

Press Release

“Spiridon II”: Organizer Allegedly Knowingly Accepted the Deaths of the Cattle

Freiburg i.Br. / Illnau, March 24, 2026 – **Following the tragedy on the livestock transport ship “Spiridon II,” which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of cattle, Turkish importers are leveling serious allegations against an Austrian livestock dealer. He is alleged to have knowingly accepted the animals’ deaths. Our investigations show: The horrific tragedy on the “Spiridon II” was not an accident, but the result of irresponsible conduct. Exclusive video footage shows the dramatic conditions on board. Transporting live animals by sea is highly risky. We are calling for a ban.**

The tragic case of the livestock transport ship “Spiridon II,” which last fall, loaded with cattle, was stranded off the Turkish coast for several weeks after a month-long voyage from Uruguay, is now set to have consequences: **The importers have taken legal action against a livestock dealer from Austria.** They say his actions are responsible for the deaths of many animals, great suffering, and economic damage. Documents confirm that the livestock dealer organized the transport of a total of 2,901 cattle.

Video footage provided to us, taken after arrival in Turkey, shows the dire conditions on board: dying animals lying in deep manure, weakened animals barely able to stand, respiratory and eye problems, and overcrowded compartments. **“The footage reveals systemic and serious animal welfare issues, including poor hygiene and a lack of veterinary care. The conditions observed are likely to have caused significant suffering, illness, and deaths and are unacceptable for the transport of live animals,”** says Maria Boada-Saña of the German animal welfare organization *Animal Welfare Foundation*.

Particularly alarming: 140 heifers had given birth to their calves under the harsh conditions on board. According to a court document, 90 of the newborn calves could not be found upon arrival. **“They may have been thrown overboard during the voyage or ‘lost’ on the ship amid manure and bedding,”** says Maria Boada-Saña.

The video shows calves lying next to dead animals. Some are very small, while others are already so large that they must have been born at the start of the journey. **“This means some heifers must have been loaded at a late stage of pregnancy. That is irresponsible,”** says veterinarian Boada-Saña. According to the importers, the organizer delayed the trip by two months for no reason.

Despite the distress on board, Turkish authorities prohibited the unloading of the animals because they had determined that 518 cattle were not on the import list. **According to the importers, the Austrian livestock dealer had loaded these animals—knowing that Turkey might refuse the import.** A legal action by the importers, aimed at securing the unloading, was unsuccessful. The animals bore the brunt of this: their suffering was prolonged by several weeks.

Im Einsatz für Tiere

Despite intensive efforts by several organizations, help failed to materialize. **“We informed the relevant authorities, the European Commission, and the World Organisation for Animal Health—but no one felt responsible,”** said Boada-Saña.

Only after more than two months at sea were the surviving animals taken to Libya—apparently without the importers’ knowledge. Our on-site investigations show that many animals had calved there in the meantime. It is unclear how many survived the ordeal. According to estimates, at least 340 animals died.

What happened to the animals on the “Spiridon II” is not an isolated incident and could just as easily have happened to European animals—the EU exports approximately 3 million animals by ship to North Africa or the Middle East every year. **Unexpected incidents occur time and again during these transports:** accidents, animal health concerns, bureaucratic hurdles, or legal issues such as labor law disputes, import regulations changed at short notice, unpaid import duties, armed conflicts, or illegal activities can result in animals not being allowed to be unloaded. **There are no contingency plans for such cases. If a vessel is turned away at the port of destination, animals are often trapped on board for weeks or even months.** This is because they are not allowed to return.

“The ‘Spiridon II’ case is the result of a largely unregulated trade in which no law protects the animals,” says Iris Baumgärtner, project manager at the Animal Welfare Foundation. **“Live animal transport by ship is highly risky and uncontrollable.”**

We therefore call for a ban on animal transport by sea!

Background information on the vessel “Spiridon II” (IMO 7311329)

The “Spiridon II” (formerly named *Mikhail Chermnykh*) currently flies the Togolese flag and was built in Finland in 1973. Between 2021 and the present, a total of 94 deficiencies have been identified on the vessel, including issues related to structural integrity, watertightness, fire safety, lifesaving equipment, and safety management systems. Problems were also recorded with certification, documentation, propulsion systems, and overall safety management. As of June 2024, the ship was authorized in Spain to transport animals. Since then, to the best of our knowledge, it no longer holds a permit to transport animals in Europe. According to the [Paris MoU](#), it is a black-listed vessel, which means it poses a high risk to the animals on board, the crew, and maritime safety.

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