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## **Animal welfare – the challenge of our civilization**

Recently the European Parliament has debated a lot about animal welfare standards. A few months ago the Parliament adopted a new regulation about animal welfare standards for chicken-broilers. Now the Committee of Agriculture and Rural Development is considering a draft of report focusing on the European Commission's Animal Welfare Action Plan.

The idea to create higher animal welfare standards is generally accepted and supported by the majority of European parliamentarians, but there is a question about financial consequences of the implementation of new higher standards. Introducing higher standards of animal welfare into practice is impossible without additional costs. One estimate suggests that the costs of animal welfare standards required by the EU legislation is over 4 billion EURO. European farmers and meat producers say they understand the idea of keeping animals in better conditions to reduce their suffering but it means that they have to produce food at greater cost. At the same time our competitors from other countries can export animal products to the European market without any standards. We open our market, we import meat and animal products from China, India, Brazil and nobody asks them what animal welfare standards they respect. We know that they have no standards. European farmers are absolutely right in saying that this is not equal competition, that it is very dangerous for the future of European farming and generally for Europe's economic interest.

Does it mean we shall resign from the idea of increasing animal welfare standards? My answer is not, absolutely not! We shall do it, but at first we have to define what value animal welfare is, for us, Europeans of 21<sup>st</sup> century. Is it the result of an eccentric, crazy European ideas? No, this is something different. Animal welfare, the protection and conservation of animals is the challenge of our humanity in the 21st century, this is the challenge of our European civilization and the challenge of our European culture.

We introduce higher and higher standards of quality and safety of food products, not asking about costs, because we protect our health. We introduce higher and higher standards of environmental protection not asking about costs because we want to protect our environment and our way of life. We should introduce higher standards of animal welfare also not asking about costs because we want to protect our humanity.

We should not ask what the cost of animal protection is we should ask what the cost of lack of animal protection is. This is very high cost of moral degradation of our humanity.

This approach has very important consequences. We should require high standards not only from European farmers, meat producers and all animal keepers. We should require the same from everybody who can export animals or animal products to

Europe. You want to sell your animal products in our market – fine, but you have to implement the same standards which are required in Europe, which are necessary for European farmers and producers. This should be the European position in the negotiation process in WTO. I understand that it is not easy, but I am convinced that it is absolutely necessary.

The European Parliament has sent significant signals in this subject. In the Berman report, focusing on chicken-broilers farming standards, an amendment calling for the introduction of the same standards for European producers and for importers has been adopted. The same principle will be probably expressed in Elisabeth Jeggle's report about the Animal Welfare Action Plan. This is the beginning of the way for achieving a better approach to animals in global scale.

Who, if not Europe, should be the leader of this campaign?

The article entitled „*Why Europe has to act on setting standards for animal welfare*” was published in the “European Voice” - Vol. 12, No. 26 on 6<sup>th</sup> of July 2006.