



31 March 2020

Vice-President Timmermans
Commissioners Wojciechowski and Kyriakides
European Commission
B-1049 Brussels, Belgium

Marija Vučković
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Please reply to:

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Dear President of the Agriculture Council, Commission Vice-President Timmermans, and Commissioners Kyriakides and Wojciechowski

Export of live farm animals from EU to non-EU countries

The letter sent to you on 19 March by 35 animal welfare organisations called, among other things, for the suspension of exports of live farm animals to non-EU countries. We are concerned that, despite this, these exports are continuing to take place. On 2 March the Croatian Presidency activated the EU Integrated Political Crisis Response Mechanism in full mode; since then at least 46 livestock vessels carrying EU animals have sailed to non-EU countries. Indeed, just since 27 March six livestock vessels have left EU ports for the Middle East and North Africa and another 17 are either inside EU ports or on their way to EU ports to load animals.

As explained in the letter of 19 March, these journeys may contribute to the spread of COVID-19 among drivers, crew members, veterinarians, border officials, and port personnel loading and unloading animals. Crew members of ships arriving in the EU interact with EU port personnel during the loading of animals onto the ship; this can spread COVID-19 into the EU. Four livestock vessels have recently arrived in Romania from Saudi Arabia which has rising COVID-19 levels.

Moreover, these exports can spread the virus to importing countries.

Eleven of the livestock vessels that have sailed from EU ports in March 2020 carrying animals to non-EU countries are managed by operating companies classified as having low or very low performance on the website of the European Maritime Safety Agency. Such companies may not be able to properly manage the disease risks arising from this trade.

Much of the EU is in lockdown or subject to severe movement restrictions. Other sectors are subject to stringent measures. Yet despite this, the Commission insists on the continuation of the live export trade. It is placing the interests of the meat industry and exporters above the vital need to protect public health. The live export trade is not necessary. In short, it is irresponsible of the Commission and the Member States to prioritise the continuation of the live export trade over public health. We believe some Member States share our concerns and are looking to the Commission for leadership and to take decisions on this that are in the public interest.

If crew members of ships carrying live animals contract COVID-19 during the journey, the importing country may refuse to allow the animals to be unloaded as crew members are involved in this process. This could lead to animals being confined on the ship for days or weeks as other ports too may refuse to permit unloading. This would lead to severe animal welfare problems and health crises for infected crew members who would not be able to access medical treatment.

Failure by Member States to comply with Regulation 1/2005 at EU ports of departure

Audit reports by DG Sante show that Member States (MS) often fail to comply with and enforce Regulation 1/2005 at the ports.^{1 2 3} The pre-loading inspections of (i) livestock vessels and (ii) animals to ensure they are fit to travel required by Article 20 of Regulation 1/2005 are often inadequate or carried out in a cursory manner. The failure to properly inspect the ship pre-loading presumably contributed to the drowning of 14,000 sheep near Romania in 2019. The French authorities have just announced: "Due to the measures taken to contain the outbreak of the COVID-19 coronavirus, ship visits cannot be carried out on time and according to the procedures laid down". Failure to carry out pre-loading inspections will endanger the safety and lives of crew members and animals. Moreover, the handling of animals during loading is often rough with electric prodders sometimes being used.

Failure by Member States to enforce Regulation 1/2005 during long sea journeys

The journeys from EU ports to the Middle East and North Africa generally take 5-8 days. During this time animal handlers on the ship provide feed and water. However, there is no-one who has clear legal responsibility for ensuring the animals' welfare during these journeys. This results in serious problems. A report by the Animal Welfare Foundation⁴ (and reports from Australian voyages) show that during sea journeys water troughs are sometimes dirty and the bedding gradually becomes very wet and soiled; in some cases animals are covered in faeces. Space allowances and pen heights can be too low. Ventilation is often inadequate and temperatures and humidity too high. There is no veterinarian on board the ships travelling from the EU and so there is no-one able to treat diseased or injured animals.

Failure by MS & Commission to ensure exported animals are slaughtered to OIE standards

We have often told the Commission and MS of the cruel slaughter practices in the Middle East and North Africa. A chain is often tied to a rear leg of cattle; they are then hoisted up, dangling upside down, ready for slaughter. Blunt knives are used to hack and slash repeatedly at animals' throats. EU animals are slaughtered on the street outside butchers' shops.

Many slaughtermen are too frightened to get close enough to cattle. They stay at arm's length and simply stab the knife into the neck. The animal bellows in pain and distress and struggles powerfully against the restraining rope. Even after several such stabs, the animal remains standing while it slowly bleeds from the neck.

Despite having been often told of the problems, the Commission and the MS fail to take effective steps to ensure exported EU animals are slaughtered to the OIE standards on welfare.

Conclusion: We call on MSs to suspend live exports to non-EU countries under COVID-19, as compliance with Regulation 1/2005 cannot be guaranteed. Public health must be given a greater priority than the commercial interests of the live animal trade. To preserve animal welfare and protect public health it is urgent to shift to a meat and carcasses only trade, ending the cruel trade of live animals on a permanent basis.

Yours sincerely

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Animals Angels, Julia Havenstein, Vorsitzende
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Verein gegen Tierfabriken, Martin Balluch
Vier Pfoten, Pierre Sultana, Director European Policy Office

¹ Final report of an audit carried out in Slovenia from 16 April 2018 to 20 April 2018 in order to evaluate animal welfare during transport to non-EU countries; DG(SANTE) 2018-6449

² Final report of an audit carried out in Croatia from 26 September 2018 to 28 September 2018 in order to evaluate animal welfare during transport to non-EU countries; DG(SANTE) 2018-6447

³ Final report of an audit carried out in Spain from 26 September 2018 to 01 October 2018 in order to evaluate animal welfare during transport to non-EU countries; DG(SANTE) 2018-6446

⁴ Animal welfare overboard, 2017. Animal Welfare Foundation