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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Council
Subject:	Symposium "Call to Care for Animal Welfare" (Brussels, 29 January 2024): lessons learned and way forward
	- Information from the Presidency

Delegations will find in the Annex a note from the Presidency on the above-mentioned subject which will be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Council meeting ("Agriculture and Fisheries") on 26 March 2024.

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Symposium "Call to Care for Animal Welfare" (Brussels, 29 January 2024):
lessons learned and way forward

Information from the Presidency

Introduction

Following the publication of the animal welfare package by the European Commission on 7 December 2023, the Belgian presidency of the Council of the European Union organised a symposium on animal welfare in Brussels to discuss further elements that may contribute to EU discussions in the field.

The event, entitled 'Call to Care for Animal Welfare', was attended by policy-makers, experts, advocates of animal welfare and stakeholders from across EU Member States and beyond. The debates and presentations resulted in conclusions which may guide the Belgian Presidency, the European Commission, Member States, and other policy-makers, during their future discussions.

Conclusions of the Symposium "Call to Care for Animal Welfare" held on 29 January 2024

On 7 December, two legislative proposals on animal welfare that originated from a larger package on animal welfare, were published by the European Commission: (i) the proposal for a revision of the regulation on the protection of animals during transport and (ii) the proposal for a regulation on the welfare of dogs and cats and their traceability. The proposals were expected to be part of a larger package, including revisions of the EU legislation on the slaughter of animals and animals held for economic purposes, and a new proposal on labelling. During the event, Stella Kyriakides, the European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, reiterated that the unpublished proposals are still on the agenda of the Commission and that they continue to commit themselves to revising the EU legislative framework for animal welfare, including the response of the European Citizens Initiative: "End the Cage Age".

A panel discussion on animal welfare and economic profitability led to the conclusion that the European Union and its Member States must be more transparent towards their citizens regarding animal produce. Farmers should not be alone in bearing the costs stemming from an obligation for a higher quality of animal welfare. Every actor along the value chain should pay its dues. The political sphere, together with the actors along the production chain, must ensure that animal welfare measures are both efficient and affordable. Finally, imported animal produce from third countries shall fulfil European standards.

Regarding the breeding of companion animals resulting in excessive traits, experts explained that breed standards consist in physical characteristics such as weight, wither height and eyes, that are not necessarily chosen based on the welfare of the animal. Some breeds are bred for their "beauty" standards, further magnifying the extremes, which can negatively impact the health of the companion animals, and consequently, their welfare. A prohibition of certain breeds, for which these excessive traits are more in demand, will not solve this problem. Health problems resulting from this practice should rather be tackled by laying down rules on breeding companion animals, while at the same time increasing citizens' awareness about the health and welfare problems arising from breeding these types of breeds.

Finally, experts explained that during the last few years, online advertisement for adopting or buying companion animals has increased exponentially, in particular on social networks, and has become part of the contemporary economic sphere. Experts showed how artificial intelligence is a promising tool to facilitate and automate the process of detecting illegal advertisements.