffer.

Meat obtained after slaughtering animals according to religious ritualistic practices must be properly labelled, so that the public can exercise their right to free choice, and so that they are not forced to consume certain products due to their unawareness of how the animal was killed.
Thanks for your attention!