

WRITTEN QUESTION P-3455/02
by Giacomo Santini (PPE-DE)
to the Commission

Subject: Outbreak of avian influenza in Italy

An outbreak of avian influenza caused by the low pathogenic H7N3 virus has been recorded in the Italian provinces of Verona, Mantua and Brescia. So far, the influenza has almost exclusively affected turkey farms. In order to check the spread of the disease, the Italian authorities are to ask the EU for authorisation to vaccinate vulnerable species in the risk area.

However, recourse to vaccination may mean that it is no longer possible for poultry products from the vaccination areas to be exported to other Member States. The three provinces in question produce around 80% of the turkeys reared in Italy, with exports accounting for around 20% of total production.

It is therefore clear that an export ban would entail:

- a 20% reduction in turkey production;
- the importation of poultry meat from third countries (Brazil and Thailand);
- the loss of the German market;
- a possible limiting of the vaccination radius and the concomitant risk of the disease persisting and the virus mutating from a low pathogenic virus to a high pathogenic one.

In view of the above, could the Commission indicate whether emergency vaccination could be authorised without the possibility of exporting to other Member States being forfeited? Exportation was possible during the previous influenza outbreak in 2000, when discriminatory testing made it possible to distinguish between animals that had the disease and animals that had tested positive as a result of being vaccinated.

Would it be possible to vaccinate a vast area with a heterologous vaccine (H7N1) and to allow exportation to continue while still guaranteeing with absolute certainty that the animal meat to be exported is not harbouring the virus because the animals were not carrying it prior to slaughter?