

17 April 2026

Olivér Várhelyi
Commissioner for Health and Animal Welfare
European Commission

Subject: Urgent follow-up – continued exports of live animals to conflict-affected regions and lack of response

Dear Commissioner Várhelyi,

We are writing to follow up on our previous correspondence of 5 March and 1 April regarding the continued export of live animals from the European Union to the Middle East in light of the ongoing and escalating hostilities in the region.

To date, we have not received a response. Given the gravity and urgency of the situation, we would like to reiterate our request for immediate action and respectfully urge the Commission to provide a clear position without further delay.

Since our last communication, the situation has not only persisted but further deteriorated. Recent information on livestock vessels operating in and around conflict-affected areas illustrates the extent to which animals continue to be exposed to severe and foreseeable risks:

- Several vessels transporting animals from EU Member States have recently arrived or are expected to arrive in high-risk destinations, including Israel and Lebanon.
- The vessel *SALEH*, departing from Romania, arrived in Haifa on 14 April with animals on board.
- The *HARMONY LIVESTOCK*, departing from Croatia, was expected to arrive in Beirut on 15 April with animals on board.

A recent case further illustrates the practical implications of these transports under current conditions. The vessel *Julia L.S.*, which departed from Raša (Croatia) on 7 April carrying approximately 1,000 sheep and 1,000 cattle, has been held at the port of Haifa for several days without being allowed to offload the animals. This delay was reportedly due to the detection of a new strain of foot-and-mouth disease in the quarantine facility where the animals were initially intended to be transferred. While the animals are now being offloaded, they are expected to be moved to an alternative facility located in close proximity to the Lebanese border, an area exposed to ongoing hostilities. This case shows that even upon arrival, safe and compliant handling of animals cannot be ensured.

At the same time, other livestock vessels are currently immobilised in highly sensitive maritime areas:

- The *AL BARAKA 1* and *SAPHIRA* have been stuck in the Strait of Hormuz since 26 March.

Furthermore, there are credible indications that several vessels currently transporting animals are deliberately not declaring their final destination, likely to avoid security risks or operational complications. For example:

- The *NORTH STAR 1*, currently near Greece, and
- The *POLARIS 2*, currently near Crete,

are both heading towards the Middle East without officially declared destinations.

This lack of transparency further exacerbates the already significant risks associated with these journeys and makes effective oversight by competent authorities virtually impossible.

These developments clearly demonstrate that, despite repeated warnings and concrete evidence of risk, exports of live animals to conflict-affected regions are continuing unabated. Animals remain exposed to prolonged journeys through or towards areas of active or potential military escalation, where delays, port disruptions, or attacks on infrastructure can have immediate and severe welfare consequences. In addition, ongoing [GPS interference in the region](#) is disrupting vessel navigation systems, including AIS tracking, significantly increasing the risk of maritime accidents and further compromising the safety of these journeys.

As previously outlined, such conditions are incompatible with the requirements of Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005, in particular Article 3, which prohibits the transport of animals in a manner likely to cause injury or undue suffering. They are equally at odds with Article 13 of Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which requires full regard to be paid to animal welfare in EU policymaking.

Moreover, the continued authorisation of such transports exposes not only animals but also crew members, drivers, veterinarians and port workers to serious and avoidable risks to their safety.

In light of the above, we must once again stress that this is not a theoretical or future concern. The risks are immediate, ongoing, and well-documented.

We therefore reiterate our call for the Commission to:

- Urgently call on Member States to suspend the export of live animals to all destinations in the Middle East affected by the current hostilities;
- Ensure coordinated EU-level action to prevent further shipments under conditions where compliance with EU animal welfare rules cannot be guaranteed;

Given the continued departures of vessels and the animals currently at sea, any delay in action will result in further avoidable suffering.

We would be grateful to receive a response to our previous and current correspondence as a matter of urgency, and to understand what immediate steps the Commission intends to take in this regard.

We remain at your disposal to provide further information and would welcome the opportunity for an urgent exchange.

Yours sincerely,
Reineke Hameleers
CEO, Eurogroup for Animals

Co-signed by the following organisations:

Animal Welfare Foundation e.V.
Animal Protection Denmark
Animal Equality
Animals International
Compassion in World Farming EU
Ethical Farming Ireland
Essere Animali
Eyes on Animals
Deutscher Tierschutzbund
Dierenbescherming
Djurskyddet Sverige
Fondation Brigitte Bardot
FOUR PAWS

GAIA
Israel Against Live Shipments
Lega Anti Vivisezione
Society for Animals, CZ
La Fondation Droit Animal
Project 1882
Sloboda Zvierat
Welfarm
Animal Welfare Observatory
PATAV - Plataforma Anti-Transporte de Animais
Vivos
Tierschutzbund Zürich