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

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The European Commission adopted its final report on the follow up of the European Parliament's recommendations in relation to the continuing BSE crisis. This document outlines the progress made since the end of the inquiry by Parliament, in particular with regard to eradication of BSE, protection of public health and restoration of consumer confidence. According to the report the investigations in progress have shown that there are malfunctions in the official monitoring of meat production in the Member States and the Commission will therefore take steps to strengthen the system of veterinary controls in the Union in order to improve the safety of foodstuffs and to prevent fraud. The report draws particular attention to an ambitious work programme on food safety which it will implement and monitor in close cooperation with the other Community institutions and with the Member States. Subsequent progress will be described in other reports which it will submit twice a year to Parliament and the Council. The Commission also stresses that the number of cases of BSE has fallen sharply, in particular because of the slaughter of about 1.7 million cattle over thirty months, as provided for by the Florence agreement. The number of known cases has thus fallen from 3 000 new cases a month in 1992/93 to less than 500 in 1997. The Commission reiterates that it will not hesitate to use the legal means at its disposal to ensure that the legislation is correctly implemented. A considerable number of other steps undertaken in relation to the management of this matter (mainly internal reorganization) are also pointed out to members. With regard to the disciplinary measures called for by the European Parliament, the Commission states that it has studied the question and found no grounds to justify starting such a procedure. It should be noted that the Commission shares Parliament's view concerning compensation for the victims of nv-CJD, a human version of the transmissible spongiform encephalopathies. Lastly, the Commission highlights some major problems which will have to be dealt with in future: - how to ensure that the Union's exports do not face unjustified restrictions on access to the world market while remaining able to set the level of protection for human health it considers appropriate; - provision of a derogation for pharmaceutical products as analysis of risk must also take their beneficial effects into account so as to avoid a shortage of essential medicines in the Community; - how to ensure the full implementation of Community legislation when the responsibility for effective checks on its implementation rests with the Member States, the Commission's role essentially being to check how they perform this task. Here the Commission suggests that the Member States should adopt a more common approach with regard to procedures, organization, teaching standards and training of their inspectors.