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| From: | General Secretariat of the Council |
| To: | Council |
| Subject: | Placing Animal Welfare at the core of the Next European Commission's Agenda <i>- Information from the Slovenian delegation on behalf of the Bulgarian, French, Portuguese, Slovenian and Swedish delegations</i> |

Delegations will find in the Annex a note from the Commission on the above-mentioned subject which will be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Council meeting ("Agriculture and Fisheries") on 27 May 2024.

Placing Animal Welfare at the core of the Next European Commission's Agenda

Information from the Slovenian delegation on behalf of the Bulgarian, French, Portuguese, Slovenian and Swedish delegations

Animal welfare has been an important topic for several years in the Union. The discussion about increasing standards of animal welfare is one of the key topics and regularly on the agenda of the Council meetings. High level of animal wellbeing has several positive effects, the animals are healthier, while it also decreases the use of antibiotics and antimicrobial resistance overall.

The Commission was following a very ambitious Farm to Fork Strategy and we should acknowledge the extensive work done so far. Revision of the animal welfare legislation and alignment with the new scientific evidence was necessary. Especially the proposal on the Regulation on the protection of animals during transport was long awaited by several Member States and foresees the biggest update of welfare rules in the transport over the past 20 years. The proposal came along with a completely new proposal of the Regulation on the welfare of dogs and cats and their traceability that is currently being discussed in the working parties of the Council. Besides defining rules to safeguard welfare of dogs and cats when breeding or selling them in the Union market, proposed rules on traceability are vital to fight illegal trade of these animals. The main goal of the proposal is to ensure better welfare situation for dogs and cats. When it comes to selling and distributing of dogs and cats, advertising on either e-platforms or deliveries by third party leave the window open for illegal practices (such as operation of puppy mills). We believe that raising awareness in the public is crucial. Educating the public in that area is therefore of utmost importance. The public needs to see and understand that irresponsible or uninformed purchase of dogs or cats from illegal, not registered and unorganized establishments can have huge impact on health and welfare of dogs and cats, human health, consumer protection and competition distortion among breeders. The future and current owners should consider the importance of enough time, space and resources when it comes to animal wellbeing. We feel that awareness raising campaigns can be prepared in the future, whereby collaborating with other Member States will be an additional asset. We would like to see the Commission stepping in and assisting Member States with expertise to facilitate the regional and EU wide cooperation. Responsible ownership and understanding of animal needs is a prerequisite and first step in achieving better animal welfare.

Furthermore, other topics are also crucially important and should not be forgotten. The European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) was given a mandate by the Commission to prepare and deliver awaited advice according to the new scientific based knowledge. The work of EFSA should continue even in the future and additional work should be done also by other institutions to look at socio-economic impacts of the proposed actions on the farmers and animal welfare, whereby considering a balanced out approach of the various measures proposed.

Moreover, work that has been done thus far should continue within the scope of the existing and the new Commission. The revision of current EU rules on the welfare of animals at farm level and protection of animals at the time of killing is another attribute where the EU has to be the frontrunner in the animal welfare arena. This is what the EU citizens would expect and the society will appreciate. The Commission already positively responded to the European Citizens' Initiatives “End the Cage Age” and “Fur Free Europe”. This is an important aspect and will have to remain in the programme of the new Commission. We would like to see a proper assessment of the economic and social impacts of any proposed legislation in this area.

To conclude, the Commission should continue to prioritize animal welfare at the core of its next agenda. Policymakers need to be aware of the importance of different aspects of animal welfare. At present, the EU has already a rich history in setting higher standards of animal welfare. Nevertheless, the proposed policy ought to take into consideration all the social and economic impacts, where the actions taken need to be sound and sustainable.