

EU Platform on Animal Welfare - Fourth meeting

Speech by Janusz Wojciechowski

European Court of Auditors (ECA)

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my honour to present to you today the results of the European Court of Auditor`s audit on animal welfare in the European Union. This is the first time that the EU auditors have focused entirely on animal welfare.

Mahathma Gandhi expressed once a thought that the greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated. The EU citizens are aware of that and are increasingly concerned about animal welfare. The concept of animal welfare is enshrined in Article 13 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, which recognizes animals as sentient beings. The EU has some of the world`s highest regulatory animal welfare standards, which include requirements on the rearing, transport and slaughter of farm animals.

This audit is confined to **farm animals** – so numerous in the EU and most frequently referred to in EU legislation. We looked at the farm animals due to the risk that they are mistreated, because good animal welfare does not always go hand in hand with the economic interest. As well as **animals` lifetime on the farm, the audit also covered their transport and slaughter**. We examined the overall implementation of the EU animal welfare strategy focusing on its two objectives – achieving compliance with animal welfare standards and synergies with the CAP. We looked at how the welfare of farm animals is checked in **five Member States**: Germany, France, Italy, Poland and Romania.

Our audit has shown that the Commission and the Member States have **succeeded** in addressing some animal welfare issues **through a combination of guidance and enforcement actions**. The group housing of sows and the ban on cages that restrict laying hens are the areas of success. The Member States visited generally followed the Commission`s recommendations, but sometimes took a long time to address them. We found weaknesses regarding the application of the minimum standards required by the legislation, even where the legislation has been in force for up to 18 years.

Unfortunately, **weaknesses persist in some areas**, particularly in relation to the **routine tail docking of pigs, the lack of compliance with rules on long-distance transport and the transport of unfit animals, and the use of stunning procedures at slaughter**. In particular, as regards the use of the derogation for slaughter without stunning, there is **risk for excessive use of the derogation to streamline the production process**. There is **no overview on the extent of slaughter without stunning**. We found that the way Member States use derogation

for stunning varies. For example, Germany had a specific procedure to check the justification for applying the derogation, while in Poland no such procedure was in place.

Even the highest animal welfare standards will not change the situation, if the control system is not effective. We found good practice, particularly regarding the **consistency of official inspections or preventing conflict of interest**. However, there were also **weaknesses in the Member States control systems** relating among others to:

- **targeting of inspections**, especially in the area of transport of live animals (for example Polish road inspection didn't have access to TRACES);
- **exclusion of certain farms from official inspections**, although they represented a large share of the livestock sector (in Italy and Romania);
- **the use of information from complaints** to target control actions in Member States. We found that only two of the Member States visited (Poland and Romania) had procedures in place, including deadlines for dealing with complaints. None of the Member States implemented a central register of complaints to give an overview of the main areas of concern in animal welfare and support further decision making.

The **Commission's 2012-2015 animal welfare strategy** recognised a need to improve synergies between animal welfare and the tools of the CAP, notably through **cross-compliance and rural development**. The cross-compliance mechanism links farm payments to minimum levels of animal welfare, while rural development policy encourages farmers to pursue higher standards.

One of the key messages of our report is that the **links with farm policy need to be stronger**.

Member States have generally put in place appropriate arrangements for **cross-compliance checks** on animal welfare. However, there is scope for **improving coordination with official inspections**. There were also cases where **penalties** applied by paying agencies were **not proportionate to the seriousness of the irregularities**.

We assessed that the **animal welfare rural development measure** contains good examples of actions beneficial to animals, which are going beyond the minimum requirements. These are for example higher space requirements in cattle sheds, summer pasture grazing for cattle or using straw bedding for pigs. However, this **measure was not widely used**. Out of the countries we visited, Poland and France didn't decide to introduce it. In France, this choice contrasted with the national strategy on animal welfare, which contained an objective to attract rural development funds to help farmers improve animal welfare.

To improve the situation we make a number of **recommendations** to the European Commission to:

- **Evaluate the animal welfare strategy** and reflect how to address its conclusions, for example through a review of animal welfare legislation.
- **Develop enforcement strategy** in order to reduce the time for implementing the Commission recommendations by Member States, so that the long outstanding problems can be eliminated
- **Improve coordination between the official inspections and cross-compliance** and
- **Use rural development support better** to achieve animal welfare objectives, among others by exchange of good practices and giving farmers wider range of incentives to improve animal welfare.