

Five minutes with Marianne Thieme: “We need to refocus our priorities instead of putting mankind at the centre of the universe”

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*In 2006, the Party for the Animals (Partij voor de Dieren) became the first animal rights party to gain representation in a national parliament when it gained two seats in the House of Representatives of the Netherlands. EUROPP's editors spoke to the party's parliamentary leader, **Marianne Thieme**, about the party's success, the lessons to be learned from Europe's horsemeat scandal, and whether in a time of economic crisis Europeans can afford to prioritise animal rights.*



As the first animal rights party to gain representation in a national parliament, do you think that your success could be repeated in other European countries?

There are in fact already 12 other ‘parties for the animals’ across the world, and since last year there has also been a representative in the Parliament of Madeira. In the UK there’s also a party called Animals Count, and there are animal rights parties in Austria, France, Portugal, and Spain, so it’s a growing movement. The animal rights movement is a new social movement, which follows on in the tradition of women’s rights, anti-slavery, and other civil liberties movements. The animal rights movement is part of establishing a world in which there is justice for all species, not just mankind.

Should animals have the same rights as human beings?

Well animals and human beings are not the same: just as children do not have the same rights as adults. What we have to look into is what animals need and that’s to live naturally and to be given as much freedom as possible. Animal rights are in fact more like obligations from human beings towards animals: to avoid causing fear, or stress, or hunger and to give them room to live a life according to their needs. So while they don’t have the same rights, we still have obligations to treat them in the correct way or to leave them in peace.

What does Europe’s recent horsemeat scandal say about the food industry?

What we see is that people want to get products – not only commercial products like electronics and so on, but also food – as cheaply as possible. So the meat industry tries to obtain meat and other products for the lowest price. It’s a rat race to the bottom. As a result we’ve lost a real overview of where food comes from and how it’s been produced. That’s how we ended up with a situation in which horse meat could be sold as something else. It’s a symptom of a meat industry which is totally corrupt, bad for the environment, bad for animals, and bad for human health as well.

In a time of austerity and economic problems, can we afford for animal rights to be a priority?

Well we have to because if we don’t change our attitudes towards animals, and in general towards nature, we’ll end up with a world which lacks the major principles of sustainability and compassion. The reason why we have all of these crises at the same time – the economic crisis, climate change, and starvation in some parts of the world – is greed and the short-term interests of human beings. We have a very ‘man-centred’ way of thinking and it causes so much devastation for our planet and, of course, for animals. We really need to refocus our priorities instead of putting mankind at the centre of the universe, and try to create symmetry with nature and animals in order for the next generations to survive.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

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