

LITHUANIA'S PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCE (POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE) IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF VETERINARY LEGISLATION"

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During the 20-year-independence period of the state of Lithuania full reconstruction of its veterinary and food legislation has been completed. Since the majority of the legislation was inherited from the former Soviet legislation, the harmonization process has been focused on the creation of a modern veterinary and food safety strategy based on the OIE policy and main provisions of the OIE Animal Health Codes and Manuals on the one hand, and the new EU policy and EU *acquis communautaire* on animal health, animal welfare and food safety legislation, on the other hand. Lithuania's two greatest goals were re-instatement of the OIE membership and becoming a Member State of the EU.

During the preparation for the accession to the EU Lithuania had to adopt the whole EU legislation. By the 1st of May 2004 Lithuania had fully transposed into the national law the EU directives within the scope of our competence, which was our obligation under the Accession Treaty, and had enacted the EU Decisions and Regulations, which do not require national implementing legislation. In the Position paper of the Republic of Lithuania (Negotiation chapter 7 'Agriculture', 'Veterinary') Lithuania stated that it accepted in full the *acquis* in veterinary sector and that it would be ready to implement the *acquis* in veterinary sector and undertake the international obligations of the European Union from the date of accession to the European Union. State Food and Veterinary Service under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania (further –SFVS), which adopts veterinary legislation, is the sole institution for food control (raw materials, animal and non animal foodstuffs, feeding stuffs, monitoring, HACCP and other).

Veterinary activities in the EU are regulated by 595 legal acts (directives, regulations, decisions and agreements). Among these, 132 are basic acts divided further into "horizontal" and "vertical" legislation. There are 15 "horizontal" acts, which establish the principles of veterinary control in the trade of animals and products of animal origin between the Member States and with the third countries, as well as on computerization of veterinary import procedures. "Horizontal" legislation also includes legal documents, which introduce the system of animal identification and registration, the detailed procedure of cattle identification also, the principles of veterinary certification. Furthermore, "horizontal" legislation regulates funding and expenses of veterinary inspections, required for the functioning of the veterinary system and the compensation of losses incurred by contagious diseases. The "vertical" legislation is divided into 9 parts according to the field of regulation. "Vertical" legislation comprises veterinary directives regulating trade within the EU and with the third countries, international veterinary agreements affecting trade, and different legal acts regulating animal disease

control and protection of health, animal welfare, certain zootechnical aspects, feeding stuffs, food products of animal origin, veterinary pharmacy and biomedicines, as well as training of veterinary surgeons and mutual recognition of their diplomas in all the EU Member States. The SFVS is responsible for the transposition of the trade directives, health protection and disease control legal acts and of the legal acts on animal welfare. The Law on Veterinary Activities, the main legal framework in veterinary legislation, was adopted in 1991. At that time the EU legislation was not yet analysed, so later on with the aim to establish the legal basis for transposition of the EU veterinary legislation the Law Amending the Law on Veterinary Activities was adopted. This law provides a legal basis for the veterinary control of animal slaughter and products of animal origin, for the funding of veterinary measures, for the implementation of more than 50 legal documents of the EU, the basic of which govern the activities of animal keepers, veterinary officers and state institutions on the control of animal contagious diseases, execution of animal registration and identification, disposal of animal waste.

Primary legislation empowers the SFVS to transpose and enforce the EU legal acts within its competence which come into effect through the orders of the Director of the SFVS. According to their legal power, the orders of SFVS director are parallel to the orders of ministers but below the laws and Government resolutions.

Upon adoption of each national legal act according to the *acquis* the table of correspondence was made. It was a good tool also for better understanding of farmers, manufacturers, consumers, public, other people and administrations inside and outside.

Lithuania requested transitional periods for the restructuring of meat, milk and fish processing plants, dairy farms and fishing vessels, so that they comply with the veterinary requirements of the EU, as well as for the implementation of animal welfare requirements in slaughterhouses and on animal holdings, and for the switching of fees for veterinary inspection to the EU level.

The establishments which on the day of accession were on the list of establishments which may comply with the EU requirements provided a transitional period was granted and which on the accession date had not yet completed the investment projects addressed at the reconstruction and modernisation of the production process in accordance with the EU requirements, were proposed for a transitional period. The establishments had to prepare extensive plans on the elimination of shortcomings and co-ordinate them with the State Food and Veterinary Service, and the implementation of the plans was controlled by the State Food and Veterinary Service. However Lithuania experienced some negative aspects of the transitional periods as well, due to highly restricted markets for the products from such establishments, which could only be sold on the local market, they would not even be supplied as raw materials to other establishments approved for the export to the EU. During the transitional period such products were differently marked, and this could

cause decline of consumers' confidence in the product.

Since the year 2000, Lithuania has got a centralised food control system, where the SFVS is responsible for the development and coordination of control policy, and the analysis and assessment of the data, performs risk management, issues requirements and instructions for harmonised implementation of the policy. Territorial institutions of SFVS are responsible for implementation of official controls.

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