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COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT, PUBLIC HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY  
– SECRETARIAT–

Brussels, October 2013

## **ENVI COMMITTEE DELEGATION TO IRELAND**

### **3-5 APRIL 2013**

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#### **I. COMPOSITION OF THE DELEGATION**

The following Members of the European Parliament participated in the delegation to Ireland and the Food and Veterinary Office (FVO), from 3 to 5 April 2013:

- Pilar AYUSO (EPP) – Chairwoman of the delegation
- Sophie AUCONIE (EPP)
- Esther DE LANGE (EPP)

The following Members participated in the delegation as local members:

- Mairead MCGUINNESS (EPP)
- Nessa CHILDERS (S&D)
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The following Member participated in the delegation as associate members:

- Anna ROSBACH (ECR)

Group advisors Gemma Roig Linana (EPP) and Majella McCone (S&D), Emiliano Imeroni and Jos Vervloet from the ENVI Committee Secretariat, and interpreters Micheline Quintelier, Francoise Forster, Elsa Maria Michael Sacristan and Pilar Antelo Sanchez accompanied the delegation.

## II. GENERAL BACKGROUND

The main purpose of the delegation was to visit the Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) in Grange, Ireland, as well as to assess the state of implementation of EU legislation in Ireland in the fields of environment, public health and food safety.

The mission of the FVO, which is part of the Health and Consumers Directorate-General, is, through its audits, inspections and related activities, to:

- check on compliance with the requirements of EU food safety and quality, animal health and welfare and plant health legislation within the European Union and on compliance with EU import requirements in third countries exporting to the EU,
  - contribute to the development of European Community policy in the food safety, animal health and welfare and plant health sectors,
  - contribute to the development and implementation of effective control systems in the food safety, animal health and welfare and plant health sectors,
- and to inform stakeholders of the outcome of its audits and inspections.

## III. DELEGATION'S ACTIVITIES

A series of bilateral meetings were organised to exchange views with the relevant actors in the fields of environment, public health and food safety in Ireland. The visit of the FVO took the form of a presentation of the work of the various units followed by a Question & Answers session.

### Thursday 4 April

The activities of the delegation started with a meeting with the **Environmental Pillar**, a group comprising several non-governmental environmental organisations of Ireland. The NGOs highlighted various issues in the implementation of environmental law in Ireland, in particular as regards forestry policy and coastal zone management, and expressed concern that the focus on jobs and growth by the Irish EU Presidency could neglect the employment opportunities that a green economy could create. Removal of active peat bogs was pointed out as a serious natural heritage incident. Other topics of discussions were biofuels policy, agriculture, birds protection and water policy.

The delegation then met with **Phil Hogan, Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government** and **Jimmy Deenihan, Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht**. Mr Hogan underlined the significant dossiers on environment and climate on the table of the Presidency, such as on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of cars and vans, F-gases, priority substances in water, ETS backloading, and also identified the 7th Environment Action Programme as an important flagship initiative. The situation of shale gas in Ireland was discussed. As regards water policy, Mr Hogan illustrated the water reform that introduces metering for the public and discussed water availability, the participation of public and private entities in water management, and the inspection of septic tanks. Mr Deenihan explained the current situation as regards peat bogs and the measures being put in place to prevent bog cutting, including a compensation scheme. Topics raised at the meeting also included the Nagoya protocol on biodiversity, migratory birds, waste recycling targets, energy efficiency, renewable energy and biofuels.

The programme continued with a working lunch at **safefood**, an all-island implementation body set up under the British-Irish Agreement with a general remit to promote awareness and knowledge of food safety and nutrition issues on the island of Ireland. **Martin Higgins**, Chief Executive Officer of safefood gave a presentation about the activities of the organisation. Present at the meeting was also **Alan Reilly**, Chief Executive of the **Food Safety Authority of Ireland**, who exchanged views with Members on the "horsemeat scandal" and on food fraud.

The ENVI delegation then met with **James Reilly, Minister for Health**, who identified the legislation on tobacco products, on clinical trials and on medical devices as priorities for the Irish Presidency in the field of health. Mr Reilly summarised the important negative effects of tobacco use and stressed the need for urgent action, starting from the Commission proposal. Possible measures to face the problem, including introducing plain packaging, promoting better education in schools and increasing tobacco prices were discussed. The issue of the classification of e-cigarettes was also raised.

The day continued with a field visit to **Lodge Bog**, a bog restoration project managed by the **Peatlands Restoration Council**, and to **Kerdiffstown landfill**, a landfill site managed by the Irish **Environmental Protection Agency**. Members of the delegation could get a first-hand account of two problematic cases as regards the implementation of EU environmental law and of the efforts put in place to find solutions.

#### Friday 5 April

The first meeting of the second day took place at the **Department of Agriculture**, hosted by the **Chief Veterinary Officer** and the A/SG with responsibility for Animal Health/Food Hygiene. The main topic of discussion was the horsemeat scandal, which was first discovered by the Irish authorities. The details of the events and of the ensuing investigations were explained to the delegation. Lessons learnt from the scandal and possible measures to better avoid fraud in the food chain were thoroughly discussed.

The delegation then transferred to Grange, Co. Meath, to visit the **Food and Veterinary Office (FVO)**. Members were welcomed by **FVO Director Michael Scannell** and attended presentations given by the Heads of the various Units of the FVO: Quality, planning and development; Food of animal origin: mammals; Food of animal origin: birds and fish; Food of plant origin, plant health; processing and distribution; Animal nutrition, import controls, residues; Animal health and welfare; Country profiles, coordination of follow-up. The presentations illustrated in particular the audits carried out by the FVO in all its fields of competence and the successes and the challenges in the enforcement of EU law.

During an intense Q&A session, Members and FVO officials discussed many topics, such as: animal diseases including African swine fever, traceability and labelling systems for animal products, animal transport, cloning and novel foods, fraud in the food chain and the horsemeat scandal including the issue of the use of phenylbutazone, neonicotinoids and their impact on bees, fisheries in Southeast Asia, import of

pesticides, active pharmaceutical ingredients, antimicrobial resistance, ash dieback, enforcement and penalties, and the details of audits and inspection systems.

#### IV. KEY FINDINGS

During the visit to Ireland, the delegation of the ENVI Committee had the occasion to understand in depth the workings of the Food and Veterinary Office, including the systems of audits and inspections that are put in place, and to exchange views on many important and current topics in the field of food safety.

The delegation was also instrumental to meet the relevant actors in the fields of environment, public health and food safety in Ireland, and in particular to make an assessment of the level of implementation of EU legislation in the country.

Finally, the meetings with the relevant ministers allowed delegation Members to form a clear picture of the priorities and ambition of the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

#### V. PROGRAMME

Wednesday, 3 April 2013		
Evening	Individual arrival of participants	
Thursday, 4 April 2013 - Meeting in the Buswells Hotel lobby at 8:30 for departure		
09:00 – 10:30	Meeting with the Environmental Pillar (Irish Environmental NGOs)	EP Information Office
11:00 – 12:15	Meeting with Phil Hogan, Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government and Jimmy Deenihan, Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	Customs House
12:30 – 13:30	Meeting with Martin Higgins, Chief Executive of Safefood (cross-border Food Safety Board) followed by a light sandwich lunch offered by Safefood	Safefood
14:00 – 15:00	Meeting with James Reilly, Minister for Health	Department of Health
15:00 – 19:00	Visit to a bog restoration project managed by the Peatlands Restoration Council and to a landfill site with officials of the Environmental Protection Agency	
Friday, 5 April 2013 - Meeting in the Buswells Hotel lobby at 8:30 for departure		
09:00 – 10:15	Meeting with Chief Veterinary Officer and A/SG with responsibility for Animal Health/Food Hygiene	Department of Agriculture
10:15 – 11:15	Transfer by bus to the Food and Veterinary Office (FVO)	
11.15 – 15.15	Visit of the <b>Food and Veterinary Office (FVO)</b> , Grange, County Meath Welcome by Director Michael Scannell, Presentation of the work of the FVO Units, Question & Answers session, and working lunch	
15:15	Departure by bus to the airport	