

Meeting of the Council (Agriculture and Fisheries) on 28th and 29th June 2021

Statement by the Netherlands, Germany and Luxembourg on the Council conclusions on animal welfare during maritime long distances transport to third countries

Introduction

Member States of the European Union export millions of sheep and cattle each year to Turkey, the Middle East, North Africa, Russia and Asian countries by road and sea. Despite many efforts to improve compliance with the provisions of Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005, and despite the fact that best practices exist, we conclude that the welfare of animals cannot be sufficiently guaranteed during these type of long journeys.

Animal welfare concerns

One major concern is related to extreme high and low temperatures during long distance transports of the animals. In summer, the conditions for the animals can deteriorate rapidly, especially when they are waiting in stationary vehicles, for example in EU-ports before docking, or at EU-exit points or points of entry into a third country.

Audits by the European Commission show that, when it comes to transports of animals to third countries, there is room for improvement as regards compliance with the Regulation, adequate official controls and enforcement, as well as communication between Member states. But even if all detected shortcomings are solved, Member States' competent authorities still cannot guarantee that, or verify if, the part of the journey which takes place outside EU borders is in accordance with EU rules. In addition, if unforeseen problems occur outside EU borders, posing a threat to the welfare of the animals, it is often not reported back to the Member State of origin and possibilities to intervene are extremely limited. Especially during long distance transports via sea, when unforeseen prolonged delays occur, it becomes difficult provide for the needs of the animals and to get them safely to their destination. The sea vessel may need to return to the EU port of origin but this is problematic because re-entry of animals into the EU is not always possible under current EU rules. We have all witnessed the terrible situation earlier this year, when two livestock-carrying sea vessels were stuck on the Mediterranean Sea for months, which eventually ended in the killing of all the animals in the port of Cartagena, Spain.

Finally, the conditions to which the animals are exposed after arrival at their destination, e.g. during onward transport, at livestock markets and at slaughter, must also be taken into account.

Time for a change

For all reasons above, we call for an EU-wide ban of long-distance transports of livestock to third countries by road and by sea. This should be implemented in the upcoming revision of Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005. We strongly advocate a shift from transporting live animals, to a trade in meat and carcasses, as well as genetic material.