



Lid van het Europees Parlement

Open letter to Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis (Health and Food Safety)

CC: Miguel Arias Cañete (Climate Action & Energy), Phil Hogan (Agriculture and Rural Development) and Cecilia Malmström (Trade)

5th April 2017

Dear Commissioner, *Dear Vytenis,*

In the light of the recent scandal with rotten Brazilian meat and because of your intervention in the European Parliament, where a number of questions remained unanswered, I would like to get clarifications about the fact that 4 of the 21 suspected Brazilian companies (Seara Alimentos Ltda, BRF S/A, JJZ Alimentos and Breyer & Cia LTDA) imported contaminated meat in the EU.

Given this situation and the fact that Brazil is responsible for respectively 40% of the poultry and 20% of the meat export in the world, make me believe that - in contrast to what President Temer is saying - this scandal is potentially harmful for both consumer's health and confidence. Moreover, this scandal is deterrent in the light of the upcoming Mercosur negotiations and poses - again - questions on food safety within the Union.

The recent scandal is not a single fact. Between 2000 and now, the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) portal shows 258 notifications concerning Brazilian meat products and 553 notifications concerning Brazilian poultry meat and poultry meat products. Recently, the RASFF portal detected the import of non-consumable meat from Brazil to Italy, The Netherlands and the UK over the last couple of months. More specifically, between 17 November 2016 and now, the RASFF notified 24 cases of salmonella found in samples of frozen turkey breasts and thighs and frozen chicken fillet. In one of these cases, the contaminated meat was already distributed to other member states. All these notifications were rated as serious. In December 2016, the RASFF also detected three cases of E. coli bacteria in frozen Brazilian meat.

Industrial farming poses not only questions on food safety, but also on deforestation and climate change. Although the agribusiness likes to impress with booming export numbers, the reality is much more nuanced. The Cerrado - a savannah-like area that includes 20% of the Brazilian surface - is a clear-cut example of this. At the moment, the deforestation of this area goes 2 to 3 times faster than the deforestation of the Amazon rainforest. The age-old savannah - crucial for the Brazilian biodiversity - is largely occupied by agro-industrial activities such as livestock farming and soybean plantations.

Industrial farming also puts human rights at stake. According to recent reporting by ngo Global Witness, 207 ecological militants - defenders of human rights and rainforest preservation - were murdered in Brazil between 2010 and 2015. This number increased to 61 murders in 2016, according to the *Comissão Pastoral da Terra* (Pastoral Land Commission). Most of these deaths are linked to

the fight against illegal logging by agribusiness related companies and individuals. The European Parliament is aware of this specific and serious problem and adopted a resolution on 24 November last year on the situation of the Guarani-Kaiowa in the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso do Sul (2016/2291(RSP)).

All these events indicate that there is a serious structural problem with the Brazilian meat industry. For that reason, I would appreciate if you could answer the following questions.

1. In the Commission (DG Food Safety) pages concerning Veterinary border control, it is stated *that "In addition to Community rules governing inter-alia, public health and animal health requirements which must be satisfied by third countries exporting food to the EU"*.

In this light, three audits were conducted in Brazil in 2016, one of which concerned food of animal origin - fresh bovine meat. The report describes the outcome of an audit at two red meat establishments as follows: *"The report concludes that in the specific case of the two establishments visited, they did not meet all the requirements for EU export listing at the time of the audit."*

What was the motivation to continue the meat import from Brazil, even when the findings after the audit in 2016 were not in line with the general requirements for third countries to export to the EU? In other words: Why did not the Commission nor the Health and Food audits and analysis service (former FVO) take any specific measures concerning meat exports to the EU? In that view, what is the value of the extra audits recently announced by the Commission if the outcome of previous audits are not taking into account?

Therefore, I would like to read your reflection on my written statement annexed to the report of the plenary session of 3th April where I call for an annual debate in the European Parliament about the recommendations done by the Health and Food Audits and Analysis service - of whom I am sure that they do excellent work - in order to assure more political monitoring. In addition, do the EU authorities believe they can guarantee that every EU-citizen will eat non-contaminated Brazilian meat or chicken in the future? Earlier examples, such as the traceability issues of Mexican and Canadian horsemeat after several FVO-audits, show that this is virtually impossible in practical terms. The earlier mentioned notifications in the RASFF portal also show the impossibility to guarantee this.

In addition, in which way are these audits representative for the entire export of meat from Brazil to the EU? As they are very limited in quantity, I have serious questions on the efficacy of these audits. Moreover, are these audits announced to the authorities beforehand?

2. Brazil's Trade Minister Marcos Pereira said that the problem would not be discussed at the Mercosur negotiations between the EU and South-America. However, I believe the meat export (and in addition the export of animal feed) should be a crucial part in these trade negotiations in order to set thing right. As I mentioned earlier, nor the Commission nor the Health and Food audits and analysis service took measures against the meat import from Brazil. However, the Commission has directly instructed the member states to be vigilant and reinforce their controls for Brazilian imports. Because of that, a possible Mercosur deal can have serious implications for the controls by the member states but also for the Commission itself, as more controls by the Health and Food Audits and Analysis Service will be necessary. Does the Commission foresees an increase in the budget and staff for conducting these extra controls?

Are the recently announced extra controls imposed by the Commission mandatory for member states? Could you clarify the specific completion of "reinforce their controls"?

3. Could I have your thoughts on the widespread vision that such trade agreement gives more short-term and long-term problems than actual benefits? Again, the 2013 scandal with Canadian horsemeat shows that it is simply impossible to assure 100% food safety within the EU and in fact, it would be better to ban this meat from the EU market. Could I also have your reflection on the widely supported vision that such trade agreement is not compatible with the proposed climate goals as adopted in the Paris agreement and not compatible with assuring human rights? How would you explain the lack of policy coherence in the EU and how would you remediate?

I look forward to receiving your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Bart Staes, MEP Greens/Belgium

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bart', with a stylized flourish at the end.

