

Brussels, 13/05/2020

Joint open letter to:

**Vice-President Timmermans
Commissioner Sinkevičius
Commissioner Kyriakides**

Eurogroup for Animals and its member organisations urges the European Commission to integrate our recommendations in its Farm-to-Fork and Biodiversity to 2030 strategies.

Stop pandemics? Start here

70% of emerging infectious diseases in humans come from animals, and COVID-19 is in all likelihood no different. Changes in land and sea use and loss of habitat for agricultural purposes, especially for the intensification of animal farming, cause more frequent and closer interactions between animals both farmed and wild, humans, and ecosystems. As a result, 77% of our protected species and 84% of natural habitats in the EU alone have either disappeared or are in a very bad condition. These species and habitats not only have an intrinsic right to be protected, but should in fact be much better protected, since together they aid human health by providing vital ecosystem services such as clean air and water, and protection against erosion and drought.

While research is not conclusive about the source of the SARS-COV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, it is widely believed to have been transmitted from wildlife to humans as a consequence of the proximity and variety of species sold in a Chinese wildlife market. However, the disease could just as easily have originated here. The EU is a major destination for exotic pets, including primates, reptiles, and amphibians, which are legally and illegally traded and transported to be sold and kept in EU homes, in most cases with few or no sanitary controls. Not only is this a threat to human health, it also threatens biodiversity, as is recognized in the European Invasive Alien Species Strategy.

But the next – and potentially even worse – pandemic could also easily emerge from what is now the norm in food production in most developed parts of the world: intensive farming. Farmed animals kept by the billions (trillions, if we consider fish in aquaculture) are reservoirs and pathways for diseases that can be dangerous, if not devastating, for humans and wild animals.

In the EU, hundreds of millions of pigs and billions of chickens are kept in intensive industrial conditions, and are incubators of zoonotic diseases that are heavily affecting public health. Many such diseases are becoming increasingly difficult to treat, as the (mis)use of antibiotics in intensive farming is a major contributor to antimicrobial resistance, which is only increasing in the EU in spite of sustained efforts to reduce the use of antibiotics in farmed animals.

COVID-19 has made it clear: we can no longer address public health without also addressing our treatment of animals: how we trade, keep or farm them and how we protect their natural habitats.

The Biodiversity Strategy to 2030 and the Farm-to-Fork Strategy, currently being drafted as part of the European Green Deal, offer a unique opportunity to set a brand new course for the EU: the regulation of the exotic pet trade and a move away from intensive animal agriculture, in both cases to protect the health of people and animals, their welfare, and biodiversity.

We therefore strongly urge the European Commission to integrate the following recommendations:

Biodiversity Strategy to 2030

- Wild animals should not be traded and kept as pets. As a first step in this direction, the exotic pet trade within the EU should be regulated. An EU-wide ‘Positive List’ stating which animal species are more suitable and safer to be kept as pets should be adopted.
- The post-2020 Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking should be fully integrated into the Biodiversity to 2030 Strategy, and receive adequate funding.
- The strategy should incorporate stricter measures or bans on intra-EU and external trade in endangered species, like tigers and tiger products, working with allies globally to achieve this.
- The strategy should ensure that all EU policies that influence biodiversity are adopted if they aid biodiversity restoration. This is particularly relevant for agricultural related policies, such as the Farm-to-Fork Strategy, since current intensive farming practices have greatly reduced biodiversity.
- Funds should be allocated at the EU level and made available to Member States to ensure consistent and appropriate support is provided to wildlife rescue facilities across Europe. These facilities play a critical role in supporting countries’ effort to fight against wildlife trafficking and in ensuring the welfare of wild animals that have been confiscated.

Farm-to-Fork Strategy

- An animal welfare dimension should be inserted as a stand-alone sustainability pillar for food systems.

- The CAP needs to be reformed so that public money is used to help farmers transition to less-intensive high welfare farm methods which aid the restoration of biodiversity and thus supports the Biodiversity 2030 strategy.
- Efforts to promote alternative (plant-based) sources of proteins for human diets must be further supported by helping researchers and farmers to better develop and market plant protein products.
- Integrated ecological approaches, organic and regenerative farming practices invested under Horizon 2020 need to be further enhanced and promoted so that they can be applied by farmers throughout the EU.

Stamping out pandemics means stamping out animal cruelty, now and forever.

We welcome your consideration on this important matter and stand ready to assist.

Yours sincerely,

Eurogroup for Animals

Eurogroup for Animals represents 70 animal advocacy organisations in 25 EU Member States, the UK, Switzerland, Serbia, Norway, Australia and the USA. Since its inception in 1980, the organisation has succeeded in encouraging the EU to adopt higher legal standards for animal protection. Eurogroup for Animals reflects public opinion through its membership organisations' affiliations across the Union, and has both the scientific and technical expertise to provide authoritative advice on issues relating to animal welfare. For more information, please visit www.eurogroupforanimals.org. Follow us on Twitter [@Act4AnimalsEU](https://twitter.com/Act4AnimalsEU) and like us on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/Act4AnimalsEU).