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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	AOB item for the meeting of the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council of 26 May 2025: Vaccination – a tool in the fight against animal diseases <i>- Information from Hungary, supported by Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Croatia, France, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia</i>

The EU has always been a front-runner in the field of animal health. Building on the tenet that it is directly linked to food safety, -security, thus, competitiveness, Union policy aims to ensure an exceptionally high animal health status that is acclaimed worldwide. At the heart of the policy is prevention and control – with a special emphasis on biosecurity and surveillance.

With the appearance and spread of many diseases – such as highly pathogenic avian influenza, bluetongue, peste des petits ruminants, foot and mouth disease or African swine fever – the past few years brought unprecedented changes. The challenges posed by these diseases go far beyond the field of animal health: among others they adversely affect trade, budget and competitiveness – on member state, Union and global level alike. Some can even raise public health concerns. Despite the efforts made on national and Union-level, these challenges could not have been fully overcome. At the same time, an ever-growing amount of resources is needed even to mitigate the impacts.

As a result, there is a growing need and demand to adapt the approach taken towards tackling animal diseases. To do so, additional tools have to be explored and applied. One such, powerful tool could be vaccination as a preventive measure.

During recent years, the Council has become increasingly active in relation to the matter. From the Council Conclusions on highly pathogenic avian influenza through exchanges of views at the AGRIFISH Council to events, a number of presidencies have put initiatives on their agenda. Vaccination was one of the trio priorities of the Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian presidencies – with all of them having their take on the topic. As the last member of the trio, Hungary took upon the matter during the EU-Western Balkan veterinary summit as well as at a dedicated workshop . Such initiatives received broad support from the actors involved, signalling the need for the further exploration of possibilities lying within vaccines and vaccination. All the more so as it can play a key role in the One Health concept and can be beneficial from the point of animal welfare or wild animals too.

However, as in the case of any potential additional tool, there are a number of questions around vaccination that still require clarification. Among others, answers must be sought as regards the impact on financing, trade and legal framework. Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that vaccination in itself cannot be effective enough in the prevention and control of animal diseases – it can only come as a surplus to biosecurity and surveillance, the already existing basis.

Taking into account all the above-mentioned, in a view to create a future-proof, forward-looking approach best catering for maintaining the EU's exceptionally high animal health status, we invite the Commission to examine and advance its efforts to:

- break down international trade restrictions by promoting the acceptance of responsible, strictly supervised preventive vaccination on international fora (both in international organizations as well as trade negotiations);
- create a legal framework that allows for a pragmatic, didactic approach as regards the use of vaccination in disease prevention and control and that keeps pace with scientific advancements in vaccine development;
- ensure that sufficient Union financing is at member states' disposal to tackle animal diseases;
- foster an environment that promotes and enables innovation on the field;
- grant that safe and effective vaccines are available to member states.