Current situation and future prospects for the sheep and goat sectors in the EU

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The European Parliament adopted by 507 votes to 112, with 27 abstentions, a resolution on the current situation and future prospects for the sheep and goat sectors in the EU.

Members recalled that sheep and goat farming are low-profit sectors in most of the EU, with incomes among the lowest in the EU, chiefly as a result of high operating and regulatory costs. Imbalances in the food chain aggravate the vulnerability of these sectors and the Commission has so far failed to take the necessary regulatory action, called for by Parliament, in this regard.

The sheep and goat sectors account for 3 % of European milk and 9 % of European cheese production, and together they employ 1.5 million people in the European Union.

Brexit could cause significant changes to intra-EU trade in sheep meat, given that the UK is the largest producer and the main gateway for imports from third countries.

Parliament addressed a number of recommendations to the Commission and the Member States:

Better support:

- maintain or increase **voluntary coupled aid** for sheep and goat farming and other respective measures targeted at both sectors, with differentiated subsidies for grazing herds, in the forthcoming reform of the CAP;
- extend **agri-environmental payments** to pastures used for sheep and goat grazing and support farmers who provide enhanced animal welfare;
- consider offering incentives to farmers who practice transhumance;
- further assist **young farmers** through incentives for the setting up or taking over of sheep and goat holdings, via both direct aid and rural development policy;
- take measures to step up support for the keeping of native sheep and goat breed;
- develop specific programmes enabling women to find their place in these sectors.

Promotion and innovation:

- step up support for research into **innovative production methods** and technologies with the aim of strengthening the competitiveness of the sheep and goat sectors, and promoting meat, dairy and wool products in the internal market;
- encourage more regular consumption through **information campaigns** on cooking and preparation methods and coordinate promotional campaigns for PGI and PDO labelling of sheep and goat products;
- support the exploitation of the high potential of traditional sheep and goat farming practices through agri-tourism.

Good practices and improving markets:

- set up an **online platform** focused on the sheep and goat sectors with the main purpose of exchanging relevant good practices and data from the Member States;

- draft **guidelines** for good practices for marketing products from the sheep and goat sectors that can then be shared among the Member States and with professional organisations;
- bring forward proposals on **price transparency** in the sectors in order to provide consumers and producers with information to on product prices;
- foster a climate of **direct sales** by producers and producer organisations in order to limit artificial price increases;
- ease the administrative requirements for opening small cheese-making ventures on sheep and goat farms, thereby enabling farmers to boost the added value of their farms;
- consider additional tools and instruments that can help the sectors **face crises**, meet global challenges.

Brexit and trade agreements:

- ascertain what the post-Brexit sheep meat market will look like, and to put necessary measures in place to prevent severe market disturbances, including the establishment of a more efficient safety net for prices and markets in order to protect the sector from the impact of Brexit;
- introduce a **mandatory EU labelling regulation system** for sheep meat products, possibly with an EU-wide logo, to allow consumers to distinguish between EU products and those from third countries;
- provide assistance in opening export markets for EU sheep meat and offal in countries where unnecessary restrictions currently apply.

Health aspects:

- provide incentives and support for sheep and goat farmers who can demonstrate that they have attained high vaccination coverage among their animals, in keeping with the European One Health Action Plan against Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR), as there would otherwise be little market incentive for farmers to do so;
- improve its ability to **respond to outbreaks of animal diseases**, such as bluetongue, by means of a new EU animal health strategy, research funding, compensation for losses, advances on payments, etc.;
- facilitate the use of **immunoprecise vaccines** as a first measure to combat possible disease outbreaks in the sectors.

Members supported a review of the relevant annexes of the Habitats Directive with the aim of controlling and managing the spread of **predators** in certain grazing areas. Lastly, they called on the Commission to identify support measures for the establishment of **slaughter points** and the simplification of authorisation procedures.