

Joint opinion by Peter Liese and Dennis Radtke

The corona outbreak at the Tönnies company in Rheda-Wiedenbrück in East Westphalia is causing many people concern. As the EPP coordinators responsible for health, employment and social affairs and as members of parliament for the district of Gütersloh, the city of Bielefeld, and the districts of Soest and Paderborn, we experience that people are afraid and angry. The districts of Gütersloh and Warendorf have again introduced strict corona restrictions due to the corona outbreak. This makes it clear that the intolerable conditions in the meat industry are not only damaging to workers who have to work and live in inhumane conditions, but also affect the general population. We therefore call for immediate action at European level too. According to ECDC, outbreaks in the meat industry have been occurring for many weeks throughout the European Union and according to Commissioner Kyriakides also in many other countries of the world.

The climate in meat cutting plants (cold, dry air) is obviously a climate which massively favours the spread of the virus. By the way, this is also a warning for the threatening second wave in autumn and winter. Scientists at the University of Bonn have discovered that the cause of the infection is also due to the fact that the air in the slaughterhouses is not filtered and little is exchanged. On top, there are obviously other reasons within the company.

We demand:

1.

The competent EU authorities, such as ECDC, must analyse as quickly as possible which factors, apart from low temperature and low humidity, contribute to the spread of the corona virus in slaughterhouses, which causes repeated outbreaks, and make appropriate recommendations. Slaughterhouse ventilation systems in the EU must be reviewed and upgraded as soon as possible.

2.

Systematic testing of all staff in slaughterhouses throughout the EU. In all of them at least every 4 weeks, in companies with more than 100 employees in the cutting department at least every 2 weeks, because obviously the virus has spread in Tönnies shortly after the last row test.

3.

Regulation that distance and hygiene rules in meat establishments are controlled even more than in other establishments.

In addition to the conditions in the establishments, the accommodation of the employees and their employment status seems to be a major problem. The fact that many employees are not employed in the actual company, but work for subcontractors and are in some cases pseudo self-employed, obviously leads to huge problems. The addresses of those working in the company were not known. The reason given by the company was even the European regulation on data protection. According to our experts in the European Parliament, this is nonsense. Moreover, it is obvious that someone who works as a bogus self-employed person and does not receive sick pay, in the worst case even has to pay contractual penalties, that this employee probably does not call in sick but tries to go about his work despite fever and coughing.

We demand:

1.

It must be made clear as a matter of urgency that the European regulation on data protection is not an obstacle to giving out addresses in the event of an infection. The relevant legal position is in place, but the Commission must communicate this strongly across Europe.

2.

The competent EU authorities must check how the corona virus spreads in mass accommodation and make appropriate recommendations.

3.

We demand corporate responsibility on the part of the client, including for so-called subcontractors. This can only be achieved if there is EU-wide subcontractor liability for this sector. Especially in the case of on-site work contracts, the contracting companies must be held liable for the employment relationships of subcontractors' employees.