

**EUROGROUP
FOR
ANIMALS**




sống thuần chay



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**A Call to Do More for Animals in the Context of the
European Union–Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA)**

Dear Executive Vice-President Dombrovskis,

Dear Commissioner Kyriakides,

Eurogroup for Animals, Sống Thuần Chay, Four Paws and the Shrimp Welfare Project wish to draw attention to the fact that the EU and Vietnam must do more for animals in implementing the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA).

As called upon in the Farm to Fork Strategy, “EU trade policy should contribute to enhance cooperation with and to obtain ambitious commitments from third countries in key areas such as animal welfare”. In the consultation on the Future of Europe, one out of seven EU citizens considered animal welfare to be a priority issue, and, in 2016, the Eurobarometer on animal welfare found that 89% of EU citizens want the EU to do more to promote animal welfare at a global level.¹ Making full use of the animal welfare provision listed in the EVFTA would constitute a step in the right direction.

¹ <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2096>

The EVFTA entered into force on 1 August 2020, eliminating over 99% of tariffs and liberalising the trade in animal products without any animal welfare-related requirements. This is likely to increase trade in animal products between the partners, which has seen a slight reduction in recent years (554,003 tonnes of animal products traded in 2016, compared with 421,780 tonnes in 2021). The main animal products Vietnam exports to the EU are fish products, crustaceans and animal skins. Domestically, Vietnam has witnessed an increase in meat consumption and production, notably in pig meat, beef and chicken, and the aquaculture sector has been steadily growing. Improving farm animal welfare standards will thus be key to ensuring the sustainability of the Vietnamese farming sector, and of the trade in these products.

The agreement contains a single provision on animal welfare in the “Cooperation and Capacity Building” chapter, but it opens the door for the EU to use a cooperative approach to encourage legislative improvements on animal welfare in Vietnam through technical assistance and capacity building. Yet, from what we heard in the most recent meeting of the EU Domestic Advisory Group on EVFTA, no step has been taken yet to formally set in place a cooperation mechanism on animal welfare. It is high time for such a cooperation to be put in motion. A first step should be for the EU to define priorities in the field. It could do so by looking at which animal products it imports from Vietnam; at which sectors are important in Vietnam; and at its live exports of animals to the country.

Subsequently, Eurogroup for Animals believes that the EU and Vietnam should cooperate on aquaculture. Vietnam is the fifth largest producer of farmed fish globally, and the sector is still growing. In 2020, the EU imported more than 50,000 tonnes of fish and fish products derived from Vietnamese aquaculture. This sector - due to exceptionally high stocking densities, heavy use of antibiotics, and poor transport and handling practices - has a serious impact on the environment and its growth could hinder the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals related to public health and the environment. The EU must share its expertise with Vietnam on how to improve fish welfare standards, and thus the sustainability of this sector. This is of particular relevance for the implementation of Article 13.9 of the TSD chapter on the sustainable management of aquaculture products. Increased fish welfare standards play a crucial role in this as healthier, more robust fish reduce the need for harmful chemicals and medications. This link between welfare and health in aquaculture was confirmed by a series of opinions published by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). With the EU on the path towards improving its fish welfare standards, there is a real opportunity to promote such vision in Vietnam.

The EU should also work with Vietnam on the welfare of poultry, having exported 1.9 million live fowls to the country in 2020. The total domestic consumption of meat in Vietnam increased by 102% from 2002 to 2012 and broiler meat accounts for 18-20% of this, second only to pork. In recent years, chicken meat production in the country has transitioned to intensive, industrialised systems.² This move has led to serious problems. Studies have revealed the high levels of disease in chicken flocks,³ and because welfare is a new concept in Vietnam, many farmers turn to antimicrobials as a cheaper

² Hanh, H.Q., Xuan, N.T., 2019. Integration of animal welfare into assessment of broiler chicken production systems toward sustainable development in Vietnam. *Livestock Research for Rural Development*, 31(5).

³ Cuong NV, Phu DH, Van NTB, Dinh Truong B, Kiet BT, Hien BV, et al. High-resolution monitoring of antimicrobial consumption in vietnamese small-scale chicken farms highlights discrepancies between study metrics. *Front Vet Sci.* (2019) 6:174. doi: 10.3389/fvets.2019.00174

alternative to disease control measures.⁴ As indiscriminate antimicrobial use drives antimicrobial resistance globally, the EU should promote awareness among Vietnamese farmers of the need to reduce the use of antibiotics on farms, and the role animal welfare can play in such reduction. There are also issues with laying hens. In 2019, 77 million hens laid 8.2 billion eggs in Vietnam. Most of these are kept in wire battery cages, which are so small and crowded that the birds cannot even stretch their wings. Yet, there is momentum for change in Vietnam. V.Food, one of the country's largest egg suppliers, just joined the global cage-free movement last September. The EU should build on this trend by providing technical assistance to help Vietnam transition to cage-free systems.

The EU should also use its cooperation with Vietnam under the Trade & Sustainable Development (TSD) chapter to address several wildlife-related concerns. First, it should look into the welfare issues raised by the trade in captive-bred tigers. 31 tigers bred in the EU were exported to Vietnam between 1999 and 2016. Considering the prominence of illegal trafficking in Vietnam over the past decade, European tigers exported to this country are at high risk of being trafficked or killed for their parts (notably for traditional medicine use). The EU must examine this issue in the light of Article 13.7.3 (d) and (e) of the TSD chapter, which commits the parties to implement appropriate effective measures to reduce wildlife trafficking.

Corrupt state actors in Vietnam play a key role in illegal wildlife trafficking. While there have been major seizures at Vietnamese seaports in recent years (15 tonnes of ivory and 36 tonnes of pangolin scales since 2018), there have been no arrests or convictions, indicating serious inadequacies in the country's law enforcement. The government has also failed to implement effective anti-corruption measures. Anti-corruption was initially listed as a key commitment in Vietnam's National Ivory Action Plan, but this was deleted in the revised version, without any justification. In this context, the EU should cooperate with Vietnam to promote transparency and government accountability in order to better respond to the corruption that facilitates wildlife trafficking.⁵

Another important area of concern is the trade in frogs' legs. Vietnam is the world's second largest exporter of frogs' legs and the second largest source for the EU (1,724 tonnes were imported to the EU in 2019). Production methods are highly cruel; frogs are captured using hooks, nets, and spears and then kept in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions until they are sold. Before consumption, their rear legs are cut off while they are still alive by scissors, blade or by hand and their torsos are tossed in a pile of other bleeding frogs, so they endure a painful death which can take a full hour.⁶ This trade has also led to the depletion of native frog populations in Vietnam, compromising the welfare of the local environment as frogs play a vital role in balancing aquatic ecosystems.⁷ The sustainability of this trade must be considered in light of the TSD chapter, particularly Article 13.7.3(f) on biodiversity. The lack of mandatory reporting in Vietnam means that the species involved in the trade are untraceable.

⁴ <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fvets.2020.612993/full>

⁵ <https://eia-international.org/wp-content/uploads/EIA-Vietnams-Footprint-in-Africa-FINAL.pdf>

⁶ <https://awionline.org/awi-quarterly/2011-summer/out-limb-demand-legs-driving-frogs-extinction>

⁷ https://defenders.org/sites/default/files/publications/canapes_to_extinction.pdf

⁸ <https://www.eurogroupforanimals.org/news/fish-welfare-scoping-report-vietnam>

To conclude, the EU and Vietnam together represent 543 million citizens, many of whom believe that more must be done to improve the lives of animals, not only for the sake of the animals themselves, but also because of the deep interconnections between human, animal and environmental health. The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed the lack of resilience of our trading systems at great cost. With political willingness and resources, mechanisms available under the EVFTA can contribute to achieving progress for animals, which will in turn help both the EU and Vietnam to become more resilient against future crises. We therefore call on you to use such mechanisms to improve the prospects of humans and animals in the years to come.

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