

Protection of animals kept for farming purposes

1992/1201(CNS) - 18/11/2002 - Follow-up document

The European Commission adopted a Communication to the Council and European Parliament comparing animal welfare standards in the European Union with standards in third country trading partners. The Report analyses ways to avoid potential competitive disadvantages and subsequent deterioration in animal welfare standards as a result of disparities in measures. Since 1999 the Commission has collected information on animal welfare legislation from 73 countries that engage in trade of animals and animal products with the EU. The study shows that there is no international consensus on the role of animal welfare and the measures in place in the EU cannot be readily compared with the standards in third countries. A key issue for the report was whether competitive disadvantages arise from disparities in animal welfare measures. The evidence available suggests that competitive distortions are most likely to arise in the more intensive forms of agricultural production, notably in the pig and poultry sectors. Starting from the assumption that competitive distortions (whether to the advantage or disadvantage of EU producers) arising from differences in standards have the clear potential to undermine higher animal welfare, the report investigates a number of channels to prevent such a development: - market mechanisms consumers are increasingly willing to pay more for "ethical" products; - dialogue at the international level aiming at greater recognition of animal welfare, in particular in the framework of the OIE (World Organisation for Animal Health) and the Council of Europe; - promotion of animal welfare standards in bilateral trade arrangements, in future extended to multilateral trade; - improvement of labelling regimes, whether voluntary or mandatory, to respond to consumer demands for higher standards; - strengthening the position of animal welfare in EU agricultural policy as part of the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy focusing on "quality rather than quantity. The Report concludes that efforts must concentrate on all fronts in order to cope with the complexity of animal welfare and its ethical and cultural dimension.