

WRITTEN QUESTION P-0545/01  
by Mario Mastella (PPE-DE)  
to the Commission

Subject: European ban on the consumption and export of Italian 'bistecca alla fiorentina'

On 7 February 2001, the Standing Veterinary Committee in Brussels, in response to the proposals published on the same day by the Commission concerning the removal of the vertebral column from all cattle over 12 months old, decided to ban Italian 'fiorentina' (T-bone) steaks. Member States that can prove they have taken effective control measures will be exempted from the requirement to remove and destroy the vertebral column of animals over 12 month old. Furthermore, Sweden, Finland and Austria will be exempt from the requirement on the grounds that they have not registered any native cases of BSE to date and are regarded as countries where the disease is unlikely to be present. But the exemption is also being extended to the United Kingdom, the country in which the first cases of the disease were recorded and which also has the highest number of confirmed cases of BSE and vCJD (the variant that affects human beings), as the ban on allowing any animal over 30 months old to enter the food chain is supposedly sufficient to ensure that the number of animals that could be infected is small and constantly decreasing. The exemption will not, however, make it possible to export bone-in beef from that country. The exemption will also apply to Portugal by virtue of the national measures in force to eradicate BSE, and in particular the ban on meat and bone meal that has been in place since July 1999. But the exemption will apply only to animals born after that date and under 30 months old.

In view of the foregoing,

1. Would the Commission clarify the points referred to above and establish whether or not the decisions taken by the Veterinary Committee were discriminatory, in order to protect both the interests of Italian operators in the sector, which have already been seriously damaged, and the right of consumers to be provided with accurate information, and also state the sanitary or public health grounds on the basis of which the decision in question was taken?
2. Does the Commission not consider that it would be appropriate to take action, possibly by means of new and further decisions which would officially sanction and safeguard the characteristic features of the traditional products of each Member State of the European Union, with particular reference to Italy in the case in question, instead of penalising such products?