

WRITTEN QUESTION P-6136/08
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to the Commission

Subject: Programme for the prevention and eradication of bluetongue disease in the Member States

Bluetongue disease is an infectious viral disease transmitted by midges of the *Culicoides* genus. To date, 24 serotypes of the virus have been identified. Until recently, it was a problem only in some of the Mediterranean Member States. However, for more than two years now, the disease situation has been getting worse, and in August 2006 the first outbreaks of the bluetongue disease in northern Europe were recorded. The disease is now present in most Member States. The spread of the disease to new areas has caused serious financial losses for cattle and sheep farmers, owing to the restrictions placed on movements of livestock from infected areas, and has thus disrupted both intra-Community trade and exports to third countries. In 2008 the Commission has initiated a large-scale vaccination campaign, allocating substantial appropriations to cover the refund of vaccine purchases and a portion of vaccination costs. The campaign is set to continue next year.

Despite the Commission's determined efforts to prevent the disease's spread, there is no EU programme for the prevention and eradication of bluetongue disease. Unless such a programme is set up, the measures taken will have only a piecemeal effect and will by no means guarantee that this dangerous disease will be gradually and lastingly eradicated from the EU, thus lessening financial losses among cattle and sheep breeders. A plan for eradicating the disease should form an integral part of the new Community Animal Health Strategy for the period 2007-2013.

Given the above, does the Commission intend to set up a bluetongue disease prevention and eradication programme, and if so, when?

What financial resources does it intend to allocate to a multiannual programme for the prevention and eradication of the disease in EU Member States?

Has any provision been made for programmes to assist with the eradication of the disease from Member States in the Mediterranean area, which is the main source of infection in Europe?