EurSafe News

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Dear EurSafe members,

It is my pleasure to present you, just before the 16th EurSafe conference, the second issue of the 2021 EurSafe News. The theme of this issue is Global One Health. Considering the current COVID-19 pandemic, this seems a logical theme to choose. The editorial team of the newsletter, however, came up with the idea for this theme during the 13th EurSafe conference in Vienna in June 2019. It demonstrates that One Health, integrating environment and human and animal health, is an important topic.

During my study of veterinary medicine (mid-nineties), zoonotic diseases and the consequences for both human and animal health were important topics to study, but at that time, it were less obvious topics to study for health professionals. I am happy that since then many efforts have been made and that the One Health approach has been embraced by multiple organizations, such as the WHO. The WHO defines One Health as an approach to design and implement programmes, policies, legislation and research in which multiple sectors communicate and work together to achieve better public health outcomes. Although it is generally accepted that One Health is an important topic, integrating environment and human and animal health comes with many (ethical) challenges. Therefore, I am happy that two EurSafe members, Joost van Herten and Martin Huth, were willing

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to take up this challenge and both wrote a paper about Global One Health and future challenges.

Joost van Herten from Wageningen University is currently finishing his PhD on One Health. I am happy that he found time to write an interesting paper entitled COVID-19 and our unhealthy relation with animals and the environment. Joost argues for a more proactive mode to combat future emerging zoonotic diseases. He hopes that COVID-19 is a wake-up call for the need of global governance to address the necessary transition of animal husbandry and the role of animals in food systems. The second One Health paper, with the inspiring title One Health in the pandemic?! We are all in the same boat... but everything depends on the seat, is written by Martine Huth from the Messerli Research Institute, University of Vienna. Martin discusses the conceptualization of One Health, the interrelatedness of human and animal health and interspecies equity in health concerns. He concludes that with the One Health concept steps have been made, but the concept does not initiate critical reflection upon the position of humans and animals. I hope both papers inspire researchers to work on the (ethical) challenges of One Health, as addressed by Joost and Martin!

EurSafe members Simon Meisch, Lieske Voget-Kleschin, and Thomas Potthast organized the 19th Vilm Summer Academy Nature Conservation as a Partner of Agriculture? from May 17 till 20. You can read their report of the workshops, which focused on the relationship of agriculture and nature conservation, especially biodiversity conservation. Furthermore, you can read that EurSafe board member Stef Aerts has been appointed as president of the Flemish Experimental Animal Committee by the Animal Welfare Minister. Stef notes that in practice the definition of an 'animal experiment" is not clear enough and that it would be interesting to discuss within the EurSafe community the definition from different perspectives.

This newsletter comes out just before the start of the - online - 16th EurSafe Conference, Ethics and Justice in Times of Changing Environments, which will be organized by Ivo Wallimann-Helmer, Hanna Schuebel and colleagues from the Fribourg Environmental Sciences and Humanities Institute (UniFR_ESH). On Thursday, Friday and Saturday June 24-26, about 60 to 70 papers will be presented in five parallel sessions on the following topics:

1. Climate mitigation, geoengineering, and food security
2. Adapting agriculture to sustain food security
3. Animal ethics, veterinary ethics and food security
4. Methodology and further challenges to environmental ethics
5. Covid-19: New directions for ethics and food security?

The parallel session will be framed by fife keynote lectures regarding justice and food security. Please note that on Wednesday afternoon, June 23, several interesting pre-conference workshops will be organized! Please check out the conference website for the time table and further details.

Last but not least, I would like to bring to your attention an update of Franck Meijboom, our EurSafe Vice President. Of course, this newsletter also includes a list of events, conferences, and symposia that may be of interest for EurSafe members. Would you like to contribute to EurSafe News in the future? Please feel free to contact any member of the editorial board.

I am looking forward to seeing you online during the conference or in real-life in the near future!

Mariska van Asselt, DVM, PhD
Department of Applied Research
Aeres University of Applied Sciences Dronten, the Netherlands
m.van.asselt@aeres.nl

paper

COVID-19 and our unhealthy relation with animals and the environment

Joost van Herten

Dr. Tedros, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) has classified the current COVID-19 pandemic as a 'once in a century health crisis" (WHO 2020)convened by the WHO Director-General under the International Health Regulations (2005. With its assumed low probability and high impact, the COVID-19 outbreak indeed runs the risk being labelled as a so-called 'Black Swan' event. Taleb (2010) has characterized a Black Swan event by three criteria: 1) it is an outlier, as it lies outside the realm of regular expectations, because nothing in the past can convincingly point to its possibility, 2) it carries an extreme 'impact' and 3) in spite of its outlier status, human nature makes us concoct explanations for its occurrence after the fact, making it explainable and predictable. However, after experiencing consecutively SARS-CoV-1, Ebola, MERS and Zika since 2003, red flags for the emergence of new pandemics like COVID-19 were abundantly present. Therefore, calling COVID-19 a Black Swan event can only be seen as a poor excuse for not being prepared.

Joost van Herten
DVM, MA
Wageningen University & Research
joost.vanherten@wur.nl

One Health as a panacea

So it comes as no surprise that health professionals all around the world are now stressing the importance of a One Health approach to combat COVID-19 and to prepare for future pandemics. This call is grounded on the notion that the health of humans, animals and the environment is inextricably interconnected. Consequently, One Health was coined as: the integrative effort of multiple disciplines working locally, nationally, and globally to attain optimal health for people, animals, and the environment" (American Veterinary Medical Association 2008).

The emphasis of such a One Health approach usually lies on better collaboration between medical and veterinary health professionals to effectively combat zoonotic diseases at the human-animal interface. Standard elements in such an approach are on the one hand: to prevent zoonotic disease transmission from animals to humans. In the case of COVID-19, for instance, by banning wild live trade and wet markets or culling infected animals, like mink in the Netherlands, Spain and Denmark. And on the other hand: to improve disease monitoring and surveillance in order to identify possible zoonotic disease threats as early as possible and thus raise preparedness.

It is a common believe that One Health strategies have the potential to change our reactive approach towards emerging zoonotic diseases into a more proactive mode. Ward (2020) explains this idea as follows: 'rather than disease emergence leading to pathogen discovery, the opposite is what we need to strive for. Discovery of zoonotic agents in animal populations, a thorough risk assessment driven by knowledge of the hazard and the likelihood of spillover, and then integrated monitoring and surveillance of animal and human populations can shift the world into a paradigm of discovery that prevents emergence and spread". However, although this interpretation of the One Health concept makes us perhaps better prepared to encounter the next pandemic, it will not prevent future zoonotic disease outbreaks nor will it improve human, animal and environmental health. Therefore, in my opinion, the contemporary conception of One Health is necessary but insufficient to address the future emerging zoonotic diseases that will continue to arise sooner or later.

Animals and COVID-19

Even though it is considered most likely that the virus originally emerged from a spillover event after zoonotic exposure in China, the world wide spread of COVID-19 is since then due to human-to-human transmission. Although there is some evidence of animal to human transmission at mink farms in the Netherlands, the general scientific opinion is that after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic animals do not play a significant role as drivers of disease spread (FAO 2020). Nevertheless, our disturbed relation with animals and the environment is regarded as the root cause of many zoonotic disease events which can turn into devastating pandemics.

Of all human infection diseases around 60% is of animal origin. Moreover, more than 75% of new and emerging infectious diseases are caused by pathogens that jump from animals to humans, mostly via food systems. In fact, this is not a new situation. Zoonotic diseases, often resulting in major plagues, are notorious since humans started to domesticate animals in Neolithic times. Most serious zoonotic threats classified as priority diseases by the WHO, like Ebola, Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever or Lassa, have a reservoir in wildlife. However, domestic animals still play a crucial role in zoonotic disease outbreaks amongst humans. Together with peri-domestic (pest) animals and insect vectors they often act as bridge for zoonotic pathogens to make the final jump to the human population.

In this perspective, animal husbandry receives the most attention. Recently, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP 2020) identified seven main drivers for zoonotic disease emergence: 1) the increasing demand for animal protein; 2) unsustainable agricultural intensification; 3) increased use and exploitation of wildlife; 4) unsustainable utilization of natural resources, urbanization and land use change; 5) travel and transportation; 6) changes in food supply chains and 7) climate change. All of the above are both essentially anthropogenic and mutually amplifying each other's impact. Moreover, these drivers often are intertwined around food systems. Unsurprisingly, one of UNEP's main recommendations is: 'to build resilient agroecological food systems that rely on natural synergies and harness biological diversity for food production while protecting important wildlife habitats".

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Sustainable animal husbandry

Ultimately, the foundation of zoonotic disease prevention lies in anticipating, recognizing and taking action to alter the course of the drivers of emerging infectious diseases. Addressing these drivers is a global challenge required to achieve sustainable human development. This means that the scope of One Health approaches to tackle zoonotic threats should stretch beyond effective disease control and preparedness. It should focus more on the underlying drivers of zoonotic diseases which destroy the health of animals and the environment and consequently those of humans.

Most urgent in this respect is the transition of animal husbandry. The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) defined sustainable agricultural development as: 'agricultural development that contributes to improving resource efficiency, strengthening resilience and securing social equity/responsibility of agriculture and food systems in order to ensure food security and nutrition for all, now and in the future" (FAO 2016). A problem with this transition is that global food systems are enormously complex and very different, depending on region and culture. Furthermore, there is a lack of global governance to direct this change. This does not imply that national governments can hide behind this fact. Hopefully, COVID-19 will be the wake-up call that finally sets things in motion. Whether animals should be part of future food systems or not, for moral, environmental reasons or because of food security, I will not address here. However, one thing is clear: if animals are included then their health cannot be compromised.

paper

One Health in the pandemic?! We are all in the same boat… but everything depends on the seat

Martin Huth

Bats in China, lions in Spain, great apes in the US…

The current pandemic of the zoonosis SARS-Cov-2 is a particularly illustrative example for the interrelatedness of human and animal health. In this short article, it will build both the topic and a vehicle of explanation of the concept of health as oscillating between One Health and different socially determined conceptualizations. One Health emerged precisely in the context of zoonoses (Zinsstag 2015) and is a valuable conceptual basis for reflecting the pragmatic and ethical implications of the pandemic. Many experts assume that the initial hosts of the virus have been wild animals (perhaps bats); others suspect that the fur industry was the root of the pandemic. This has led to critical considerations of our abusive relation to the environment and to animals (New Scientist 2021). Moreover, many animals living with or in the vicinity of humans, such as pets, livestock and zoo animals, can be infected with and spread the Corona virus. Animals are, therefore, included in the public debates on and in combatting SARS-Cov-2.

Martin Huth
Messerli Research Institute,
University of Veterinary Medicine
University of Vienna
martin.huth@vetmeduni.ac.at

For instance, in December 2020 some newspapers announced that four lions at the zoo of Barcelona had been infected with the Corona virus but have recovered without severe symptoms. They reported this case while millions of humans were sick and a considerable number of individuals had lost or were about to lose their lives. In March 2021, four orang-utans and five bonobos at the zoo of San Diego have been vaccinated while from a global perspective only a small number of humans had received their first (let alone the second) dose.

Is this a sign of a public acknowledgment of One Health not only regarding the interrelatedness of human and animal health, but also regarding an interspecies equity in health concerns?

…and minks in Denmark

In November 2020, the media reported the case of a mutated virus strain in minks (New York Times 2020). 17 millions have been culled only in Denmark to extinct this virus strain in order not to harm the efficacy of a vaccine for humans (which was still in the making in these days). Although there was some objection against the culling (since, generally, culling is a practice that does not go uncontested), the main focus here was the immunization strategy concerning humans, the animals were considered as nothing but zoonotic vectors. Has One Health been suspended in this case?

Different kinds of health in different spaces of human-animal relations

In practice, there is more than one world, and likewise more than one health. (Hinchliffe 2016: 31) Basically, health is a powerful teleological (i.e. normatively charged) figure (Nordenfelt 2006) determining prophylactic or curative interventions in humans and animals as well as public health policies. One Health expresses a concern for health as interdependent in humans and animals in a shared environment. Therefore, the question emerges what makes or does not make the difference between humans, a handful of lions and a small number of apes considered as animal patients in the pandemic, and 17 millions of minks being nothing more than a threat for global human health? Wouldn't One Health demand a reasonably equal consideration of human and animal health?

However, a description of One Health as pursuit of equity between humans and animals (or among animals) is inadequate as it insinuates that health is independent of social practices and structures. In contrast, Charles Rosenberg asserts that 'disease is at once a biological event, a generation-specific repertoire of verbal constructs reflecting medicine's intellectual and institutional history, an occasion of and potential legitimation for public policy, an aspect of social role and individual (…) identity, a sanction for cultural values, and a structuring element in doctor [or veterinarian; M.H.] and patient interaction" (Rosenberg 1997: xiii). Therefore, an emphasis on One Health will not suspend the differential perception and recognition of human and animal vulnerabilities (which I consider as inextricable downside of health): If health is socio-culturally framed, and if humans are related to animals in various ways, then a uniform, solely naturalistic notion of health is illusionary. We face different kinds of animals, and this kind-structure has epistemological and ethical implications. Social relations and shared practices produce a complex topography of the perceptibility and recognizability of vulnerabilities; consider the cases of the lions in contrast to the minks. We do not encounter animals per se, but livestock animals, wild animals, pests, companion animals, etc. in connection with particular knowledge stocks and saturated with different affective responses. But while minks are worth a headline, animals conceived of as pests, for instance rats, are hardly recognized as vulnerable beings at all (Nieuwland and Meijboom 2021).

Drawing from spatial sociology (Löw 2008), we can further clarify this topography as related to (a) synthesis, (b) spacing, and (c) normative framing: A tacit synthesis arranges humans, (kinds of) animals and goods in processes of perception, imagination and memory (ibid.). Therefore, an

animal's (just like a human's) infection with the Corona virus is situated in a socio-spatial order; SARS-Covid-19 can neither be reduced to an invasion of microbes in a previously unadulterated body nor to objectively detectable symptoms and nor to felt illness (i.e. an individual's welfare issue). Spacing concretizes the synthesis in material spaces; this mirrors and produces patterns of practices and perceptions of animals (in relation to humans). Considering the spatial dimensions of zoos, confinement buildings, slaughterhouses, laboratories or how we 'give room" to companion animals, it becomes visible how spacing arranges different human-animal encounters including clinical encounters. This situatedness is, in addition, normatively charged. Expectations and obligations are immanent to the mentioned synthesis. A differential normative infrastructure determines whether specific practices of of care are considered as adequate, over-blown or absurd (imagine someone demanding a vaccine against SARS-Covid-19 for sewer rats).

One Health appears to tacitly insinuate a harmonistic and equal understanding of shared health. Yet the emphasis on a variety of spaces in connection to practices, perceptions and frames could not only a differential recognizability of vulnerabilities but could also be a basis for differential conceptualizations of health (Huth et al 2019), of which one can identify the following ones: (a) Like in humans, health in companion animals or zoo animals is centered in welfare. Yet, hardly anyone would be surprised if the vaccination of zoo animals would be criticized in the face of a global lack of vaccines for humans particularly in the global South. Different vulnerabilities within this conceptualization are still recognized differentially. (b) In livestock, health and animal bodies appear to be somewhat objectified. This is visible in veterinary interventions that aim to sustain the use of these animals as resources; a cow with decreased lactation performance becomes a patient not due to welfare issues. In this field, animals are part and parcel of economic and agricultural structures; their vulnerability is framed accordingly. (c) In case of an infection with a zoonotic disease, the animal body of a farmed animal or, a fortiori, an animal framed as pest, becomes (almost) nothing but a vector (let alone a suffering subject). Here, the individual and its specific vulnerability virtually disappear behind their notion as functional parts of shared health.

A very short conclusion

Certainly, we can easily recognize that in zoonosis humans are in the same boat with animals. However, from the perspective of spatial sociology, the seat becomes crucial. One Health might be a stepping stone to critically reflect upon these positions; but it will not suspend spatial and symbolic orders that deeply determine human practices, perceptions (including affective responses), imaginations and normative frames.

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Nature Conservation as a Partner of Agriculture?

Simon Meisch, Lieske Voget-Kleschin, Thomas Potthast

Simon Meisch, Thomas Potthast and Lieske Voget-Kleschin

EurSafe members Thomas Potthast and Simon Meisch were part of a team organising the 19th Vilm Summer Academy (May 17-20, 2021). These annual workshops take place at International Academy for Nature Conservation Isle of Vilm and explore foundational themes of nature conservation. This year's workshop focused on the relationship of agriculture and nature conservation, especially biodiversity conservation.

More than half of Germany's land is used for agriculture. The intensification of agriculture has increased productivity, but also dramatically decreased agriculturally related biodiversity. In their statements of April 2018, the Council for Biodiversity and Genetic Resources at the Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection and the Scientific Advisory Board on Agricultural Policy, Food and Consumer Health Protection (both at the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture) advocate a clear shift towards agricultural practices that are more conducive to biodiversity conservation. In its farming strategy of May 2018, the Committee of German Agriculture (Zentralausschuss der Deutschen Landwirtschaft) – an umbrella organisation of the national associations of German agriculture – also declares the promotion of biodiversity to be an important concern of agriculture. Furthermore, the integration of nature conservation measures holds great potential to contribute to a positive social appreciation of agriculture and, above all, of those who cultivate the land. Yet, parts of the public and of nature conservationist and farmers respectively perceive the two fields of action and their respective actors as adversaries.

The 19th Vilm Summer Academy explored necessary prerequisites and framework conditions for stabilizing existing and enabling new partnerships between nature conservation and agriculture. In addition to aspects of production systems, nature conservation instruments and regional development, lectures and discussions encompassed rural sociological, environmental ethical and political questions.

In his opening lecture, Ulrich Hampicke, agronomist, environmental economist, and dedicated conservationist explained that in Germany today three million hectares are used to produce energy crops and export surpluses – and pointed out that these could also be used for other purposes, such as nature conservation. Hampicke distinguished between two guiding principles – maximizing the production of agricultural products versus producing agricultural products while preserving a diverse cultural landscape – and made a convincing case for the latter.

Lieske Voget-Kleschin – an old EurSafe acquaintance – provided some ethical food for thought on the normative basis of nature conservation and agriculture and explored the roles of academic ethics in the complex interplay between both fields of actions. She proposed that next to an ethics reconstructing moral convictions and one substantiating ethical judgements, addressing the ethos of farmers and nature conservationists and related eudaimonistic perspectives on agriculture and nature conservation constitute promising ethical endeavours.

From a rural sociology perspective, Lutz Laschewski addressed some ethically pertinent issues in discussing not only the alienation between agriculture and society, but also the moralization of nature and of environmental problems respectively and – once again – how to conceptualize 'good' (in the sense of eudaimonistic values) agriculture.

In practical terms, the 19th Vilm Summer Academy showed that successful integration of nature conservation in agriculture requires a combination of radical changes regarding agricultural policy and mutual recognition of individuals, aims and goals of farmers and nature conservationists, respectively. Such top down- and bottom up- approaches do not exclude, but rather need to complement each other. On a more theoretical level, these insights highlight the necessity for agricultural ethics to consider contexts, (policy) frameworks and structures, but also eudaimonistic issues and issues of recognition.

19th Vilm Summer Academy: Nature Conservation as a Partner of Agriculture? Trade-offs and Opportunities for Cooperation

May 17-20, 2021, International Academy for Nature Conservation Isle of Vilm (INA)

Organisers

- Prof. Dr. Thomas Potthast (University of Tuebingen)
- Dr. Lieske Voget-Kleschin (University of Tuebingen)
- Dr. Simon Meisch (University of Tuebingen)
  Prof. Dr. Konrad Ott (University of Kiel)
- Gisela Stolpe (INA)

Stef Aerts appointed president of the Flemish Experimental Animal Committee

Earlier this spring Stef Aerts, who has been a EurSafe member since 2003, and a former EurSafe News chief editor, and current Board member, has been appointed president of the Flemish Experimental Animal Committee. Stef Aerts holds a PhD in Applied Biological Sciences with a thesis on the societal and ethical aspects of animal production. He is the program director of the Bachelor of Agro & Biotechnology at the Odisee University College, where he also teaches ethics, current topics, and experimental animal sciences. His research is centered on the ethics of the use of animals, and agriculture on general. He has co-authored books, papers, conference papers and proceedings on these topics, and serves as a member of several ethical committees within the agricultural industry and academia.

As in any official business in the complex country of Belgium (they currently have governments, all of them!), the National Committee for the Protection of animals used for scientific purposes, has been split into three different Committees following the latest constitutional reform in 2014. The largest of those oversees the experimental animal sector in Flanders, which includes most of the country's medical and pharmaceutical research. Following the EU Directive 2010/63 the National Committee 'advises the competent authorities and

animal-welfare bodies on matters dealing with the acquisition, breeding, accommodation, care and use of animals in procedures and ensure sharing of best practice'. In Flanders, it also advises the competent authority on all exceptions to the general regulations.

"Several members expressed to me that they would like to see me as the new president"

As one of the few ethicists and philosophers working on animal topics, since 2014 Stef has served on the Committee next to welfare scientists, medical scientists, and alternative methods specialists. His second mandate will be as president. 'Several members expressed to me that they would like to see me as the new president', he tells EurSafe News, 'Not only would it bring new views to the Committee, but they thought it important that someone without ties to a large animal research sector would lead the group. Apparently, this view was shared by the Animal Welfare Minister, who then appointed me back in April.'

Animal use for scientific purposes is high on the political agenda these last years (and months) in Flanders: the 2021-2025 mandate will be an interesting time for the Committee. One of the important issues will be the development, and dissemination of alternatives to animal models. Currently, the Committee oversees an analysis of the way the decentralized competent authorities (ethical committees) function, and it is working on an advice on the definition of what is to be considered an 'animal experiment". Stef: 'Although the European Directive has a definition of an animal experiment, we have noticed that in practice it becomes less clear-cut, and more important, that different interpretations exist, nationally and internationally. We want to provide our researchers with better guidance in order to ensure a level playing field. This would be an interesting topic to discuss within the EurSafe community, as the veterinary, agricultural, and wildlife field proves particularly challenging. Discussing policy and practice with theoretical and practical ethicists should be very rewarding."

update

EurSafe Executive Committee

Update June 2021

After 22 years of EurSafe conferences and working together with many committed colleagues who organized these meetings, we have a novelty this year. A fully online conference. Probably something that none of us expected to happen two years ago and at the same time many of us are already getting used to. It is a pity that we will not meet in person in Fribourg, but it is exciting to see that Ivo Wallimann and Hanna Schuebel managed to build a very interesting online program. I am looking forward meeting you in the many interesting workshops on Wednesday and during the plenary and parallel sessions on the conference days.

I also cordially invite you to attend the General Assembly on Thursday 24 June. It is not just a formal meeting that we have to organize according to our by-law, but is also an opportunity to meet as members and share your thoughts on the (future) of the Society!

Best regards,

Franck Meijboom
On behalf of the Executive Board, 9 June 2021

announcements

Conferences, symposia, and workshops

ISAZ 2021

JUNE 22-24, 2021
30th International Society for Anthrozoology Conference (Virtual)
website

JUNE, 23-25, 2021 (ONLINE)
7th International Conference – Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Sustainability, Ethics and Governance
Lisbon, Portugal
website

JUNE 24-26, 2021
With pre-conference work-shops on June 23
EurSafe2021 Conference: Justice and Food Security in a Changing Climate
The 2021 Congress of the European Society for Agriculture and Food Ethics (EurSafe) focuses on ethical issues concerning food security and justice in times of a changing climate. The key topics are:
1. Climate mitigation, geoengineering and food security
2. Adapting agriculture to sustain food security
3. Animal ethics, veterinary ethics and food security
4. Methodology and further challenges to environmental ethics and – given the developments of the past year –
5. Covid-19: New directions for ethics and food security?

Alongside presentations on these topics, Workshops, keynotes presentations and an exciting exchange event are waiting for you online!
Visit the website for more information.

SEPTEMBER 7-10, 2021
MANCEPT Workshops
website

contact

President
Kate Millar
Centre for Applied Bioethics, University of Nottingham, United Kingdom
kate.millar@nottingham.ac.uk

Secretary
Bernice Bovenkerk
Philosophy Group, Wageningen University, the Netherlands
bernice.bovenkerk@wur.nl

Treasurer
Dirk de Hen
the Netherlands
dgdehen@gmail.com

Vice-president
Franck L.B. Meijboom
Ethics Institute, Utrecht University, the Netherlands
f.l.b.meijboom@uu.nl

Members
Stefan Aerts
Odisee University College / KU Leuven,
stef.aerts@odisee.be
Diana Dumitras
University of Agricultural Science and Veterinary Medicine Cluj-Napoca
ddumitras@usamvcluj.ro
Leire Escajedo
University of the Basque Country, Spain
leire.escajedo@ehu.es
Herwig Grimm
Messerli Research Institute University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna
herwig.grimm@vetmeduni.ac.at
Ariane Willemsen
Federal Ethics Committee on Non-Human Biotechnology, Switzerland
ariane.willemsen@bafu.admin.ch
Simon Meisch
University of Tuebingen, Germany
simon.meisch@uni-tuebingen.de
Teea Kortetmäki
University of Jyväskylä, Finland
teea.kortetmaki@jyu.fi

Website
www.eursafe.org

EurSafe News
Chief-editor
Simon Meisch
University of Tuebingen, Germany
simon.meisch@uni-teubingen.de

Editorial Board
Raymond Anthony
University of Alaska Anchorage, US
ranthon1@uaa.alaska.edu
Mariska van Asselt
Aeres University of Applied Sciences Dronten, the Netherlands
m.van.asselt@aeres.nl
Bernice Bovenkerk
Wageningen University, the Netherlands
bernice.bovenkerk@wur.nl
Samuel Camenzind
Messerli Research Institute, Austria
samuel.camenzind@vetmeduni.ac.at
Jes Harfeld
Aalborg University, Denmark
jlh@learning.aau.dk
Zoë Robaey
Wageningen University, the Netherlands
zoe.robaey@wur.nl
Svenja Springer
Messerli Research Institute, Austria
svenja.springer@vetmeduni.ac.at
Mark Stein
Salford University, Manchester, UK
markstein2010@live.co.uk

Layout
Luc Dinnissen
studio ds
Nijmegen, the Netherlands
www.studiods.nl

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