



EHN SEMINAR – 9th October 2014 - Brussels

Invited:

Julie Girling, Member of the European Parliament
Philippe De Backer, Member of the European Parliament
Anne Van Aperen, Adviser of Mr De Backer
Alf-Eckbert Füssel, DG SANCO, European Commission
Andrea Gavinelli, DG SANCO, European Commission
Alexandra Korstoz, DG SANCO, European Commission

Andrea Gavinelli, Head of Animal Welfare Unit, DG SANCO

Andrea is a veterinarian and he has been a policy official at the European Commission since 1999. He is currently heading the Animal Welfare Unit in the Health and Consumers Directorate General of the Commission.

The growing interest of all stakeholders with regards to the animal welfare has pushed the European Commission to address a number of questions such as: Education and training with regards to the treatment of horses; The state of the market for horse breeding; Animal welfare.

The conduct of an impact study to assess the effectiveness of action at European level was agreed in May during the Equine Expert Meeting (60 experts in the group + 1800 connexions on that day to view the meeting – impressive).

A fifty-page report, conducted under the supervision of a group of experts, will provide a number of key findings that will offer the basis for an impact assessment, and therefore address the relevance of an intervention at the European level:

- The size of the equine market in Europe (estimated at between 4 and 10 million);
- The structure of this market;
- The environment in each Member State and at the EU level;
- The current exchange of best practices;
- Identifying problems and finding ways to address them

A new meeting is planned with expert group on 11th November to discuss content of the assessment (sport and transport issues to be discussed). Regarding abandoned horses, sometimes left in cruel conditions, the EC will also analyse in its impact study the possibility of putting down horses at the end of their life under certain conditions still to be defined.

Equally, Mr Gavinelli underlines the holistic approach taken by the Commission to understand legislation on animal welfare since it aims to conclude questions related to animal health.

Mr Gavinelli made it known that he was entirely open to the discussion and ready to take into consideration all actors concerned by these questions.

Julie Girling MEP, Member of the ENVI (Environment, Public Health and Food Security) Committee, founder and member of the MEP *Horse Group* at the European Parliament.

Through the *Horse Group*, Julie Girling explains that she is looking to mobilise as large a number as possible of MEPs around questions relating to the treatment of horses and create understanding that the equine sector involves a great number of sectors such as agriculture, animal health, hippotherapy. These are at once economic sector, but also social and societal ones which are important to preserve.

The activities of this group, created in 2011 in collaboration with the European Horse Network, consist in the organisation of lunches enabling the coming together of parliamentarians interested in equine issues with experts and members of the Commission.

Julie Girling notes that today, two thirds of parliamentarians being new and not being necessarily familiar yet with these questions, the need for information is strong. In addition, she observes that the growing interest of MEPs from eastern and southern European countries who are looking to get involved in debates on issue relating to horning. The European Horse Network, in collaboration with the *Horse Group*, works, she underlines, to bring together the greatest number of MEPs from different countries in order to constantly increase their network. She also adds the great quality of the exchanges and the growing positive reputation of the group.

Julie Girling pleads also for the new Commission, which has inscribed the economy as a priority in its policy agenda, to concentrate more on the economic potential of the equine sector. In her view, it will have to deal with issues relating to economic disparity within various European countries and notably differences in prices and taxation in the countries of the south and east.

She feels that the EU must act in order to improve information and understanding about horse welfare, by raising its qualitative standards. In this regard, she hopes in particular to improve access to European funds (rural development) in order to enable a better dissemination of information on equine welfare. On this matter, Julie Girling underlines dichotomy between regulations applicable to amateurs and that which applies to professionals showing how important is the dissemination of good practices to raise the knowledge.

As far as concerns the animal health dossier, Julie Girling considers that the Commission does not go far enough with legislation concerning this question and that it is necessary to close existing gaps. She asserts that MEPs lack the time and the means to contribute adequately. They are also highly solicited, but are not always able to respond to the expectations of the actors in the sector. All questions relating to horning will again be debated in Parliament and that she will continue to mobilise those of her colleagues who wish to take part in the debates of the *Horse Group*.

Philippe De Backer, MEP, Belgian, Member of the ITRE (Industry, Research and Energy) Committee.

Mr De Backer began his speech by mentioning his intention to ensure that questions relating to horse welfare will be very much on Parliament's agenda. Sensitive to these issues, he set out a list of dossiers which are currently on the table in Parliament:

- the horse passport and, notably, the question of the exclusion of certain horses from the food chain;
- zootechnical regulation and the question of imports with regard to a more harmonised approach, taking into account that the discussions are complicated due to international accords that must be respected;
- the proposed directive on veterinary medication, notably concerning the fight against antibiotic resistance;
- animal welfare;
- regulations on copyrights in sports events (which will depend on the new legislation on authors' rights which is due to emerge from DG MARKT).

Taking up the question on animal health and, in particular, the strengthening of legislation regarding horse passports, Mr De Backer underlines that there is a need here to strengthen harmonisation between Member States even if the negotiations are difficult and the Council often blocks the way when it involves giving the EU more power.

Mr De Backer declares himself to be listening to the actors of the horse industry and he is ready to represent their interests by asking questions to the Commission and informing parliamentarians and representatives of the Commission.

Alf-Eckbert Füssel, Animal Health, DG SANCO, European Commission

Mentioning the adoption, beginning of September, of the draft regulations relating to Horse ID and medicine for animal, he indicates that it does not modify significantly the 1990 directives (+ equine identification regulation 504/2008). He admits that it is more a case of copy-pasting of existing legislation. The points on which the Commission hopes to concentrate are the following:

- animal welfare and exclusion of horses at the end of their life;
- the framework for the slaughter of horses in conditions that respect animal welfare;
- the strengthening of the database at European level following the horsemeat scandal, in order to permit a better circulation of information as well as better coordination at European level.

He specifies that given that questions relating to equine passports are the responsibility of veterinarians will be dealt with in the corresponding legislative texts. However, in order to take into account international regulations, he notes that it will be necessary to allow a certain amount of flexibility in the legislation with the possibility of vets, in certain cases, being able to delegate this power to another authority (stud books). On the Horse ID regulation, hopefully, the Member States without central database will implement one.

Regarding end of life/abandoned horses' issues: the Commission is looking into solutions to put some horses back into the food chain and/or use meat for pet food. A meeting was organised early October with the pet food industry representatives and the answer was negative.

Concerning imports to the EU of horses for slaughter, the representative of the Commission made it known that legislation is already very strict, with strict controls. He considers, however, that there remain efforts to be made regarding animals arriving in Europe with 30-day passports and on the 31st day are slaughtered for meat. The zootechnical document (2014/0005) is in the Parliament with a possible first discussion in November AGRI + ENVI (rapporteur Michel Dantin - date to be confirmed).

Mr Füssel draws the attention of participants to the lack of medication developed specifically for horses and points out that veterinarians generally see themselves obliged to use medication which have not been developed specifically to treat problems relating to horse health. He divulges that the Commission is working, however, to address this in close collaboration with experts and authorities in Member States.

Finally, regarding the protection of breeds and the possibility of maintaining a certain degree of selection of these, Mr Füssel underlines that the treatment of this question differs from one Member State to another. Nothing new has been put in place in this regard, as far as European legislation is concerned.

Stefan Johanson and Torbjorn Froynes added 2 comments on EU legislation with an impact on the horse sector.

The Consumer Sales Directive (1999/44) is not adapted to sales of live animals. EHN will enquire to services of the EU Commission on when and how to review/adapt articles of such regulation.

Torbjorn Froysnes informs about the adoption/signature of the Council of Europe Convention against Sport Manipulation, a move forward to protect all sport events.