

**Question for written answer E-001958/2022
to the Commission**

Rule 138

Tom Vandenkendelaere (PPE)

Subject: Unjustified barriers to pigeon racing in Animal Health Law (AHL)

On 21 April 2021, the Animal Health Law (Regulation (EU) 2016/429) came into force. This law has far-reaching consequences for pigeon racing in the event of bird flu. The rules concerning restrictions and surveillance zones have been changed, and now limit the flexibility which national governments enjoyed in the past. National governments can no longer make exceptions for pigeon racing within the surveillance zone (10 km) to enable participation in official pigeon races. However, such exceptions are justifiable. First of all, not allowing pigeons to fly outside the protective zone is detrimental to their health and the development of immunity, which runs counter to the AHL's objectives. In addition, the AHL wrongly places racing pigeons, which according to research¹ do not play a significant role in the spread of bird flu, on the same footing as other birds. Finally, pigeon racing was made into a professional sport in order to bolster its economic potential.

In the light of the above arguments, will the Commission review the scope for national authorities to grant exemptions for pigeon racing within surveillance zones?

¹ Abolnik, A current review of avian influenza in pigeons and doves (2014), and Abolnik and Others, Experimental infection of racing pigeons (*Columba livia domestica*) with highly pathogenic Clade 2.3.4.4 sub-group B H5N8 avian influenza virus (2018)