Animal diseases and public health: measures for the control of avian influenza (repeal. Directive 92 /40/EEC)

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The Council took note of the information provided by the Commission and the remarks from several delegations on the situation regarding avian influenza.

Commissioner Kyprianou stressed that avian influenza had spread in Europe, including Russia, Romania and Turkey, that suspicions were rising in Croatia and that a suspicious case was currently under examination in Greece. Indicating that this disease was mostly spread by migrant birds, he insisted on the need to tackle this issue rapidly in order to avoid any possible risks. He also announced the presentation by the Commission in the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCFCAH) of a temporary ban on imports of captive birds and pet birds. He reiterated his reluctance to consider vaccination as a tool to combat the outbreak.

Several delegations welcomed the swift reaction of the Commission and stressed the need for each Member State to take immediate action at the source of the problem and to improve communication in order to avoid large-scale panic reactions from consumers. Some of these delegations indicated that consumption of poultry had sharply declined in their countries.

In the follow-up to the information provided on avian influenza, France, supported by Italy and Hungary, submitted a document stressing the need to take into account the economic implications of avian influenza. These delegations asked in particular that all possible tools be used, including the existing export refunds in the Common Market Organisation for poultry, in order to alleviate the economic impact of the avian flu outbreak on poultry producers.

Commissioner Fischer-Boel acknowledged the influence of the media on the decreasing consumption of poultry. She emphasised the use of export refunds as the main market instrument, and stressed that the market would be closely monitored. She also indicated that, should the situation develop into a massive outbreak of avian influenza, co-financing of expenditures was possible and financial compensation for producers' inability to deliver poultry was provided for, under Article 14 of Regulation (EEC) No 2777/75 on the CMO for poultry meat.

The Presidency intends to return to the issue at one of its forthcoming meetings in particular in the light of the discussions within the Council preparatory bodies on the Commission proposal for a Council Directive on Community measures for the control of avian influenza. It recalls its intention to reach an agreement on the Commission proposal as soon as the European Parliament delivers its opinion (in December).