Food law, European Food Authority, and food safety

2000/0286(COD) - 12/06/2001 - Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading

In adopting the report presented by Philip WHITEHEAD (PES, UK), by 491 votes to 5 with 21 abstentions, the European Parliament has made a large number of amendments to the Commission's proposal (please refer to the previous document). The European Parliament stressed that the Food Authority must be able to monitor the whole food chain, including inputs used in agriculture. MEPs added that the draft regulation should also cover food and animal feed imported from third countries. For example, in the interests of consumer protection, the precautionary principle should apply not only to goods produced in the EU but also to food and feed imported from third countries. A further amendment tightens up the ban on exporting risky poor-quality food and animal feed to third countries. In light of the recent food safety scandals, illegal practices that could endanger consumer safety must be reported. Employees and internal inspectors must therefore be assured that in so doing, they will not jeopardise their own position. MEPs also agreed that food hygiene was the other key requirement for food and should therefore be one of the important tasks of the Authority. Processing must be considered part of the food chain and the directive should also cover food supplements. Although the entire food chain 'from farm to fork' was supposed to be covered by the new regulation, there was no specific article dealing with the responsabilities of farmers. The European Parliament therefore stipulates that food producers must ensure, at all stages of production under their control, that their produce complies with food and agricultural law, in particular on food safety. MEPs also called for a better definition of the Authority's mission, so that it also covers cases where food or feed may become harmful, food safety matters relating to GMOs and food labelling. As regards financing, the European Parliament says the Authority should be entirely funded from the Community budget in order to ensure its independence. But the financing for the Authority should only be transferred from the reserve once a satisfactory solution for both its location and effective operation has been agreed. As regards, its location, MEPs want the European Parliament to be consulted when the decision is taken on where the Authority should be located. However, replying to the debate Commission David BYRNE could not accept the amendments related to the location of the authority, amendments regarding the word 'safety' and the composition of the board of the Authority. On balance however, he could accept half of the amendments and emphasised that he welcomes the European Parliament's support in general for the new Food Authority, seeing the amendments more of a textual nature.