The role of veterinary organisations

During its General assembly, FVE members warmly welcomed the representative of the recently established Albanian Veterinary Association, the nation’s first veterinary organisation.

Since then, the veterinary profession in Albania has been working on the establishment of a Veterinary Chamber. The necessary rules have been adopted and a first meeting is to be held soon. Thanks to the unrelenting efforts of a handful of highly dedicated and motivated colleagues, the veterinary profession in Albania is moving forward – fast.

For many of us, from countries where professional bodies have existed for a hundred years or more, the establishment of such an organisation may perhaps not seem such an achievement. Yet it certainly is, in particular in view of the country’s context. Many of us may take the existence of our professional organisations for granted and may even underestimate their value. However, the organisation of the profession into representative and/or statutory bodies is essential for the functioning of the profession and protection of the public.

Veterinary organisations also contribute to the smooth functioning of the Veterinary Services, by acting as a liaison between the profession and the competent authorities.

They also play an important role in the incorporation of private veterinarians in the Veterinary Services. Veterinary Statutory Bodies ensure that ethical codes and standards are met, by veterinarians and veterinary para-professionals alike. They are in charge of the licensing/registration of private veterinarians and veterinary para-professionals. By doing so, and by setting, monitoring and reinforcing professional standards and conduct, Veterinary statutory bodies play a vital role in maintaining public and international confidence in the veterinary profession, both private and public.

The range of activities initiated and developed by veterinary organisations can only be evaluated from this perspective. Veterinary organisations are about the protection of animal health, animal welfare and veterinary public health. In this light, the newly established organisations in Albania is indeed a huge step forward. FVE congratulates the Albanian Veterinary Profession and wishes it every success in the future.

Jan Vaarten
FVE Executive Director
Highly pathogenic avian influenza

UK outbreak linked to trade, not wild birds

The interim Defra report on the epidemiological origin of the outbreaks states that “currently the most plausible route of transmission is associated with the importation of poultry products via Hungary”.

The recent outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) due to influenza type A/H5N1 in Hungary and in the UK have caused considerable disquiet and interest in the agriculture industry and the media.

The outbreaks in January 2007 on geese farms in the village of Lapisto and then in Derekegyhaza, 9 km apart, were not much of a surprise, as last year there had been outbreaks in Hungary linked to wild birds.

The H5N1 specimens from affected birds in Hungary and the UK were sent to the EU Community Reference Laboratory for testing, where the genomes of the viruses from Hungary and the UK were found to be 99.96% similar.

According to Fred Landeg, Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer, they may never be able to conclusively pinpoint the original source of the virus

However, the interim Defra report on the epidemiological origin of the UK outbreak states that “currently the most plausible route of transmission is associated with the importation of poultry products via Hungary”. Fred Landeg, Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer noted that “we may never be able to conclusively pinpoint the original source of the virus.”

Genomes of the viruses from Hungary and the UK were found to be 99.96% similar

According to Fred Landeg, Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer, they may never be able to conclusively pinpoint the original source of the virus

However, the birds on the affected UK turkey farm (outbreak on 3 February) lived in an enclosed unit with limited possibilities for contact with wild birds. Additionally, the EU's extensive wild bird surveillance has not detected positive H5N1-infected wild birds for several months.

1 Food Standards Agency
2 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
3 Health Protection Agency
4 Meat Hygiene Service
For Welfare and Health Reasons

Ban on the import of wild-caught birds

The import into the EU of birds caught in the wild will no longer be allowed although the new rules will not apply to commercial poultry and pet birds.

The import of live captive birds, such as parrots and macaws, will depend on strict conditions. The Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health backed unanimously this draft Regulation in January. The EU introduced these new rules to protect animal health in the EU as part of the preventive measures against highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza. They also follow the recommendations on the import of such birds, published by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) in October last year.6

FVE warmly welcomes the new ban on the import of wild-caught birds. “Both from an animal and public health viewpoint and in view of animal welfare, long-distance transport of wild captive birds causes considerable risk”, notes Jan Vaarten, FVE Executive Director. The British Veterinary Association and the FVE called for the ban last year (see FVE Newsletter of November 2006).

“Both from an animal and public health viewpoint and in view of animal welfare, long-distance transport of wild captive birds causes considerable risk”, Jan Vaarten

Under the new legislation, the list of countries approved to export live poultry to the EU. These approved countries have demonstrated high standards of animal health and the ability to cope with international animal health concerns. Stringent conditions will have to be met both before and after the birds are imported into the EU and Member States will need to provide more detailed information on such imports.

The import into the EU of birds caught in the wild will no longer be allowed. The new rules will not apply to certain types of birds, including commercial poultry and pet birds accompanying their owners.

In view of the risk of spreading H5N1 avian influenza, the Commission banned all imports of captive birds from third countries in 2005. This temporary ban will now be renewed until the new Regulation applies (1 July 2007).

Castration of Piglets

What alternatives to castration?

Castration of boars should be reduced or replaced by realistic, ethical and practical alternatives

Castration of piglets without anaesthesia is painful. Alternatives need to be considered and further research is needed. This emerged from the SCFCAH7 Workshop on the castration of piglets, “Reflections towards alternatives”, held on 29 January. Citing the 2004 scientific opinion of the European Food Safety Authority, the working group published its conclusions8.

Participants suggested the Community should deal with this issue, taking into account scientific, social and economic aspects.

Recommendations from workshop

1) develop a Europe-wide information tool to keep stakeholders informed on the issue

2) organise a seminar open to all stakeholders

3) carry out a feasibility study on the social, economic, environmental and animal welfare impact of phasing out the castration of piglets

FVE welcomes these conclusions because the federation has urged for years for more research into this issue9.

“Although the surgical castration of piglets under 3 weeks of age without prior anaesthesia is legal, the practice is painful and adversely affects welfare of the pig”, comments Jan Vaarten, FVE executive director. “From an ethical viewpoint, the welfare of animals – considered sentient beings – should be weighed against human interest”. While castration under general anaesthesia would be better for welfare reasons, this is currently not a feasible alternative. Castration of boars should be reduced or replaced by realistic, ethical and practical alternatives. The FVE therefore urges to carry out research into alternatives such as boar taint detection methods, sex separation techniques of semen, management factors reducing skatole and androsterone levels in male pigs. In the long term, alternatives would make the castration of pigs unnecessary.

Alternatives to castration need to be considered and further research is needed

In Europe, the castration of piglets is a practice resulting from consumer demand for meat free from boar taint, a demand that varies per country. Animal welfare during castration is also a demand from certain consumers – often the same that do not accept boar taint.

The workshop confirms that some EU producers have already stopped castrating piglets, while some Third countries reported the successful use of immunocastration.

7 Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health
Transport of animals

New regulation into force

Currently, too many animals are transported all over the world, which does not only compromise the welfare of the animals but increases the risk of spreading infectious diseases.

The new Regulation on animal welfare during transport\textsuperscript{10} entered into force on 5 January. Among the new rules we find higher standards for vehicles and equipment and stricter rules for those dealing with animals in transport. The Regulation also provides for measures to ensure the better enforcement of EU rules in this area, such as the use of satellite navigation systems.

Although FVE welcomes the Regulation, “it is – by far – not as good as it could have been to protect the animals during transport”, regrets Jan Vaarten FVE Executive director. In order to reach consensus, several provisions were deleted or watered down during the legislative process, he recalls.

He stresses that, “even more important than the protection of animals during transport is the reduction of long-distance live animal transport”. Ideally, animals should be raised and slaughtered as close as possible to the place they were born. “Currently, too many animals are transported all over the world”, Mr Vaarten notes. “This does not only severely compromise the welfare of these animals but also increases the risk of spreading infectious diseases”.

Since early January, all provisions of the Regulation apply – with the exception of article 5(6), regarding the certificate of competence for drivers and attendants of road transport vehicles, which will apply from 2008. Member States did not agree on a revision of existing maximum travelling times and animal stocking densities on vehicles. Therefore the commission agreed that these two issues will be the subject of a further separate proposal to be presented by 2011.

Ritual Slaughter

FVE Executive Director speaks out on Belgian television

FVE finds the practice of slaughter without prior stunning unacceptable under any circumstance. However, current EU legislation allows a derogation on religious grounds, but only if certain conditions are met.

Ritual slaughter was the theme of a television programme on Belgian television end January, during which FVE executive director Jan Vaarten was asked about the FVE point of view.

Immediate hooking up of the animals does not reduce suffering. Those who mean well should put forward their arguments, not ignore the law, Jan Vaarten

\textsuperscript{10} Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 of 22 December 2004 on the protection of animals during transport and related operations
One slaughterhouse that carried out ritual slaughter (without prior stunning) hooked the animals on the slaughter line before they had bled completely. Spokespeople from the slaughterhouse argued that “this would kill the animals more rapidly” and thereby reduce the suffering.

“First of all, the FVE finds the practice of slaughter of animals without prior stunning unacceptable under any circumstance”, recalled Jan Vaarten11. “However, current EU legislation allows a derogation on religious grounds, but only if certain conditions are met. One of these is that no slaughter activities may be carried out prior to the complete bleeding of the animal”. He added that there is no proof that early hooking up of the animals reduces suffering. “Available data even suggest the opposite”, Mr Vaarten said, adding that “those who mean well should put forward their arguments, not ignore the law”.

Two brothers from Cambridgeshire (UK) were found guilty last January of causing “unnecessary suffering to an animal”. Their dog Rusty, a 9-year-old Labrador retriever, weighed about 73kg when animal welfare inspectors of the RSPCA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) removed the dog from its owner’s home in March 2006.

“The dog was so grossly overweight it could barely walk to the point where it could take five or six paces before collapsing on the floor”, said Jason Synch, RSPCA inspector. Rusty already lost 22kg since then under veterinary guidance.

The brothers had been warned several times to control Rusty’s weight and to see a veterinarian, but they had failed to do so. The owners denied causing unnecessary suffering to the dog and they claimed that Rusty was overweight because of his age and the arthritis that kept him from exercising.

The dog’s owners were convicted of causing unnecessary suffering to an animal. They received a three-year conditional discharge and the dog was returned to them, but only under the condition that they would provide adequate care.

Greece will be referred to the European Court of Justice for failing to properly staff its veterinary services. This persistent understaffing of the veterinary services has resulted in poor controls and inadequate enforcement of EU food safety and animal health legislation in Greece.

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Overweight pet dog

UK owners convicted for animal cruelty

The owners received a three-year conditional discharge and the dog was returned to them, but only under the condition that they would provide adequate care

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Public Health

Veterinary Services

Greece taken to Court over inadequate staffing

Veterinary Services play an important role in the protection of animal health and welfare as well as veterinary Public Health. This can only be achieved with adequate funds and sufficient staff
The upgrading of Veterinary Services standards should be considered a public investment priority

"In view of the efforts made by new and candidate Member countries to bring the Veterinary Services up to standard, it is highly regrettable to see that an EU Member Country fails to comply with its obligation", says Mr Vaarten

The FVE fully supports the Commission’s decision, although it regrets it has come to this. “Veterinary Services play an important role in the protection of animal health and welfare as well as veterinary Public Health”, stresses Jan Vaarten, FVE executive director. “This can only be achieved with adequate funds and sufficient staff”. He also recalls that the World Organisation for Animal health (OIE) considers Veterinary Services to be a Global Public Good. Their upgrading to international standards (in terms of structure, resources, capacities, etc) should be considered a public investment priority.

"Without adequate staff, there cannot be full and proper veterinary controls. And without these controls, the high level of food safety that we seek to guarantee in all Member States cannot be assured”, Commissioner Markos Kyprianou, (DG SANCO)

This does not only put the health and welfare of animals and of its citizens at stake but it also creates a risk for neighbouring countries and for their international trading partners. It also puts a heavy burden on the shoulders of those veterinarians who, with a limited capacity and budget, try to do their work.

Despite actions since the Commission’s reasoned opinion of 2004, Greece has still only created and filled a fraction of the posts necessary to ensure proper implementation and enforcement of EU veterinary legislation.

Under EU food safety legislation, Member States are responsible for ensuring that rules are implemented and properly enforced. Inspections of the Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) to Greece have consistently reported shortcomings in the enforcement of EU food law, due to the severe understaffing of veterinary services, both at central and at regional level (prefectures). The Commission took the view that, because of the inadequate staffing levels, Greece did not carry out veterinary and other food safety and animal welfare controls in accordance to EU law.

The World Organisation for Animal health (OIE) considers Veterinary Services to be a Global Public Good

The Commission is also concerned that many of the recruitments being committed to by the Greek authorities do not actually amount to a net increase in the number of staff available. In fact, these new recruits are being used to replace staff who have either recently retired or are about to retire. Recent FVO inspection reports confirm the lack of substantial improvement, which means that the standard in the enforcement of EU veterinary legislation continues to be very poor. For this reason, the Commission now has no alternative but to refer the case to the Court of Justice.
Two more cases concerning infringements of EU veterinary legislation by Greece are currently pending and are also at an advanced stage. They are directly linked to the problem of understaffing so any steps taken by Greek authorities in this regard will have a direct impact also on those cases.

**Medicines**

### 7th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development

**Launched in Brussels, FP 7 identifies research domains**

The money that will become available over the next years creates great opportunities for the veterinary world, in particular research in fields of animal health and welfare and in veterinary public health.

The 7th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP7, 2007-2013) was launched early February in Brussels. It has a total budget of € 50 billion to cover research grants from Europe and third countries.

The FP7 programme is subdivided into five programmes: Cooperation, Ideas, People, Capacities and Nuclear Research. For the veterinary sector, the Cooperation Programme and in particular theme 2 (Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, and Biotechnology) is the most interesting.

“The money that will become available over the next years to co-finance research, technological development and demonstration projects creates great opportunities for the veterinary world”, remarks Nicole Schreiner, FVE veterinary policy officer, adding that “in particular, research in the fields of animal health and welfare and of veterinary public health will contribute to strengthening the development of veterinary medicine”.

Examples of projects include proposals for a list of priority diseases and pushing for certain targets such as in-feed vaccination against avian influenza virus.

“In the area of animal production, research could find means to move away from cost-driven competition only and to focus on other values such as health and welfare”, Ms Schreiner adds.

The ETPGAH was set up in 2004 and is chaired by the International Federation of Animal Health (which represents the veterinary pharmaceutical industry). It is a joint initiative of industry and the research community actively encouraged by the European Commission services. It integrates all relevant stakeholders at EU and national levels, from academia, research, farmers, veterinarians (represented by the FVE), industry, consumers and regulators.

Grants for FP7 projects are awarded on the basis of calls for proposals and a peer review.

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process. As opposed to the previous framework, under FP7 there is also room for "individual teams" with no obligation for transnational cooperation. Participation in FP7 is open to a wide range of organisations and individuals and it is open to any country in the world.

For the veterinary sector, the Cooperation Programme and in particular theme 2 (Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, and Biotechnology) is the most interesting.

National Contact Points (NCP) have been set up in all EU Member States in order to give personalised help and advice to researchers and organizations intending to participate. A guide for applicants is available online.

The European Coordinating Committee for Veterinary Training (ECCVT) discussed the revised standard operating procedures (SOP) for the evaluation of veterinary schools, the day-one skills for veterinarians and the impact of the Bologna declaration in a meeting last 19 January.

The ECCVT is a joint committee of the EAEVE, the EBVS and the FVE, and ensures the coordination of veterinary undergraduate and postgraduate training.

At the January meeting, representatives discussed the updated SOP for the evaluation of European veterinary schools.

**Main proposal for updates of the SOP include**

1. Addition of a subject group “professional skills” (practice management, professional ethics, legislation...)

2. Only after a positive stage 1 evaluation (checking that the school meets the EU legal requirements), schools can apply for a stage 2 evaluation/accreditation.

3. For stage 2 accreditation, the evaluating committee should become member of the European association for quality assurance for higher education.

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13 European Association of Establishments of Veterinary Education
14 European Board of Veterinary Specialisation
15 Marcel Wanner, Stefano Romagnoli, Liljana Pinter (EAEVE), Frank Gasthuijs, Jens Arnbjerg, Sjeng Lumeij (EBVS); Tjeerd Jorna, Karin Ostensson, Rémi Gellé (FVE).
As the new EU Directive regulating basic veterinary training and qualifications will enter into force next October, the requirements set out by this Directive and those under the SOP should concur.

Regarding the Bologna declaration, participants confirmed that the veterinary curriculum takes at least five years, the “Bachelor’s degree” is an academic degree, not a professional qualification, and that the final Master’s degree is required for veterinarians.

Germany decided to reject the Bologna process altogether for the veterinary curricula. As a consequence, there would be no credits transfer system or Erasmus exchanges.

Welfare issues with active MEP, Mr Thijs Berman

On 6 March, the FVE welcomed a group of students in agricultural sciences who are preparing a Master’s degree in Animal Welfare and Biology. The aim was to provide the students with an insight and information on animal welfare in Europe.

The programme included presentations by FVE staff and representatives of Eurogroup for animals about decision-making process and European institutions and non-governmental organisations dealing with animal welfare. In the afternoon, the group visited the European Parliament where they met Thijs Berman (MEP and member of the Committee of Agriculture and Rural Development) to discuss the role of the European Parliament in Animal Welfare issues.

Students had the opportunity to learn about the steps taken to improve animal welfare in Europe and to have a better understanding of the role of NGO’s and European and International institutions.

FVE & Professional matters

MSc in animal welfare

FVE introduces students to animal welfare in Europe

Students of an MSc in Animal Welfare and Biology could discuss Animal

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19 HAS Den Bosch (NL/UK)
EFSA, FVE and UEVP participate in food safety conference

The important role of veterinarians in food safety was the main topic of the conference

In its hometown, Cremona, the Italian Veterinary Association (Associazione Nazionale Medici Veterinari Italiana, ANMVI) hosted an international congress on the role of the veterinarian in food safety, in close collaboration with FVE and UEVP. The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), located in nearby Parma, also contributed to the scientific programme.

In his opening speech, FVE president Dr Tjeerd Jorna highlighted the importance of a strong veterinary network and the need for close collaboration between veterinarians in different disciplines.

For further information, see http://www.anmvi.it/documenti/relazioni_slide.htm
FVE
The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) is an umbrella organisation of veterinary organisations from 37 European countries, regulated by the law on international societies in Belgium.

Members
Austria, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, FYR of Macedonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia/Montenegro, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom

Sections
EASVO-State Officers
EVERI – Education, Research and Industry
UEVH-Hygienists
UEVP- Practitioners

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