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NOTE

from:	General Secretariat of the Council
to:	Delegations
Subject:	Partial summary record of the meeting of the European Parliament Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI) , held in Brussels on 8 May 2012 – Item 4 on the agenda

The meeting was chaired by Mr de Castro (S&D, IT) and by Mr Siekierski (EPP, PL).

Exchange of views with Mr John Dalli, Member of the Commission, responsible for Health and Consumer Policy (structural dialogue)

Commissioner John Dalli informed the committee of the ongoing and future priorities of the Commission in the area of health and consumer policy. In his presentation, he highlighted the following points:

1) Animal Welfare

- a) EU Strategy for the protection and welfare of animals 2012 – 2015: the Commission's priority in this area was to comprehensively enforce current EU animal welfare laws. While Mr Dalli was aware that there was a certain expectation that the Commission should propose initiatives on specific issues (e.g. transport, dairy cows or rabbits), he preferred a holistic approach that focused on enforcement and the establishment of general mechanisms applicable to all animals used in the context of an economic activity.

- b) Animal Welfare during transport: Mr Dalli was conscious of the current debates in Parliament in particular concerning a suggested 8-hour limit on journey times for animals destined for slaughter. However, he said that the Commission was not planning to propose changes to the current regulation. Here too, the focus of the Commission was on ensuring proper enforcement of the current legislation.
 - c) Enforcement of the Directive on the protection of pigs: Commissioner Dalli said that according to the information received from Member States, only 16 of them foresaw full compliance by the deadline (1 January 2013). He warned, however, that infringement procedures would be opened without delay should any cases of non-compliance arise after the agreed deadline.
- 2) Zootechnics: a new proposal was expected to be adopted after the summer. Its purpose was to achieve alignment with the Lisbon Treaty and to create a simplified and streamlined regulation on the breeding and production of animals of high genetic quality.
- 3) Package of four proposals to be adopted later in 2012:
- a) Animal health law: the purpose of the proposal was to simplify, integrate and make more flexible the vast body of animal health laws whilst aligning them with the Lisbon Treaty.
 - b) Plant health law: this proposal was aimed at better protecting the Union against new pests, and at modernising and streamlining the current regime. The new law would also complement the biodiversity strategy on invasive alien species which was being run concurrently.
 - c) Review of Plant Reproductive Material legislation: the intention of the Commission was to simplify and harmonise 12 current directives with a view to creating a single law. The review also sought to reduce the cost and the administrative burden of implementation.
 - d) Review of the Official Controls Regulation: the objective of the review was to simplify the current rules while consolidating the current approach. The review would also look at the areas of inspection fees, controls on residues of veterinary medicines and import controls. It would also introduce all changes necessary to accompany the animal health, plant health and seeds reviews.

- 4) Review of the hygiene package: the proposals were expected to be adopted after the summer with a corresponding impact assessment. They were aimed at making adjustments in a number of areas to consolidate implementation, including simplification, clarification and reducing administrative burdens. They would also serve to align the hygiene legislation with the Lisbon Treaty, the Commissioner said.
- 5) GMOs: the package was aimed at giving Member States the possibility to have a say on whether or not they wanted to allow GMO cultivation on their territory. The Commissioner said that the proposal had entered a decisive phase and he hoped that a political agreement would be reached at the Environment Council in June.
- 6) Novel Foods/Cloning: The Commissioner explained that cloning was treated separately from the rest of the novel foods dossier. A separate proposal on cloning was expected by early 2013.

In the subsequent debate the committee members spoke on various issues. The most important points can be summarised as follows:

a) GMOs

Mr Capoulas Sanots (S&D, PT) inquired about the Commissioner's viewpoint concerning the low-level presence of GMOs in products for human/animal consumption. Mr Dalli replied that the rules of measurements on imported feed into Europe had changed and these new measurements had been in place for several months now. The Commission had already conducted a first analysis of the consequences of this change and it felt that the first results were good. The question that arose now was whether this new measurement should also be extended to food where currently zero tolerance applied.

Ms Girling (ECR, UK) said that as far as she knew the Danish Presidency had rejected negotiations on the GMO package. She asked whether this dossier was to be discussed in Council again in June. In his reply, the Commissioner explained that while the Parliament had already voted on the issue and had a clear position, the Council still needed to find its position. He admitted that it was not yet clear whether this issue would be discussed again in Council in June.

Mr Bové (Greens/EFA, FR) pointed out that the debates on GMOs were currently taking place at national level and inquired whether it would not be advisable to take discussions back to EU level. Mr Dalli said that the Commission had acted on the initiative taken by 12 Member States in this matter and considered this initiative as viable since the issue included country-specific questions such as the cultivation of GMOs on the territory of MS, which could be better dealt with at national level.

b) Revision of the Tobacco Directive

Mr Capoulas Santos (S&D, PT) asked Mr Dalli whether the Commission intended to revise the Directive on tobacco products. Commissioner Dalli said that when talking about the revision of the Tobacco Directive, the Commission was focusing mainly on flavouring and additives and was planning to take action only on characterizing flavours. He explained that there was an impact assessment currently underway. However, he pointed out that the new Directive would not or only very little affect the agricultural sector.

Ms Ayuso (EPP, ES) expressed her concerns about drastic changes the new Directive would have for both the production industry and for consumers. The Commissioner answered that he was aware of the problems in the production sector and the jobs at stake. However, he also had to bear in mind the economic loss and the pressure on health sustainability as a serious consequence of the 650,000 deaths in Europe per year caused by tobacco-related diseases.

c) European Year against Food Waste

Mr Caronna (S&D, IT) reminded the Commissioner of the resolution by the European Parliament on targeting food waste reduction. He inquired what initiatives the Commission intended to undertake to ensure that 2014 would be declared the European Year against Food Waste. In his reply, Mr Dalli acknowledged that the wasting of food in the EU was a grave problem with a huge economic and environmental impact. He informed the committee that he was working in close cooperation with his colleague, Commissioner Potočnik, on this issue and a communication would be published later this year. In order to combat food waste more effectively, he also intended to put more emphasis on education.

d) Animal Welfare during transport

Ms Herranz Garcia (EPP, ES), Mr Dorfmann (EPP, IT), Mr Lyon (ALDE, UK) and Mr Wojciechowski (ECR, PL) asked questions about the Animal Welfare Regulation limiting the journey times for animals to eight hours (justification for the 8-hour limit; increased costs owing to the interruption of the journey; enforcement). The Commissioner replied that he was aware that this issue was of concern to the Parliament and also to citizens. He expected to receive one million signatures on this issue. He stressed that it was important to fight abuse which had to be done in close cooperation with Member States. He repeated that enforcement of current rules by harnessing modern technologies was the Commission's main priority in this area.
