



FÉDÉRATION FRANÇAISE  
D'ÉQUITATION



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FÉDÉRATION FRANÇAISE D'ÉQUITATION - FFE.COM

# 9 PROPOSALS FROM THE FÉDÉRATION FRANÇAISE D'ÉQUITATION TO SUPPORT HORSE RIDING, ON THE EVE OF THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

## I. HORSE RIDING, AN AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITY

- For a fair and uniform application of the Common Agricultural Policy
- For an European recognition of the agricultural nature of horse-related activities
- For European statistics on equidae
- Ensuring that the new regulation on the protection of animals during transport takes account of the specific features of equine movements

## II. HORSE RIDING, A SPORTING ACTIVITY

- To encourage organised sport framework
- Protecting the European model of federated sport

## III. L'ÉQUITATION, UNE ACTIVITÉ TOURISTIQUE

- For an amendment to the Package Travel Directive
- For equestrian activities to be taken into account in European policies promoting soft mobility
- For the maintenance of a MEP Horse group



# EDITOR'S NOTE FROM SERGE LECOMTE

Our world is changing and so must we. To safeguard our environment, and the survival of the SMEs that keep our regions alive. To meet the challenges of today and those to come. To adapt to a climate that is difficult to predict and to a complex geopolitical context.

This is a shared responsibility and one that is unique to human beings, and the European Union must be the tool that enables us to bring about these changes, which are once again being imposed on us. The managers of equestrian facilities work every day to make our activities an asset in these changes, but they must also adapt to the new needs and desires of our fellow citizens. To carry out these missions successfully, they need a European Union that listens to them and supports their actions, without ever losing sight of the importance of moving forward united and together.



Serge LECOMTE, President of the FFE.

## LA FÉDÉRATION FRANÇAISE D'ÉQUITATION EN CHIFFRES

**1<sup>ST</sup>**

employer from private sports sector with 35,000 active employees

**3<sup>RD</sup>**

olympic sports federation

**34**

equestrian disciplines, including 3 Olympic disciplines and 1 Paralympic, gender diversity

**9,500**

establishments, including 6,000 pony clubs and riding schools

nearly **700,000**

member riders  
80% of ♀

## PART I

# HORSE RIDING, AN AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITY



**A**lthough they are located on the outskirts of major conurbations, and at the heart of many of them, pony clubs and riding schools have a strong presence in rural areas. They offer employment opportunities in areas that are often deprived of them, and give local residents the chance to take part in physical activity close to their home.

The presence of horses on their facilities and their need for farmland have led the vast majority of equestrian establishment managers to organise themselves in the form of a farm. Since 2005, the law on the development of rural areas has enshrined this status in France for all equine activities (breeding, horse racing, leisure riding). Since then, the agricultural nature of equestrian activities has never been called into question, so great is the contribution made by this industry to our country's agricultural wealth. Breeding contributes to the preservation of breeds that were threatened with extinction until recently, and exporting our sport horses abroad is an asset for our economy. The meadows and pastures of pony clubs and riding schools help to reduce our CO2 emissions and are essential reservoirs of biodiversity. Finally, this status has made it possible to harmonise the legislation applicable to these establishments and to put an end to numerous cases of unfair competition between those that were already subject to it and those that were not.

In this respect, equestrian establishments are directly affected by several European agricultural legislations, but their issues are rarely taken into account, notably because of the different status of their activities at European level

## → For a fair and uniform application of the Common Agricultural Policy

Although equestrian facilities were excluded from the 2014-2020 CAP programming, the 2021-2027 programming has opened up part of the CAP aid schemes to equestrian activities. Support for investment is provided through calls for projects managed directly by the Regions. However, as the regions remain totally independent when it comes to implementing non-surface measures, they are free to direct funding according to their regional priorities.

*This has led to a totally heterogeneous application of the CAP across the territory, and to the exclusion of equestrian facilities from funds, even though the EU had opened up the new definition of active farmer, leaving it up to the Member States to define the eligible activities*

**It is essential that all players in the equestrian sector have equal access to agricultural funds and can develop their activities in all our regions. The FFE calls on future Members of the European Parliament to ensure that equestrian facilities are able to benefit from aid under the next programming period and to monitor the implementation of current legislation in order to ensure that the CAP is applied uniformly and in line with common objectives.**

## → For European recognition of the agricultural nature of horse-related activities

While the agricultural nature of horse-related activities has been enshrined in national law since 2005, this same recognition is still awaited at European level, which only considers breeding activities to be agricultural.

*This difference in treatment has deprived professionals in the equestrian sector of the benefits of a number of European agricultural laws, including certain CAP provisions, and has led to a difference in status between livestock farming and other activities in the sector that is difficult to understand, as well as between the national and European levels.*

**At a time when simplification is the watchword of public action at national level, it must also guide the action of the European Union for this new term of office. This recognition will not only ensure greater legal certainty for our equestrian structures, but will also enable progress to be made on the crucial issue of data collection for these SMEs.**

## → For European statistics on equidae

In order to inform the decisions of the European institutions and assess the impact of legislation adopted on the lives of European citizens and businesses, Eurostat works every day to collect high-quality data. While equidae were previously included in the regulation determining the species to be covered by data collection campaigns, they are no longer included<sup>1</sup>.

The lack of reliable data on equidae means that we have no accurate knowledge of their presence on European soil, and represents not only a health risk for our continent, but also an obstacle to intra-Community trade in these livestock.

**Having accurate data on the presence of horses in the European Union would help inform the decisions of the institutions, and in particular MEPs, on the economy generated by this activity and the impact of European legislation (legislation on animal health, zootechnics, animal welfare, etc.). This would also help to safeguard the many breeds of equidae that represent a rich resource for our regions, and would enable them to play their full role in greening.**



## → Ensuring that the new regulation on the protection of animals during transport takes account of the specific features of equine movements

The Commission has published its proposal for a regulation to revise Regulation (EC) 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport as part of the review of animal welfare legislation<sup>2</sup>. Unlike other agricultural species, equidae are transported for a wide variety of reasons (racing, sport, leisure, presentation, breeding, etc.). According to the report entitled Transport of live animals in the EU: challenges and ways forward (European Court of Auditors, 2023), slaughter accounted for only 13% of the reasons for transporting equidae within the European Union.

For this reason, the Commission listened to the request from equestrian professionals to benefit from a derogation from the common rules for "the transport of animals with a view to their participation in dressage, exhibitions, competitions, cultural events, circuses and equestrian sport and leisure activities", indicating that, for these specific cases, only general obligations applied.

**This derogation must be supported by MEPs when the proposal for a regulation is debated in the European Parliament, so that the events that bring equestrian activities to life every weekend and train our riders in equestrian sports can continue. Without it, people transporting their horses will be subject to the same obligations as other animal species, whose transport does not serve the same purposes. The weight of these regulations would then be totally disproportionate to the measures already taken for the transport of equidae<sup>2</sup>.**



<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EU) 2018/1091 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 concerning integrated statistics on agricultural holdings and repealing Regulations (EC) No 1166/2008 and (EU) No 1337/2011

<sup>2</sup> Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the protection of animals during transport and related operations and amending Council Regulation (EC) No 1255/97 and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 (COM(2023) 770 final)



## PART II

# HORSE RIDING, A SPORTING ACTIVITY



This is undoubtedly the characteristic of horse riding that will surprise the least. A sporting activity with numerous health benefits, it can be practised by a huge number of people, as its various disciplines are suitable for everyone, whether disabled or not, children or senior citizens.

The Fédération Française d'Équitation (French Equestrian Federation) is a public service body responsible for organising sport and competition, and supervises the various disciplines and ensures that they are practised safely.

The European Union has a supporting role in the field of sport, and its mission is to "develop the European dimension in sport, by promoting fairness and openness in sporting competitions and cooperation between bodies responsible for sport, and by protecting the physical and moral integrity of sportsmen and sportswomen, in particular the youngest among them" (Article 165(2) of the TFEU).

**In this respect, the FFE would like to highlight two issues for the next term of office.**

## → To encourage organised sport

The current term of office has been particularly marked by the health crisis linked to Covid-19 and the ever-increasing need to take action on people's health. To this end, numerous conferences have been organised and action plans adopted to support people's desire to practise sport more freely.

*Although support for unorganised sport is commendable and enables as many people as possible to take part in sporting activities, it must not be to the detriment of organised sport, which ensures the safety of licence holders and competitions while meeting the objectives set by their ministries.*

**It is essential for the European Union to work to support those involved in organised sport, who are the prime movers of sporting excellence and the guarantors of the implementation of national public health objectives and the protection of participants.**

## → Protecting the European model of federated sport

Last December, the Court of Justice of the European Union handed down a number of rulings relating to the organisation of sport in Europe. These rulings were long-awaited by the entire European sporting movement, given their potentially far-reaching consequences for federations. In the ISU v Commission<sup>3</sup> and European Super League Company v UEFA<sup>4</sup> cases, the CJEU established the principle that a sport federation does not have the right to prohibit the holding of a sporting competition that it has not organised, or to penalise athletes who wish to take part.

*While the pyramid-shaped organisation of federal sporting competitions allows fair access based on athletes' results, these decisions, taken in the name of respect for the principle of competition law, would have the consequence of allowing any player to organise competitions in parallel with this organisation. No one would therefore be able to ensure that this event respects the health of the athletes and guarantees fair access to the final events, both from a sporting point of view and in terms of the resources deployed to combat doping in particular. Financial gain would then take precedence over fair play and safety.*

**The sports sector has specific characteristics relating to education, athletes' health and fair play that must always guide the actions of our institutions. The monopoly of sports federations in the organisation of their sports and competitions must be guaranteed to avoid a trend towards events guided solely by economic and financial interests.**



<sup>3</sup> Judgment of the Court (Grand Chamber) of 21 December 2023 (Case C-124/21 P), International Skating Union v European Commission, Mark Jan Hendrik Tuitert, Niels Kerstholt, European Elite Athletes Association.

<sup>4</sup> Judgment of the Court (Grand Chamber) of 21 December 2023 (Case C-333/21), European Superleague Company, SL v Fédération internationale de football association (FIFA), Unión de Federaciones Europeas de Fútbol (UEFA).



## PART III

# HORSE RIDING, A TOURISTIC ACTIVITY



A lesser-known aspect of horse riding, outdoor riding or so called equestrian tourism is becoming increasingly popular every year. Allowing you to discover or rediscover the cultural and natural riches of our regions in an original way, at horse pace, the rides and hikes appeal to riders of a day or to the most seasoned, in territories sometimes less popular but just as beautiful.

These activities also represent an additional source of income for the equestrian structures that offer them, as well as being an integral part of their riding school activities when they organise courses or training for their riders. In France, the FFE estimates that one million riders regularly take part in equestrian tourism. In 2023, there were 377 equestrian FFE facilities with the equestrian tourism label.

In addition, since its creation in 2013, the FFE has been involved in the development of the Route Européenne d'Artagnan, the first equestrian route to be certified as a cultural route by the Council of Europe in 2021, and which has received European funding under the COSME programme. Crossing 15 regions and 6 European countries, this route will eventually offer more than 8,000 km of riding for riders and other users (pedestrians, cyclists, etc.) along 6 themed routes.

Finally, the FFE is also a founder member of the Fédération Internationale de Tourisme Equestre (FITE), created in 1975 with the support of Belgium, Italy, Switzerland and France. The FFE participates in the various commissions and activities of the FITE. Since May 2022, the FITE has had participatory status for the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe. This appointment consolidates the FITE's recognition as an expert in the development of equestrian tourism and itineraries internationally.

**In the same way as other tourism operators, equestrian facilities offering such activities are therefore affected by the relevant European legislation.**

## → For an amendment to the Package Travel Directive

In 2018, the Package Travel Directive came into force with the aim of providing a high level of protection for European consumers who book complex travel services. As provided for in this legislation, an evaluation of the effectiveness of its provisions has been carried out since 2020. As a result of the Covid-19 crisis and the bankruptcy of Thomas Cook, the tourism sector has undergone unprecedented upheaval, leading the European Commission to present a revision of this directive at the end of 2023. As organisers of training courses or rides, equestrian structures fall within the scope of the directive in the same way as the giants of the tourism sector.

*The Package Travel Directive creates obligations that represent additional costs and an administrative burden for SMEs that already comply with sporting obligations. Those relating to protection against insolvency do not correspond to the economic reality of these sporting and agricultural structures. The FFE believes that the aim of the directive and the revision - which is laudable - is not adapted to equestrian establishments which, most of the time, offer these activities to their members. Since the directive came into force, the FFE has been constantly alerting the European Commission to the disastrous consequences of these rules on the daily lives of its members, notably through its participation of the FITE, a member of the expert group set up by the European Commission, and through its contributions to public consultations.*

**With this in mind, Members of Parliament should support the FFE's request that equestrian establishments which themselves organise the offer intended for their members in their country (for example, the reception of minors group during advanced training courses during school holidays) should not be considered to fall within the scope of this directive, whether they are associations or structures organised on a commercial basis.**



## → Ensuring that equestrian activities are taken into account in European policies promoting soft mobility

For several years now, we've been thinking about the way we travel. Whether it's in relation to the European Union's climate commitments, or the fragility of our tourist economy in the face of various crises, particularly health-related, the institutions have understood the importance of encouraging less energy-intensive mobility. With this in mind, the EU recently adopted a European declaration on cycling designed to encourage the use of this environmentally-friendly form of transport.

*This laudable objective must not stop at this activity alone, and other forms of soft mobility must also benefit from this positive dynamic. For example, horse riders regularly have difficulty getting around on tarmac cycle paths known as "grey" paths, which can pose a risk of injury to equidae. Encouraging routes that can be used on foot, by bike or on horseback would send a strong signal to our fellow citizens and would highlight the diversity of non-polluting modes of transport available to them, whether for everyday activities or for travel.*

**The FFE is calling for the coordination of European policies on slow tourism and the inclusion of horse trekking in their development. The inclusion of horse trekking in European policies on tourism, rurality, mobility and sustainable development would also be particularly commendable, as it is a vector of economic benefits for rural areas (accommodation, shops, cultural activities, etc.), social benefits (health, reconnection with nature, culture and heritage, etc.) and environmental benefits (development of green, local tourism).**



→ For the maintenance a MEP horse group

If all these demands are to continue and be heard after the European elections, it is absolutely essential that a parliamentary horse group exists in this new term of office. During the current parliamentary term, the MEP Horse Group, chaired by Hilde Vautmans MEP, has enabled horse enthusiasts in the European institutions to exchange views with European professionals from across the industry, in order to gain a better understanding of the sector's priorities and challenges. This kind of forum must continue to exist, as the sector is covered by several European public policies and a cross-sectoral vision is needed to ensure the future of the horse in Europe.





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