Resolution on imports of poultry carcasses

2008/2600(RSP) - 19/06/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 17 June 2008, the European Parliament adopted, by 526 votes to 27 with 11 abstentions, a resolution on imports of poultry carcasses. The resolution had been tabled for consideration in plenary by the EPP-ED, PES, ALDE, UEN, GUE/NGL and Greens/EFA groups. Parliament voiced its disapproval of the Commission proposal to amend Regulation (EC) No 1234/2007 establishing a common organisation of agricultural markets as regards the rules on the marketing of poultry meat seeks, by redefining poultry meat, to authorise the marketing of poultry meat that has undergone anti-microbial treatment for the purpose of human consumption. Members also refer to the draft Commission regulation implementing Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 as regards the use of anti-microbial substances to remove surface contamination from poultry carcasses seeks to authorise the use of four anti-microbial substances in the treatment of poultry carcasses for human consumption in the EU. They call on the Council to reject the Commission proposal.

Parliament recalls that the Commission proposal follows on from the request by the United States for imports into the European Union of US-produced poultry treated with chemicals or anti-microbial substances to be authorised. The US may already export poultry meat to the EU. The Commission acknowledges the lack of scientific data on the environmental and health impact of using the four anti-microbial substances whose authorisation is now being proposed. In addition, according to the findings of an assessment conducted by the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the use of anti-microbial substances in the United States has not reduced the number of infections caused by listeria, salmonella and other bacteria. Parliament stresses that authorisation of the four anti-microbial substances for the treatment of poultry carcasses intended for human consumption would pose a serious threat to Community rules and standards and would constitute a setback for the efforts and adjustments made by poultry professionals with a view to reducing the incidence of bacterial infection in the EU. It would also represent a serious and extremely damaging reversal of Community policy in this area and a blow to the credibility of Community efforts to promote high food safety and hygiene standards at international level.

Parliament voices its concern at the fact that authorisation of imports of such poultry meat could undermine European standards. Members feel that that the authorisation of anti-microbial treatment, either only for imported products or also within the EU, would in both cases mean double standards, as the European sector has been forced to invest heavily in a whole chain approach, while the US is applying only a cheap 'end of pipe' solution. They draw attention to the considerable investments made in this area by European poultry professionals, in accordance with Community legislation, with a view to reducing pathogen contamination by implementing a total food chain approach. The total food chain approach, as used within the European Union, is a more sustainable means of reducing pathogen levels in poultry meat than decontamination using anti-microbial substances at the end of the food production process. The proposal is out of step with both the European public's food safety and hygiene expectations and the demand for production models – both within and outside Europe – which ensure that high hygiene standards are maintained throughout the production and distribution process. It would be likely to undermine European consumer confidence in foodstuffs sold within the EU, which remains fragile following the food safety problems that have arisen within the Union over recent years.

The resolution notes that the Agriculture and Fisheries Council has already discussed the topic twice and the general reaction of the Member States to the Commission plans to authorise the anti-microbial treatment of poultry carcases has been negative. On 2 June 2008 the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health rejected the Commission proposal by 316 votes to nil, with 29 abstentions, thus sending out a clear and forceful message prior to the EU-US Summit in Brdo, Slovenia. However, the Commission is obliged to forward its proposal to the Council following its rejection by the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health. Parliament is strongly of the opinion that this issue should be dealt with by the Agriculture and Fisheries Council and not by other Council configurations. It

wants to be consulted and fully informed by the Commission before any further decisions in preparation for the next Transatlantic Economic Council meeting, which takes place in October 2008.