

5 March 2026

Olivér Várhelyi
Commissioner for Health and Animal Welfare
European Commission

Subject: Urgent request for suspension of exports of live animals to the Middle East

Dear Commissioner Várhelyi,

We are writing to express our deep concern regarding the continued export of live animals from the European Union to the broader Middle East in light of the renewed escalation of hostilities in the region, and to request the immediate suspension of such transports.

As we witnessed in [June 2025](#), the port of Haifa, the primary entry point for livestock vessels arriving in Israel, is located in an area directly exposed to missile attacks. During the previous escalation, missile strikes occurred in close proximity to vessels unloading animals coming from the European Union, forcing workers to seek shelter and leaving animals stranded mid operation. These were not theoretical risks but concrete events that clearly demonstrated the vulnerability of both animals and operators in such circumstances.

Other major destination countries for livestock vessels transporting animals from Europe—including Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Arabia—are also located in or near areas currently experiencing instability and armed conflict. The maritime corridor used to transport animals from the European Union to these Middle Eastern destinations passes through or near broader conflict zones, highlighting the potential exposure of EU livestock shipments to similar risks.

We are now again faced with a rapidly deteriorating security situation. Reports indicate that vessels have recently departed from EU Member States, including Portugal and Romania, and are en route to the region. At the same time, hostilities are expanding, with missiles being exchanged across borders and a growing risk of further escalation affecting additional ports in the region. The situation around the Strait of Hormuz further compounds the risks for vessels navigating these waters.

Transporting animals into an active or potentially expanding conflict zone presents an unacceptable and unnecessary risk for animals and humans. Animals transported by sea are entirely dependent on human handling and functioning infrastructure for feeding, watering, ventilation and emergency response. Any disruption caused by military activity, port closures, strikes on infrastructure or delays at sea can result in severe suffering, prolonged confinement, injury or death.

In addition, these transports expose crew members, port workers, drivers and veterinarians to serious and avoidable risks to their health and safety. Missile attacks, air raid alerts and the targeting of strategic infrastructure create conditions in which neither animal welfare nor human safety can be effectively guaranteed.

Article 3 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 clearly requires that *no animal shall be transported in a way likely to cause injury or undue suffering*. Proceeding with exports to areas where hostilities are ongoing or likely to intensify is incompatible with this obligation. Furthermore, Article 13 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union requires that full regard be paid to the welfare requirements of animals in formulating and implementing Union policies.

Furthermore, this poses an unnecessary risk, especially since viable alternatives already exist. For example, [Israel has certified an operational slaughterhouse in Portugal](#) to facilitate the transport of meat and carcasses instead of live animals, an approach that directly addresses the fragility of this trade amid the ongoing hostilities and has proven to be [more profitable](#) for the European Union.

In this context, we urge the Commission to:

- Immediately call on Member States to suspend the export of live animals to Israel and other destinations in the Middle East affected by the current hostilities, until the security situation has stabilised and compliance with EU animal welfare rules can be effectively guaranteed.
- Closely monitor vessels that have already departed and ensure contingency measures are in place to prevent animals from being left in unsafe conditions.
- Assess, as a matter of urgency, the systemic shortcomings that allow exports to proceed despite clearly foreseeable and serious risks.

The current situation illustrates, once more, the limitations of relying on enforcement of the current rules alone. Where exports take place to regions affected by armed conflict or severe geopolitical instability, competent authorities cannot in practice ensure that the requirements of Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 are respected throughout the entire journey. These recurring crises demonstrate the need for legislation that prevents animals from being exposed to predictable and extreme risks in the first place, rather than attempting to address them only through enforcement.

We remain available to provide further information and to support any action that can help ensure that EU rules and values are upheld in this context.

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