



Slovensko predsedstvo EU 2008
Slovenian Presidency of the EU 2008
La Présidence slovène de l'UE 2008

Date: 29 January 2008

**Address by the President of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council,
Iztok Jarc, before the European Parliament Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety
Brussels**

(Check against delivery!)

Mr Chairman,

Honourable Members of the Committee,

I am both honoured and pleased to participate in your meeting today and share with you the Council Presidency's vision on the priorities for the first half of this year in our joint field of policy and legislation.

Last week, Minister of Health Mazej Kukovič and Minister of the Environment and Spatial Planning Podobnik presented the priorities of the Slovenian Presidency to you in the fields of public health and the environment. Today I will present the work programme in the fields of public health, food safety, plant and animal health and forestry. In the fields of public health and food safety, I share competences with the minister of health, and therefore I will only partly address the issues in these fields.

I wish to underline the importance that I and the Slovenian Presidency attach to the important role which the European Parliament, and your Committee in particular, plays in the legislative process in the above-mentioned fields. I look forward to working closely with you to ensure smooth progress on the proposals currently before us.

Slovenia is the first of the Member States which joined the European Union in the last wave of enlargement to hold the Council Presidency. We will endeavour to effectively carry out the tasks entrusted to us.

Slovenia at the same time rounds up the first Trio Presidency of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia and their 18-month programme.

Mr Chairman, Members of the Committee,

Even if agriculture is not dealt with primarily by your Committee, allow me to briefly address certain specific aspects of the so-called CAP "Health Check", which is the most important and extensive task of the Slovenian Presidency in my field of work.

Environmental concerns and changing geo-demographic patterns are shaping a new European and international market landscape for agricultural products. Thus, the choices we make today will have tremendous impact on the future of European agriculture.



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1. CAP “Health Check”

The reform of 2003 represented a radical change in the CAP management of the past. After a few years of implementation, the moment has come, in conformity with the political decisions taken in 2003 for a stocktaking exercise, to evaluate the results and decide what should be done next in order for the reformed CAP to better adapt to the new economic, social and environmental conditions, needs and challenges we are all witnessing.

In doing this, we also have to ensure that the EU agricultural sector continues to deliver the best quality food products that the EU citizens and taxpayers are demanding in a way that promotes public health and preserves the environment in all its complex dimensions.

The issue of environmental protection is essential, and many features of the new post-reform CAP should have a positive effect on more environmentally friendly agriculture in Europe. Cross-compliance rules, on which we worked very hard in the last months to make them more effective, are essential to make progress in this context, as is an adequate rural development policy.

We should continue reflecting on these and other very important issues with regard to agriculture and the environment, such as declining biodiversity and soil degradation. We should also reflect on the reasoned, strategic and environmentally sustainable use and management of water for agricultural purposes in future.

In this context, let me also reiterate that the Slovenian Presidency sees the question of climate change as a priority issue. Agriculture can play a key role in the fight against climate change and would at the same time benefit directly from any improvement of the situation in this regard.

Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Turning now to some more sectoral files, I would like to mention several matters which are becoming increasingly important for citizens and doubtless are to be taken into account in agricultural policy – I am referring to **public health, food and plant safety, animal health and welfare**. These issues occupy a key position in our work programme.

2. Public health

In the field of public health, several dossiers will be negotiated under the codecision procedure during our Presidency.

The first of these is the proposal for a Regulation on **maximum residue limits of pharmacologically active substances in foodstuffs of animal origin**. Considerable progress has already been achieved on this dossier. Still, important issues remain to be resolved: delicate questions like the inclusion of biocides in the proposed Regulation and reference points for action for substances without maximum residue limits will call for a sound inter-institutional response.

On a second important proposal, I hope for swift agreement between our institutions on the Directive concerning the **prohibition of hormones and beta agonists in stock farming**. We all know the international



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pressure against our tight European rules in this area. But I am confident that both branches of European co-legislation will continue to follow, as proposed by the Commission, the path chosen in the interest of the European consumer. We look forward to fruitful cooperation between our institutions in order to conclude this dossier as soon as possible to the benefit of public health and consumer protection.

We will continue to work on the legislative proposal on animal hygiene, which has already been intensively dealt with by the German and Portuguese presidencies. The Commission Proposal proposes some derogation on the liabilities for HACCP for small establishments. We look forward to good cooperation on this legislative proposal, since our common goal is to reduce the administrative burden whereby a high level of consumer health protection has to be maintained.

3. Food safety/plant health

I should like to turn now to the area of food safety. The high level of protection of human and animal health, and of environmental protection, which the Union is committed to maintaining, must begin with safeguarding plant health and crop quality in all the Member States.

It is with this aim in view that the Union's phytosanitary legislation is currently being redrafted. Our two institutions will be called upon to adopt two important instruments under the codecision procedure as soon as possible: I refer to the proposed Regulation on the **placing of plant protection products on the market** and the proposed Directive establishing a framework for Community action to achieve the **sustainable use of pesticides**. The European Parliament has shown how much importance it attaches to these two pieces of future legislation by the quality of the opinions which it just delivered at the first reading and by the number of amendments which it has proposed.

I have no doubt that our two institutions will reach a second-reading agreement, given that there are a great many points on which both institutions have indicated concerns tending in the same direction.

In the Council, as you know, the examination of the Directive already resulted in a political agreement at the Agriculture and Fisheries Council meeting last December, and much faster progress has been made on the Directive than on the Regulation, which aims to establish a highly complex set of rules and will therefore require another two or three months of detailed discussion before an agreement can be reached.

In this connection, I should like to assure you that the Presidency will make all necessary efforts to facilitate codecision on these two important proposals.

In the area of phytosanitary legislation, the Council also strongly wishes to see quality criteria applied to the sale of seed and propagating material within the Community. Thus in June the Council is due to adopt a proposal for a Council Directive on the **marketing of fruit plant propagating material intended for fruit production**. It goes without saying that the Council will take the utmost account of the opinion which you delivered last December. These proceedings will also be conducted in accordance with international phytosanitary standards and obligations, especially those laid down by the International Plant Protection Convention (IPCC), International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) and the OECD.

As regards GMOs, food safety is an absolute, non-negotiable imperative for the Presidency. Therefore, in conducting the examination of the proposals that the Commission has submitted to the Council, in view of the



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authorisation of genetically modified products, the Presidency shall ensure that this work will address the highest level of protection of human and animal health and the environment.

Before leaving the subject of food safety, I should like to say a word about a forthcoming proposal which is due to be presented to the European Parliament and the Council in the coming weeks: a complete recast of the current legislation on the **labelling of animal feed**. The Presidency attaches great importance to this dossier and will therefore make an energetic start on examining this proposal and will look forward with great interest to your institution's opinion.

4. Animal health

In the field of animal health, the Slovenian Presidency is particularly attached to the follow-up of the Commission Communication on the Community Animal Health Policy. The Council adopted a set of conclusions in December and is very much interested in Parliament's report on this important Communication, which will result in a major overhaul of current European animal health policy.

A dossier which would need rapid treatment is the prolongation of transitional requirements for **non-commercial movements of pet animals**.

The intention of the proposal is to extend the transition period for the existing derogation to stricter requirements until 31 August 2009. This would give us all more time to reflect upon different options for long-term harmonised measures on the basis of a sound comparative impact assessment and in accordance with the opinions of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

This Regulation will have to be adopted during the first part of the year in order to extend the derogations before their expiry in July. Let me therefore appeal to you to accept entering into early negotiations on this dossier with a view to finding agreement in the first reading before this date.

A further priority for our Presidency will be the long-expected proposal amending the Regulation on **animal by-products**. The Commission's intention is to consolidate and simplify the existing Community rules on animal by-products and to make it consistent with other Community legislation on environment and waste – which are subject to codecision as well. This revision will have to take on board many important concerns raised in Parliament and the Council on this topic, such as provisions regarding small and medium-sized enterprises, disposal of imports for scientific research, and on-the-spot burying of carcasses in cases of natural disaster.

I invite you to engage in an early and constructive inter-institutional dialogue, which should enable us to adopt the revised Regulation as soon as possible.

5. Animal welfare

The Slovenian Presidency attaches great importance to animal protection and welfare, and therefore it will pay special attention to this field.

Since animal welfare is a precondition for animal health, it is an important element of the proposed Animal Health Strategy.



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In addition, there will be important proposals on the table in this field regarding systems of rearing laying hens, protection of experimental animals and animal welfare during slaughter, which will possibly be discussed during the Slovenian Presidency.

6. Forestry

As regards forestry, the Slovenian Presidency will ensure that the EU remains an active participant in international forest dialogue, particularly within the framework of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF). The focus of the work will be on implementation of the Instrument on Sustainable Forest Management, which was agreed at the Forum's last session and adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2007.

Furthermore, the Slovenian Presidency is awaiting with great interest two Commission communications in the field of forestry: one on additional legal options in relation to the FLEGT Action Plan to combat illegal logging and related trade, and a second one on deforestation in relation to climate change. As soon as these communications are available, the Slovenian Presidency will have them examined by the appropriate Council preparatory bodies.

Mr Chairman, Members of the Committee,

There are of course other matters on the Presidency's agenda which I have not mentioned, these being mainly of a technical or routine nature. Those which I have described are what I consider to be the most important and most labour-intensive issues for the Slovenian Presidency.

As I said at the beginning, good cooperation with you, Honourable Members, is an essential tool: as the country holding the Presidency of the Council, Slovenia will do whatever it can to ensure that we maintain the highest level of cooperation and with this synergy achieve great progress on all dossiers.

Thank you for your attention.

I am happy to take any questions you might have.