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WRITTEN QUESTION E-2794/00 by Markus Ferber (PPE-DE) to the Commission. EU ban on force-feeding of geese.

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by Markus Ferber (PPE-DE) to the Commission

(4 September 2000)

Subject: EU ban on force-feeding of geese

Pâté de foie gras is a very expensive delicacy and its production requires geese to be force-fed, resulting in the development of a fatty liver.

The fatty liver represents a pathological change to the liver. With current fattening methods the organ becomes ten times larger than normal and at the end of the fattening period weighs about 1 000 gms. It is 85 % fat and thus has a very high cholesterol content.

For foie gras to be produced, geese and ducks have to undergo horrific torture. The procedure involves the animals having a large metal tube pushed down the neck into the stomach several times a day. The frequent insertion of this tube often causes wounds to the beak and the oesophagus. Hundreds of ducks and geese are fed one after another in this horrible manner.

Force-feeding is already prohibited in Germany and Austria. However, there is great demand for pâté de foie gras in Germany. In 1992, 100 tonnes (equivalent to DEM 15 million in value) were imported from France, Hungary and Israel alone. Annual world production is about 14 000 tonnes. About 14 million ducks and geese must therefore be used for the production of foie gras.

Is the force-feeding of geese in any way compatible with animal welfare?

Answer given by Mr Byrne on behalf of the Commission

(24 October 2000)

The Commission requested in 1995 a scientific opinion on the welfare aspects of the production of foie gras using ducks and geese. The scientific committee on animal health and animal welfare adopted a report on the question in 1998. This report can be consulted at the following Internet address: http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/dg24/health/sc/scah/out17_en.html

The Community is a contracting party of the European convention on the protection of animals kept for farming purposes (negotiated under the auspices of the Council of Europe). Two Recommendations for the protection of ducks and geese bred for the production of foie gras were adopted in June 1999 in the framework of the European convention. The Commission and the Member States actively participated in the process of the drafting and adoption of these Recommendations. The scientific report above mentioned was used as a reference for the finalisation of the two Recommendations.

The Recommendations recognise the necessity to keep the birds in social groups and prohibit the use of the small individual cages which are currently used. This prohibition will come into effect on 31 December 2004 for new or replacement accommodation and for all accommodation on 31 December 2010 at the latest. The Recommendations also call for further research to develop alternative techniques which do not require force feeding for the production of foie gras. It has been agreed that until new scientific evidence on alternative methods and their welfare aspects is available, the production of foie gras shall be carried out only where it is current practice and then only in accordance with standards laid down in domestic law.

In the Community, Council Directive 98/58/EC of 20 July 1998 concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes⁽¹⁾ constitutes a legal instrument for the elaboration of future proposals in the field of animal welfare ensuring the uniform application of the Council of Europe Convention on the same subject in the Community.

The Directive currently addresses the welfare requirements to be applied for the protection of animals kept for the different types of production, including the production of foie gras. If necessary, in accordance with the provisions of Article 5 of Directive 98/58/EC, the Commission may submit to the Council further appropriate proposals for the uniform application of the above mentioned Recommendations.

However, any such initiative could only be considered in the light of the reports of Member States to the Council of Europe on the results obtained and measures taken in relation to the implementation of the recommendations.

(1) OJ L 221, 8.8.1998.
