Follow-up to the recommendations on the bovine spongiform encephalopathy BSE

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The committee adopted the report by Reimer BÖGE (EPP, D), thereby winding up its proceedings, after a marathon four-hour voting session. The committee was set up in order to monitor how far the reforms made by the Commission and the United Kingdom met the demands put forward by the committee and Parliament last February. The committee welcomed the significant progress made in certain areas, while remaining critical of the shortcomings which remained. Mr BÖGE was satisfied with the achievements of the committee and said that the threat of a motion of censure had enabled Parliament to assert its rights vis-à-vis the Commission and carve out a position within the institutional system where it could carry out its supervisory role effectively. The reorganisation of the scientific committees reflects a drive for greater transparency. The Commission has undertaken to draw up proper legislation to protect the health of consumers, in particular a framework directive on food law. The Commission departments involved have been reorganised, with monitoring functions being separated from legislative activities. The report argues that the best way to dispose of carcases is by rendering them down for the manufacture of meat and bone-meal, provided that strict sterilisation standards are met (133°C, 3 bar for 20 minutes) and that carcases of sick animals or those unfit for human consumption are not used. It calls for these high standards to form the basis for negotiation within the WTO. The report also says that labelling rules are still inadequate and calls for the ban on feeding such meal to ruminants to be clearly and legibly marked, along with the ingredients. Victims of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease are due to receive financial assistance from the EU, which will be channelled through associations of victims' families. At its October part-session in Strasbourg, Parliament adopted a budget amendment to provide the necessary funding. The report deplores the fact that, while most of the Commission officials implicated in the BSE case have been assigned to other duties, none have been penalised. However, MEPs welcomed the promise given by the Commission President, Mr SANTER, to amend the disciplinary provisions of the Staff Regulations. The United Kingdom's port checks, through which the embargo is supposed to be enforced, remain a weak point but, the report says, the Commission should also make efforts to monitor any loopholes. However, it does welcome the measures (documentation, surveillance, cutting up, staining) taken to ensure that meat which is unfit for human consumption is not released on to the market (even though these measures have come too late) but stresses that such efforts must not be confined to the plants visited by Parliament's delegation to the UK.