

Ombudsman questions Commission decisions on reindeer imports

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The European Ombudsman, **Jacob Söderman**, has recommended that the European Commission carry out a new on-the-spot inspection and consider reviewing two decisions (1) allowing the import of reindeer meat from Russia in light of its results. This follows his inquiry into alleged lack of impartiality in the administrative procedures leading to the decisions.

The decisions were made after an on-the-spot inspection carried out in Russia by the Commission's Food and Veterinary Office. They resulted in one EU-based company gaining approval to process Russian game meat for export to the EU.

The Ombudsman's inquiry revealed that the company and its Managing Director participated in the on-the-spot inspection by organising a luncheon, hotel and flight reservations, temporary fax facilities, interpretation services and inspection cars. This falls outside the normal practice of the Food and Veterinary Office to deal exclusively through the Commission's own delegation and the national authorities of the country concerned. The Commission has acknowledged this but confirmed that without the assistance of the company in organising the mission and facilitating its realisation, it would not have been possible for it to have taken place.

The Ombudsman considers that the company's participation in the on-the-spot inspection was inconsistent with the duty of the Commission and its staff to demonstrate their impartiality. This brings the decisions into question. He asks the Commission to respond to his recommendation by 31 March 2002.

The Ombudsman's inquiry follows a complaint he received from the Finnish Reindeer Herders' Association.

The draft recommendation can be found on the Internet at:

<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/recommen/en/000751.htm> [Link]

For further information, please call Benita Broms, Principal Legal Officer, tel. +32 (0) 2 284 25 43.



(1) Commission Decision 2000/161/EC of 14 February 2000 amending Decision 97/217/EC establishing groups of third countries which are able to use the veterinary certification for imports of wild game meat, farmed game meat and rabbit meat from third countries (OJ L 51, 24.2.2000 pp. 38-40) and Commission Decision 2000/212/EC of 3 March 2000 amending Decision 97/467/EC on drawing up provisional lists of third country establishments from which the Member States authorise imports of rabbit meat and farmed game meat (OJ L 65, 14.3.2000 pp. 33-34).