

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-001659/25
to the Commission
Hilde Vautmans (Renew)
(24 April 2025)**

Subject: Review of EU rules on pigeons

EU law (Regulation (EU) 2016/429 and Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/687) classifies pigeons as ‘captive birds’ even though scientific studies show that they are a ‘dead-end host’ for the highly pathogenic avian influenza virus (HPAIV). The regulations do not take sufficient account of differences in susceptibility between bird species, although HPAIV is now endemic in wild populations.

In addition, EU legislation does not distinguish between Newcastle Disease (NCD) in poultry and Pigeon Paramyxovirus (PMV) in pigeons. This could lead to unjustified trade restrictions and loss of NCD-free status in the event of a PMV outbreak. In line with WOAHP recommendations, the industry advocates recognising this distinction and limiting measures pertaining to NCD in poultry.

Finally, the sector stresses the importance of providing for derogations for pigeon racing, given its genetic and cultural value and the negligible risk of it spreading HPAIV.

1. Is the Commission willing, in cooperation with EFSA and the WOAHP, to adapt regulations to the species-specific sensitivity of birds, such as pigeons?
2. Can the Commission authorise derogations for low-risk bird species, such as racing pigeons?
3. Will the Commission make a clear distinction between NCD and PMV in the EU legislation?

Submitted: 24.4.2025

**Answer given by Mr Várhelyi on behalf of the European Commission
(1 July 2025)**

1. Adaptations to the Union animal health legislation under Regulation (EU) 2016/429 (‘Animal Health Law’)⁽¹⁾ are possible, provided that such adaptations are scientifically based, and that additional flexibility does not jeopardise the animal health situation in the EU. However, recent EU experience shows an increase of notifications of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) virus infection in wild and kept pigeons in Member States, including in farms keeping pigeons for meat production. In addition, the outcomes of past scientific assessments of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and recent scientific literature indicate that HPAI viruses circulate in pigeons at probably underestimated intensity, and they may play a role in disease transmission as an interspecies bridge in the ecology of HPAI virus dynamics.

2. Under the Animal Health Law, racing pigeons already benefit from several derogations. They may be authorised to move between Member States without certification and can enter the EU from non-EU countries under a simplified procedure, provided they are immediately released to fly back to their country of origin. In addition, Member States already may, in certain circumstances, derogate from certain prevention and control measures in the event of disease outbreaks in racing pigeons or in establishments keeping pigeons.

3. Under the Animal Health Law, the distinction between an infection with a Newcastle disease virus (NDV) and an infection with another paramyxovirus (non NDV) is very clear. NDV characteristics, triggering the implementation of eradication measures if found in birds, are clearly defined and in line with the international standards i.e. the Terrestrial Code of the World Organisation for Animal Health.

⁽¹⁾ <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/429/oj>.