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One health: healthy animals = healthy people

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou launches the 1st European Veterinary Week in Autoworld in the Parc du Cinquantenaire

Brussels, 10 November 2008

Ladies and gentlemen

I am delighted to be with you today to conclude this conference which launches the very first European Veterinary Week.

The European Commission is organising this event together with the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe to promote the concept of “**one health**”, where “**healthy animals equals healthy people**”, as it is no secret that animal health affects human health.

In parallel, we aim to highlight the integral role played by veterinarians in protecting us from threats posed to animals by diseases such as avian influenza, foot and mouth disease and bluetongue.

The event this week follows on from the first Action Plan the European Commission recently published for its **Animal Health Strategy** entitled “**Prevention is better than cure**”. The principles underlying this strategy are **communication** and **partnership**. European Veterinary Week is a good example of both of these principles.

Together, in partnership, we can raise awareness of the importance of **prevention** of animal diseases at the **start** of the food chain, and to ensure that we are ready to manage outbreaks in a well-coordinated way.

Another key element of the Health Strategy is the theme we have chosen for European Veterinary Week: **biosecurity**. We are all too aware of the devastation that can be caused by an outbreak of disease on animal and public health, the food supply, the economy, and on society as a whole, if we do not take action before problems begin to take hold.

This week therefore serves as a platform for an exchange of views and information on the issues surrounding “biosecurity” so that, in partnership, we can raise awareness and improve implementation of biosecurity measures, which is as a way to help improve animal and public health in the European Union.

Within the theme of biosecurity, there are two elements I would like to focus on in particular:

First, it is important to improve biosecurity at **farm level** as much as possible. This is where the role of veterinarians and farmers is essential, not only in implementing the biosecurity measures necessary to reduce the risk of animal disease, but also in passing this message on to others. As part of its Animal Health Strategy, the European Commission aims to produce **guidelines** on specific measures farmers and vets can take to **prevent** or **contain** diseases at the source.

Second, as the European Union is the biggest **importer** and the biggest **producer** of food in the world, we need to act with a **high degree of responsibility**. We need to remain **vigilant** at our borders to ensure animal products which may pose a risk to public and animal health, are not imported into the European Union.

This is why the European Commission intends to **revise its import legislation** to ensure a risk-based approach to border inspections which would help in targeting **illegal trade**.

Many people believe that biosecurity is only related to **commercial imports** of products of animal origin or animals. Yet it is equally related to **personal consignments**, or pets, brought in by travellers.

This is where close cooperation between veterinarians, customs officials, transport operators and members of the general public is essential.

However, ensuring good biosecurity does not mean simply **banning** imports into the Community.

But we must ensure that food imports are produced to standards at least equivalent to our own, and that imports are properly managed.

Therefore, during this Veterinary Week, we will be launching a major **information campaign** to make travellers aware of their responsibilities. For example, that they are not allowed to bring back any meat or dairy products when they enter the European Union.

We hope that the new posters that will be displayed in airports and ports will bring this message home. The new posters aim to discourage travellers from carrying meat and dairy products in their luggage when returning from outside of the European Union.

In addition, we will encourage travel agencies and airlines to make their clients aware of the rules, by displaying information on their websites and showing a new video spot during the flight.

th so many partners involved, we will only achieve our aim of "**One health**" through the successful implementation of an effective approach to biosecurity in the EU, by working in **partnership** with key stakeholders, and through effective **communication**.

In fact, biosecurity represents a good example of the importance of these two underlying principles of **partnership and communication** within the Animal Health Strategy.

Strong partnership and communication with all stakeholders, including national authorities, the European Parliament and the Council, is crucial to continue to make progress on animal health issues.

I would particularly like to thank the European Parliament for taking the initiative to make available funds in the EU budget so that we could communicate on veterinary issues of public concern, and on the valuable work of vets.

Biosecurity is an issue which concerns each and every one of us. This is why we need to work **together** to implement an effective approach in the EU. We must do all we can to avoid a repeat of the catastrophic epidemic of foot and mouth disease in 2001, which cost billions of euros.

The presentations this morning, the panel discussions and the detector dog demonstration this afternoon have highlighted the central role of professionals, including the veterinarians, farmers and customs officers, in the prevention and control of animal diseases. This not only ensures the health and welfare of our **livestock**, but also has an important positive impact on the **food chain** and on **human health**.

Indeed, veterinarians play a **crucial role** at different stages of the food chain, "**from stable to table**". For example, by checking that only **healthy** animals are slaughtered for human consumption, or by alerting the authorities at the first signs of disease on the farm. Through their work, vets help to ensure we can reach the goal of "**One Health**", as highlighted by our veterinary week motto.

However, veterinarians **alone** cannot ensure that the objective of "One health" is achieved. For this, we need the active involvement and support of **a number of other actors** in the food chain, particularly **farmers**.

Farmers are obviously at the **forefront** of animal health issues. We rely on farmers, who tend to their animals every day, to be on the lookout for any signs of disease and to take the necessary precautions to protect their animals from infection.

Biosecurity measures on the farm can be used to prevent and limit the spread of disease at their source. This is not necessarily expensive, and indeed may be economically beneficial to the **whole production chain**.

To this end, we have produced a **calendar** for 2009 that will be distributed to EU farmers by their vet. The calendar, which has been translated into all EU languages, will provide farmers with 12 useful tips, one for every month of the year, to prevent and limit the spread of diseases on their farm.

I would also like to take this opportunity to briefly mention other actions we are undertaking in relation to the Animal Health Strategy.

In particular, we have great hopes for the **Animal Health Law**, which will provide a **single** and **clearer** regulatory framework for **all our animal health legislation**.

The Animal Health Law will replace the current series of interrelated policy actions on animal health which cover many different areas, such as intra-community trade, imports, animal disease control, animal nutrition and animal welfare.

The necessary preparatory work is already underway, so that the Commission can adopt a legislative proposal in 2010.

This proposed new law will be of paramount importance for the success of the Animal health strategy, because a **single** and **clearer** regulatory framework will provide a coherent basis for all future EU actions concerning animal health.

This first European Veterinary Week provides us with the opportunity to continue to **work together**, and to **raise awareness** of how we can prevent and limit the spread of disease through the use of biosecurity measures.

I would like to thank you all for coming to mark the start of European Veterinary Week with us in Brussels today, which I hope will be a success to be repeated in the years ahead.

Ladies and gentlemen, I count on your support, not only during this European Veterinary Week, but also in the coming months, to continue the process of raising awareness to help us achieve our ambitious objectives for enhancing Animal Health in the EU.

Because, remember: healthy animals means healthy people!