# EU srategy for the protection and welfare of animals 2012-2015

2012/2043(INI) - 04/07/2012 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 574 votes to 82, with 17 abstentions, a resolution on the European Union Strategy for the Protection and Welfare of Animals 2012–2015.

Members welcome the broad Animal Welfare Strategy for the EU in 2012–2015, and the Commission's intention to address the issue of compliance with animal welfare law as a matter of priority. Members note that EU and national rules on animal welfare, owing to their complexity and differing interpretations, **create legal uncertainty** and can put producers in certain Member States at a serious **competitive disadvantage**. With regards to the implementation of EU law, a lack of compliance, unharmonised standards and the absence of legal milestones distort competition and result in an unlevel playing field.

**Trade concerns**: Parliament urges the Commission to be more ambitious in including and prioritising reciprocity of animal welfare standards, as a **non-trade concern in its trade policy and when negotiating multilateral and bilateral international trade agreements**, and to promote animal welfare in third countries by requiring equivalent welfare standards for imported animals and products accompanied by strict controls.

It calls on the Commission to:

- report on animal welfare standards applying in third countries prior to commencing negotiations on trade agreements, carry out this exercise without delay in countries where trade negotiations are currently underway;
- henceforth refrain from submitting free trade agreements to the European Parliament that fail to ensure that equivalent animal welfare regulations apply to imported products as to European products;
- insist that the WTO rapidly incorporates non-commercial concerns into the Strategy for World Trade, so as to avoid competition between EU Member States – required as they are to comply with the most stringent animal welfare standards in the world – and third countries being distorted.

**Enforcement first**: Parliament shares the Commission's view that there are today still **shortcomings as regards compliance with animal welfare rules**, despite the progress made in several fields. It deplores the fact that some actions from the Action Plan for 2006–2010 could not be completed, and calls on the Commission to align the target dates for the new actions to the legal deadlines. Parliament highlights the costs incurred by producers, and the potential for loss of competitiveness, as a result of the adoption of new and changing animal welfare standards.

The resolution calls for the creation of a **new system of comprehensive early intervention** to ensure compliance, stressing that Member States struggling to meet the deadline should be identified early by means of a new procedure requiring close co-operation with the Commission. It suggests that: (i) best-practice forums be set up to allow the Commission, Member States and relevant stakeholders to exchange information on the best way to meet these deadlines; (ii) Member States draw up an implementation plan incorporating milestones and targets leading up to the deadline in stages; (iii) a study be initiated to identify the possibilities by which the European authorities could help ensure full compliance with animal welfare legislation.

Furthermore, the Commission, and in particular the Food and Veterinary Office, must be given **increased resources**, in keeping with EU budget recommendations and powers, to adequately control the **animal welfare inspections** carried out by the Member States, a proportion of which should be unannounced checks, and to address breaches. Parliament calls on Member States to ensure that there are **sufficient animal welfare inspectors** who are adequately trained, with harmonised performance measures in place to ensure consistent checks across all Member States, and to consider giving greater responsibility and power to producer organisations.

It calls on Member States to ensure that breaches of EU animal welfare rules are **penalised** in an effective and proportionate manner, and that each sanction is accompanied by ample information and guidance from the competent authorities as well as by appropriate corrective measures.

**Labelling:** Parliament points to the concern among European citizens, expressed through their petitions to Parliament, about **abuse of the derogations for un-stunned slaughtering in the EU.** It is particularly concerned that the current derogation for un-stunned slaughter is abused to a large extent in some Member States, to the detriment of animal welfare, of farmers and of consumers. Accordingly, Members urge the Commission to accelerate its evaluation on the **labelling of meat from animals slaughtered without stunning** and to present its report before 2013, following its commitment to undertake this evaluation in 2011. The resolution highlights the fact that the question of consumers not being informed as to whether or not the meat they are buying is from animals slaughtered without stunning is an issue of great public interest for reasons of both transparency and animal suffering. It underlines, however, that labelling is not an alternative to proper enforcement as it can only guide consumers if the information provided is verified and correct.

Members also call on the Commission to build on its Communication by producing a study, if appropriate accompanied by legislative proposals, on **EU-wide labelling schemes for meat and dairy products**, aimed at informing consumers about the farming methods used, and their impact on the welfare of animals.

**Communication and education**: Members emphasise the importance of information and education being adapted and made available at regional and local level, for example through regional workshops and the use of modern technology. Information concerning new legislation and scientific advances should reach all animal handlers. They call on the Commission to promote existing animal welfare guidelines and other voluntary initiatives by developing a web-based portal through which such documents, having been validated, could be collected and disseminated.

**Framework law**: Parliament welcomes the inclusion of a European Animal Welfare Framework Law in the Strategy, as suggested by the Parliament, and calls on the Commission to present its proposal in conjunction with the revision of Directive 98/58/EC foreseen for 2013. Such a Framework Law should:

- be a tool for the simplification and streamlining of existing animal welfare legislation, the main aim of the being to achieve better and more thorough levels of compliance with existing animal welfare law;
- not further increase the burden of administrative requirements on producers;
- be based on validated science and proven experience and **cover all kept and abandoned animals, including stray animals of domesticated species;**
- be closely associated with **OIE definitions and recommendations**, and strengthen the competitiveness of EU animal keepers owners and livestock producers in the international market, as it would also help to ensure fair competition in the internal market.

Members consider that the European Animal Welfare Framework Law should establish a **common base level for animal welfare throughout the European Union** as an essential condition for free and fair competition in the internal market, both for domestic products and for those imported from third countries. They consider, however, that the Member States and the regions should be able to permit individual

producers or groups of producers to set up voluntary systems with more profound effects, while avoiding distortions of competition.

Lastly, Parliament considers that such a Framework Law should not prevent producers from introducing **voluntary systems** which go beyond EU rules, and believes that those systems should also be science based and could be promoted by certified and cohesive labels.