

INFORMATION NOTE OF COMMISSIONER VASSILIOU TO THE COLLEGE

VISIT TO CHINA (BEIJING AND SHANGHAI , 22 – 26 SEPTEMBER 2009)

My visit to China took place from 22 to 26 September. The objective of the visit was to review the main subjects of common interest in the areas of Food Safety, Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures and Public Health.

During my visit, I met with Vice-Minister of Agriculture Mr Niu Dun, Minister for the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ) Mr Wang Yong, Minister of Health Mr Chen Zhu, the Director of Shanghai Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Mrs Wu Fan and, the Shanghai Vice Mayor Mr Shen Xiaoming who is responsible for public health and the EXPO 2010.

As part of the programme I also met with the EU industry representatives of the food and pharmaceutical sector who are based in China, visited Beijing Sinovac Biotech Co., Ltd, the first H1N1 vaccine producer in China, delivered a lecture at the China National School of Administration (CNSA) and met with the Shanghai Expo Bureau at the Shanghai Expo site. I also gave an interview to the Chinese National Broadcaster (CCTV) on the EU's coordination of the novel flu, which seems to be of high interest in China.

Meeting with AQSIQ Minister Wang Yong

We took stock of our historic relations on food safety and SPS issues and we both agreed to continue to strengthen the cooperation already existing between the EU and China through the Memorandum of Understanding between DG SANCO and AQSIQ.

We discussed globally the imbalance of trade between China and the EU while both sides expressed the wish for this issue to be addressed especially following the new food Safety law introduced in China. Following recent communications of AQSIQ to Member States for additional certification requirements in respect of imports of pig meat into China from the EU, I asked the full cooperation of the Minister to ensure that trade continues to flow normally, in accordance with the statements of OIE/FAO/WHO on the safety of pig meat in relation to H1N1 Influenza A. We discussed the facilitation of deployment of inspection missions of the Food and Veterinary office and the need for exported products to meet Community food safety requirements as there is still a significant quantity of unsafe products exported to the EU from China (500 notifications in our rapid alert system in 2008).

We also touched upon issues such as the continuous alerts of unauthorised GMO rice BT63, interceptions of plants' pests, residues of prohibited veterinary drugs in food of animal origin, illegal/fraudulent imports and deficient food contact materials. I welcomed the progress made by AQSIQ in enforcing appropriate measures following the Melamine contamination incident. With regard to Consumers policy, as agreed with Commissioner Kuneva, I asked the Minister to step up the safety controls of Chinese exports given the numerous notifications on RAPEX system. I also welcomed our future cooperation in relation to traceability.

Meeting with Vice-Minister Niu Dun - Ministry of Agriculture (MOA)

We reviewed our cooperation, through the Memorandum of Understanding on animal health cooperation, between our respective services. We agreed for further exchanges of technical knowledge and scientific information between us, in particular on avian influenza H5N1, in birds and humans. We also took stock of our excellent collaboration and coordination in the

Codex Alimentarius by postponing the adoption of the Ractopamine Maximum Residue Limit.

We agreed that Chinese authorities should fully cooperate with the Food and Veterinary Office inspections in China in line with WTO/SPS rules. Vice-Minister Niu mentioned two Chinese export issues, heat treated poultry meat and horses, which were also referred by AQSIQ Minister Wang.

Meeting with Ministry of Health Minister Chen Zhu

I met with the Minister to countersign the Terms of Reference for cooperation between the Ministry of Health and DG SANCO. We agreed that our cooperation should consist in an intensified exchange of information and expertise in the priority areas of communicable and non-communicable diseases, preventative medicine, international health but also food safety.

The Minister of Health referred to the fact that China was the first country to authorise a H1N1 vaccine and had started the first vaccinations while I was in China. The Minister thanked the Commission for already having sent food safety experts to help the Ministry and he was very appreciative of the ECDC –for its cooperation with the Chinese CDC but also for its timely and transparent reporting of information on H1N1 on a daily basis. On tobacco, China would fulfil its FCTC (WHO Framework Convention on tobacco Control) obligations including the raising of tobacco taxes.

Meeting with Shanghai Vice Mayor Mr Shen Xiaoming

I met with the Vice-Mayor of Shanghai Dr. Xiaoming SHEN in charge of health and food safety. We discussed vaccination against seasonal flu and H1N1 as well as smoke-free environments – both in the context of the city and of the upcoming Expo.

Visit of the site of the Shanghai EXPO 2010

Finally, I visited the site of the EXPO 2010 where I met the Deputy General Director Huang Jian Zhi in charge of the construction of pavilions. Construction for our joint EU-Belgium Pavilion is well underway and progress seems to be on par with the other self built pavilions. The China pavilion is well-advanced and will be truly monumental as the whole Expo. To date, 242 countries and international organisations are confirmed as to be exhibiting there in 60 pavilions. With an expected 400,000 daily visitors (700,000 at weekends and holidays), health and food safety issues were very much on his mind and taken into account in the planning.

We also discussed the issue of smoking, recalling the success of the Beijing smoke-free Olympics. The Expo host has requested all exhibitors to ban smoking inside their pavilions, so far with positive responses.

Lecture at the Chinese School of National Administration

The Chinese School of National Administration, which trains all civil servants of the Chinese administration, has a programme of cooperation with the European Union. In the context of that programme, I was invited to give a lecture on crisis management, a subject on which the EU is considered to have a lot of expertise and know-how by the Chinese.