



*In this context of sanitary crisis all around Europe, I hope that this European briefing finds you well and that all of you and your loved ones are well.*

*The present situation has affected our profession on many levels, also economically. A significant number of small animal practices report financial difficulties due to lockdown and it seems that mixed practices may also be subjected to this challenge.*

*If the crisis has important consequences in our daily veterinary work, this unprecedented context has also an influence on the work of the European institutions which is most exclusively focus on the response to the COVID-19 crisis. We believe that the crisis could represent an opportunity for the European Union to prove its added-value through a coordinated response to the crisis and a shared recovery plan. The Heads of State and Government made the first step regarding the building of an important recovery plan. However, lots of decision are still to be made and we hope that the European response will be ambitious enough to address the unprecedented challenges we are facing.*

*In the upcoming weeks, the daily work of the European institutions should slowly begin to come back to normal. We will keep monitoring the developments on key dossiers for veterinarians along with the consequences of the crisis for our profession at European level.*

**Piotr KWIECIŃSKI, UEVP President**

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# PRIORITY ISSUES

## Latest news about COVID-19

### The sanitary crisis impacts the work of the European institutions

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The sanitary crisis all over Europe still have an important impact on the daily work of the European institutions. Teleworking is still the rule for the staff of the European institutions but some of them should begin to come back to the office in May with the progressive lifting of the confinement measures in Belgium.

The European Parliament is organising committee meetings online but as in the other European institutions most of the topics on the agenda only concerns the European response to the sanitary crisis.

As the European head of states decided to use the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027, the long term budget of the European Union, as the instrument to respond to the consequences of the crisis, a lot of decisions are still left to be made : the amount of the recovery plan, the use of loans or subventions, the integration of the plan within the EU budget.

Moreover, the crisis also has consequences on the foreseen work plan of the European Commission for 2020 and the publication of the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy and the Farm to fork Strategy have been postponed again. These documents, which contents could evolve following the sanitary crisis, should be published on 20 May 2020. Nevertheless, as the situation could still evolve, it is very difficult to anticipate the agenda of the European institutions in the upcoming months and further modifications will certainly take place.

### More flexibility in the Official Controls regulations

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On 30 March 2020, the European Commission adopted a [regulation](#) giving Member States flexibility in the official controls carried out on the agri-food chain (animals, plants, food, and feed) in the context of the coronavirus crisis.

For border controls, documents submitted electronically may be accepted if the responsible person agrees to provide the original document as soon as possible.

Veterinary and phytosanitary controls can now be carried out by specifically designated persons. Furthermore, specifically designated laboratories may be used if official laboratories are not available.

These measures are in effect until 1 June 2020 and will be reviewed in the light of experience gained during their application.

### Eurogroup for Animals letter to political groups of the European Parliament

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On 9 April 2020, the NGO Eurogroup for Animals sent a position letter to the political groups of the European parliament (EP) asking them to take animal welfare into account in the drafting of the different **Group's resolution regarding EU coordinated action to combat Coronavirus and its consequences**.

More precisely, this letter calls on the political groups to:

- Recommend a wildlife market global trade, a prudent approach of wildlife trade and a ban of wildlife use for traditional medicine.
- Include regulation concerning exotic pet trade in the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy.
- Fight against intensive livestock farming in the sense that this practice is a major source of zoonotic diseases and thus an important threat to public health.

- Use the Farm to Fork Strategy in order to include new and sustainable legislation concerning the European agricultural practices.
- Protect the conditions of live animals during transport, especially in the context of this crisis. The letter also calls the Member States to ban live animal transport outside of the EU during the crisis.
- Take into account that there are no proof pets are spreading the virus. The letter also calls Member States to define clear rules concerning the cross-border commerce of pets and to consider animal shelter staff as 'essential workers'.
- Push for international cooperation in the context of medical research in order to avoid the doubling of tests on animals.

### **Publication of a WWF report on ecosystem destruction and its link to pandemics**

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On 30 March 2020, the WWF published a [report](#) highlighting the link between human impact on wildlife ecosystems and the development of pandemics.

The main idea of the report is that most recent pandemics are zoonoses diseases. According to WWF, these diseases transmitted from animals to humans are mainly developing into pandemics due to the human upsetting of the ecological balance that contains the proliferation of microorganisms responsible for this type of diseases. The publication states that 75% of known human diseases are of animal origin and 60% of emerging diseases are transmitted by wild animals.

The document reports that urbanisation, deforestation and exotic animal trade are the main reasons zoonoses are transmitting to humans.

The report develops 8 case studies from around the world putting into lights previous errors in the handling of zoonoses.

Finally, the NGO WWF insists that the society post-COVID-19 should change its way in order to prevent future pandemics to occur.

### **Environment Commissioner Sinkevicius on post COVID-19 animal farming and wildlife trading**

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In an interview, **European Commissioner in charge of environment, oceans and fisheries Virginijus Sinkevicius** stated that the Commission will take post COVID-19 actions concerning a better wildlife trading control and more sustainable farming practices.

Virginijus Sinkevicius affirmed that 60% of 1940 to 2004 infectious diseases were of animal origin and that more than 70% of these diseases came originally from wildlife.

The Commissioner also declared that factory farming and the meat production practices in the world contributed to the development of the Coronavirus.

Finally, Sinkevicius said that circular economy would help the European Union market to protect itself in the future by being less dependable on foreign situations and providers.

These future actions may be presented in the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy and the Farm to Fork Strategy of the European Commission that should be published in the upcoming weeks.

## **Eurogroup for Animals' position on Green Deal delay**

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On 24 April 2020, the NGO Eurogroup for Animals took position concerning the delay of two Green Deal strategies: the Farm to Fork (F2F) and 2030 Biodiversity strategies.

Concerning the F2F strategy, the NGO calls on the European Commission to develop regulations protecting humans and animals from antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and from future pandemics. It insists that the F2F strategy should promote a shift towards more plant-based diets and more sustainable farming practices.

Concerning the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy, Eurogroup for Animals calls on the European Commission to regulate exotic pet trade and to develop an EU-wide 'Positive list' of species that can be considered as pets.

These strategies are to be published on 20 May 2020.

## **Latest news on antimicrobial resistance at EU level**

### **Probiotics in the fight against AMR and antibiotic resistance: scientific foresight from the European Parliament Research Service.**

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On 23 April 2020, the European Parliament Research Service (EPRS) published a 2-page [scientific foresight](#) informing that the use of probiotic-based approaches could be the future of the fight against antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

As opposed to antibiotics, the use of probiotics as animal food additives are still authorised in the European Union (EU) and can promote gut flora equilibrium/symbiosis and general health.

According to the EPRS, benefits of probiotic approaches are already being witnessed in:

- Livestock farming of chickens and turkeys (increased resistance to *Salmonella* infection and reduced cost of production).
- Aquaculture.
- The mitigation of diseases, the reducing of environmental pollutants and the increase of quality product in swine production.

The document states that further research needs to be undertaken concerning the use of probiotics in the fight against AMR as this approach can cause the development of antibiotic resistance genes. However, it explains that any new and alternative ways of fighting AMR should be investigated.

## **Update on the EMA activities**

### **Decisions of the Committee for Medicinal Products for Veterinary Use (CVMP)**

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The Committee for Medicinal Products for Veterinary Use (CVMP) held a [meeting](#) from 21 to 23 April 2020.

The Committee adopted by consensus a positive opinion for type II variations applications for Meloxidyl and Imrestor. The Committee adopted by consensus positive opinions for type II variation applications for Bravecto (fluralaner) to lower the minimum age of target animals.

The Committee withdraw an initial marketing authorisation for Tulatrixx after a decision from Emdoka bvba.

The CVMP opened a 6 months public consultation period on a concept paper concerning the environmental risk assessment for parasiticide veterinary medicinal products used in companion animals. The paper will soon be published on the agency's website.

## **European Medicine Agency's strategy on advancing regulatory science in Europe**

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On 31 March 2020, the European Medicine Agency (EMA) published its [new strategy for 2025](#) concerning regulatory science.

This strategy presents key areas in human and veterinary medicines where enhanced and/or new engagement of the European medicines regulatory network (composed of national competent authorities in the Member States, the EMA and the European Commission) can be found.

Five goals are presented in the strategy: *"catalysing the integration of science and technology in medicines development; driving collaborative evidence generation - improving the scientific quality of evaluations; advancing patient-centred access to medicines in partnership with healthcare systems; addressing emerging health threats and availability/therapeutic challenges; enabling and leveraging research and innovation in regulatory science"*.

This strategy will act as a base for the work of national medicines agencies as well as for the work of the EMA.

## OTHER ISSUES

### **Latest news on animal diseases at EU level**

#### **EFSA report on avian influenza for the period between November 2019 and February 2020.**

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On 27 March 2020, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) published a [document](#) reporting the avian influenza situation in continental Europe between November 2019 and February 2020.

This report observes that, during this period of time, 37 highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) (H5) outbreaks were reported in poultry, wild and domestic birds. One of these outbreaks was a simultaneous infection with A(H5N2) and A(H5N8), the 36 others were A(H5N8) outbreaks.

Furthermore, two low pathogenic avian influenza (LPIA) outbreaks (H5) in poultry were detected.

The countries where the HPAI outbreaks were reported are Poland, Bulgaria (where the simultaneous infection occurred), Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Germany, Czech Republic and Ukraine. The LPIA were detected in Denmark (H5N1) and the United Kingdom (H5N3).

The report also states that the reported HPAI A(H5N8) viruses are combination of HPAI A(H5N8) viruses from Africa and LPAI viruses from Eurasia.

#### **Avian influenza situation**

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A [document](#) from the animal health epidemio-surveillance platform (31 March 2020) reports highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) outbreaks in Germany, Hungary and Poland.

The World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) has reported new outbreaks on Polish ducks (1 April 2020) and on German turkeys.

### **African Swine Fever situation**

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In Belgium, a [document](#) from relevant Walloon authorities indicates a clear decrease in the number of African Swine Fever (ASF) cases. The last detected case dates back to February 2020. Nevertheless, the country continues its efforts to contain and manage the epidemic.

On 23 March 2020 an ASF case was detected in west-Poland.

### **Latest updates on animal welfare at EU level**

#### **Publication of the Directorate-General for health and food safety of the European Commission on transport of animals after Brexit**

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On 1 April 2020, the Directorate-General for health and food safety of the European Commission (DG SANTE) published a [notice to stakeholders](#) concerning the rules of live animal transport in the context of Brexit.

This document develops the legal situation of live animal transport at the end of the Brexit transition period.

It informs stakeholders that Brexit will have consequences in EU members States:

- **Transport authorisations:** these authorisations will not be valid anymore if delivered by the United Kingdom competent authorities.
- **Certificates of approval of means of transport:** these certificates will not be valid anymore if delivered by the United Kingdom competent authorities.
- **Certificates of competence for drivers and attendants:** these certificates will not be valid anymore if delivered by the United Kingdom competent authorities.

The second part of the document explains the post transition period rules relating to Northern Ireland.

As a reminder, the Brexit transition period should end on 31 December 2020.

#### **European Commission audit on live animal transport in Romania**

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On 24 April 2020, the EU Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) published an [audit report](#) concerning the transport of live animals in Romania.

The document reports important inadequacies with European Union (EU) rules; notably violations of the [Transport Regulation](#).

These inadequacies concern the lack of checks of vessels and vehicles transporting live animals as well as a lack of records of controls concerning live animal transport by sea to non-EU countries.

At the light of these revelations, The NGOs *Eurogroup for Animals* and *Four Paws* are calling the European Commission to launch an infringement procedure against Romania.

## 2019 Business Benchmark on farm animal welfare

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The NGOs Compassion in World Farming and World Animal Protection have published, on 3 April 2020, the [2019 edition](#) of the annual Business Benchmark on Farm Animal Welfare (BBFAW).

The document helps stakeholders from all horizons to comprehend corporate performance and practices concerning the welfare of farm animals in the world.

### Latest news on animal medicines

#### EFSA report on veterinary medicinal product residues in animals

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On 31 March 2020, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) published a [technical report](#) on the results from the monitoring of veterinary medicinal product residues and other substances in live animals and animal products. The data were collected in 2018 from more than 650,000 samples from 28 EU member states.

The percentage of non-compliant targeted samples (0.30%) was comparable to the findings in the last 10 years.

Notable variations were found for antithyroid agents, steroids, and 'others' in the sense that, for these substances, the frequency of non-compliant results slightly increased compared to 2017.

Decreases compared to the 2017 levels were identified for antibacterial, anthelmintic, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, 'other pharmacologically active substances', organochlorine compounds, chemical elements, mycotoxins and dyes.

#### Joint press release for World Animal Vaccination Day

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On 20 April 2020, AnimalhealthEurope, the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) and the companion animal veterinary federation in Europe (FECAVA) published a [joint press release](#) for World Animal Vaccination Day.

This document emphasizes the importance of vaccination, of the 'Prevention is Better than Cure' approach and of the 'One Health' approach to public health.

The press release contains comments from FVE Chair, **Rens van Dobbenburgh**, AnimalhealthEurope Secretary General **Roxane Feller** and from FECAVA President **Denis Novak**.

### Member of the European Parliament support for an EU positive list for pets

In an [interview](#), Member of the European Parliament (MEP) **Agnès Evren** (France, EPP) supported the idea of the establishment of a Positive list concerning pets. This list would have vocation to fight wildlife trafficking.

As a reminder, the European Union current regulation on wildlife trafficking only takes into account species that are protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) or included in the list of Invasive Alien Species of Union concern.

MEP **Michal Wiezik** (Slovakia, EPP) also took part in the interview and stated that "*the COVID-19 crisis is the outcome of our ignorance, how we were treating animals [...] eating wild animals, and keeping them in a condition that really asked for the outbreak*".

**Implementing decision on the reporting of the use of animals in science.**

On 16 April 2020, the European Commission adopted an [implementing decision](#) replacing Commission [Implementing Decision](#) 2012/707/EU.

This text establishes a common format and information content for the submission of information to be reported by Member States pursuant to the [Directive](#) on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes.

It provides information on the details that should be reported by the Member-States regarding the numbers relating to animal use in science, authorised animal-based projects and the implementation of the directive.

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