

Een veterinaire denker op het snijvlak van beleid en wereldhandel

Dr. Zeev Noga is geen doorsnee leider van een brancheorganisatie. Opgeleid tot dierenarts aan de Universiteit van Milaan, bracht zijn loopbaan hem al snel ver buiten de dierenartsenpraktijk, naar de complexe wereld van voedselsystemen, diergezondheidsbeleid en internationale handel.

Zijn professionele loopbaan begon in Italië met een studie diergeneeskunde, maar kreeg al snel een andere wending. Tegenwoordig vervult hij de functie van secretaris-generaal van de UECBV, de Europese Vereniging voor Vee- en Vleeshandel waarvan Vee&Logistiek Nederland lid is. Die functie bekleedt hij sinds augustus 2025. Daarvoor bekleedde hij meer dan tien jaar internationale leiderschapsfuncties, waaronder Executive Director van de World Veterinary Association en secretaris-generaal van PREZODE, een wereldwijd initiatief gesteund door meer dan 30 regeringen en

internationale organisaties zoals de European Commission, WHO, FAO, WOAAH en UNEP, gericht op het voorkomen van toekomstige pandemieën via One Health-samenwerking.

Wat zijn carrière kenmerkt is een constante rode draad: verbinding. Tussen disciplines, tussen landen en tussen mensen die niet altijd dezelfde taal spreken - wetenschappelijk of politiek. Zoals hij zelf zegt, terugblikkend op zijn weg van de dierenartsopleiding naar Brussel en daarna naar internationale topfuncties: *"Ik was vooral op*

Europees niveau actief, maar wilde mijn grenzen graag nog verder verleggen." Die overgang - van technische diergeneeskunde naar systeemdenken op globaal niveau - vormt de basis van hoe hij vandaag kijkt naar de uitdagingen in de veehandel, voedselveiligheid en wat hij "healthy trade" noemt.

Van diergeneeskunde naar systeemdenken

Dr. Noga omschrijft zijn instap in de Europese beleids wereld als bijna toevallig, maar wel gedreven door nieuwsgierigheid. Tijdens zijn studie in Milaan merkte hij al snel dat klinisch werk in een dierenartsenpraktijk niet zijn ambitie was. Herhaalde bezoeken aan Brussel, waar zijn vrouw werkzaam was in het Europees Parlement, openden een ander perspectief.

Hij begon zich te verdiepen in instellingen, organisaties en beleidsnetwerken rond diergezondheid en voedselveiligheid. Wat begon als interesse groeide uit tot een carrièreswitch richting Europees veterinair beleid. Bij UECBV startte hij als veterinair adviseur, met focus op diergezondheid, dierenwelzijn, voedselveiligheid en vooral regelgeving rondom transport en slacht. Gaandeweg groeide zijn rol uit naar bredere beleidscoördinatie en strategische betrokkenheid.

Terugkijkend zegt hij daarover: *"Ik was niet zo geïnteresseerd in klinisch werk of in het idee om me op individuele dieren te richten. Mijn visie was breder; ik wilde een echte mondiale impact hebben voor dieren en bijdragen aan het algemeen belang. Destijds wist ik nog niet precies hoe dat eruit zou zien, maar ik wist wel dat ik iets anders wilde doen."*

Die onzekerheid werd, zo zegt hij, het begin van een bredere denkwijze: systeemdenken. Volgens hem stimuleert de diergeneeskunde dat vanzelf. Ze dwingt je om biologische omgevingsfactoren en praktische realiteiten samen te bekijken. Of zoals hij het verwoordt: *"Als dierenarts kijk je naar het totaalplaatje, alles hangt met elkaar samen."* Dat perspectief maakte het later mogelijk om te bewegen tussen wetenschap, logistiek, handel en beleid zonder de technische basis te verliezen.

Wat "healthy trade" betekent

Voor Dr. Noga is "healthy trade" (of "gezonde handel") veel meer dan een slogan. Het is een evenwicht tussen voedselveiligheid, dierenwelzijn, economische haalbaarheid en de stabiliteit van internationale ketens. Hij benadrukt dat handel in vlees en vee niet los te zien is van consumptiepatronen. Consumenten staan volgens hem vaak ver af van de productie en maken hun keuzes vooral op basis van prijs en gemak. *"We zijn allemaal consumenten, maar we staan er zelden bij stil waar ons voedsel vandaan komt,"* zegt hij.

Die afstand leidt volgens hem tot een vertekend beeld van wat realistische productienormen en handelssystemen kunnen leveren. Tegelijkertijd erkent hij dat Europa tot de strengst gereguleerde regio's ter wereld behoort op het gebied van dierenwelzijn, milieu en voedselveiligheid. Het probleem zit dus niet in het ontbreken van regels, maar in de manier waarop die in de



praktijk worden toegepast.

Volgens hem moet "healthy trade" drie doelen tegelijk dienen: veiligheid voor consumenten, werkbaarheid voor producenten en stabiliteit van ketens. Zonder dat evenwicht worden systemen kwetsbaar en uiteindelijk minder competitief.

Dierenwelzijn, transport en uitvoering in de praktijk

Diertransport is een van de meest gevoelige onderwerpen in het Europese landbouwbeleid. De transportverordening blijft daarbij het centrale referentiekader. Dr. Noga erkent de hoge standaarden van de regelgeving, maar benadrukt dat het echte debat niet over de tekst gaat, maar over de uitvoering. *"De vraag is niet of de regelgeving goed of slecht is,"* zegt hij, *"de vraag is hoe die in de praktijk wordt toegepast."*

Strengere regels hebben volgens hem geleid tot structurele veranderingen in de sector. Sommige kleine bedrijven zijn vanwege de hoge kosten daardoor verdwenen. De productie is meer geconcentreerd. Dat versterkte ook de onderlinge afhankelijkheid tussen lidstaten, bijvoorbeeld in ketens waarbij dieren in het ene land worden gehouden en in een andere lidstaat worden verwerkt.

Hij verwijst naar Europese vleesketens, zoals in de varkenssector, waar meerdere lidstaten betrokken zijn in één productieketen. Volgens hem is het idee dat transport eenvoudig kan worden beperkt zonder gevolgen voor het

systeem niet realistisch. Hij ontwikkelde samen met dierenwelzijnsorganisaties een praktisch initiatief om regelgeving toegankelijker te maken.

"We hebben een richtlijn gemaakt met heel weinig tekst en veel beelden," zegt hij.

Het doel was om regels begrijpelijk te maken voor de dagelijkse uitvoering. Volgens hem is dat de richting die regelgeving uit moet gaan: minder abstract, meer praktisch, beter toepasbaar.

One Health en kwetsbare systemen

Zijn werk bij PREZODE en de World Veterinary Association heeft zijn visie op One Health sterk gevormd: de verbinding tussen mens, dier en milieu. Tegelijkertijd is hij kritisch over hoe het concept soms wordt



A veterinary mind at the intersection of policy and global trade

Dr. Zeev Noga is not a typical trade association leader. Trained as a veterinarian at the University of Milan, his career has taken him far beyond the clinic and into the complex architecture of global food systems, animal health governance, and international trade policy.

Dr. Noga's professional journey began with veterinary studies in Italy, but it quickly evolved into something much broader. Today, he serves as Secretary General of UECBV, the European Livestock and Meat Trades Union, a position he officially took up in August 2025. His return to UECBV followed more than a decade of international leadership roles, including Executive Director of the World Veterinary Association and Secretary General of PREZODE, a global initiative supported by more than 30 governments and international organisations such as the European Commission, WHO, FAO, WOA, and UNEP, focused on preventing future pandemics through One Health collaboration.

Across his career, one theme consistently appears: connection. Between disciplines, between countries, and between people who do not always speak the same language—scientifically or politically. As he puts it, reflecting on his path from veterinary school to Brussels and then to global leadership roles: *"I was very much on the European level... and I felt ready for the world."* That transition—from technical veterinary work to global systems thinking—defines how he now approaches the challenges of livestock trade, food safety, and what he calls "healthy trade".

From veterinary science to global systems thinking

Dr. Noga describes his entry into EU policy circles as almost accidental but shaped by curiosity. While studying veterinary medicine in Milan, he realised early on that clinical practice was not his path. Instead, repeated visits to Brussels—where his wife worked in the European Parliament—opened a different door.

He began exploring institutions, associations, and policy networks linked to animal health and food safety. What started as curiosity became a career shift into European veterinary policy. At UECBV, he initially joined as a veterinary advisor, working on animal health, animal welfare, food safety, and, more specifically, slaughter and transport regulations. Over time, his role expanded into broader policy coordination and strategic engagement.

Looking back, he describes his early motivation simply: *"I was not so interested in clinical work, or the idea of focusing on individual animals [...] My vision was broader; I aspired to create a significant global impact for animals and contribute to the greater good. At the time, I wasn't entirely sure what that would look like, but I knew I wanted to strive for something different."*

That uncertainty, he says, was the beginning of a much larger journey into systems thinking. Veterinary training, in his view, naturally builds this perspective. It forces professionals to connect biological, environmental, and operational factors at once. Or as he explains: *"To be a veterinarian is always about the big picture... everything is connected."* That mindset, he argues, is what later allowed him to move into logistics, trade, and international governance without losing sight of the technical foundations.

What “healthy trade” really means

For Dr. Noga, the concept of “healthy trade” is far more than a slogan. It is a balancing act between food safety, animal welfare, economic viability, and global supply chain stability.

He is careful to stress that trade in livestock and meat cannot be separated from the realities of consumption. Modern consumers, he argues, are often distant from production systems and make decisions based primarily on price and convenience.

“We are all consumers... but we do not really think where food comes from,” he says.

In his view, this disconnection shapes unrealistic expectations about production standards and trade systems. At the same time, he acknowledges that Europe operates under some of the highest regulatory standards in the world—particularly in animal welfare, environmental protection, and food safety. The challenge, therefore, is not the absence of rules, but how they are implemented across diverse production realities.

Healthy trade, he suggests, must ensure three things at once: safety for consumers, practicality for producers, and stability for supply chains.

Without that balance, he warns, systems become fragile and less competitive.

Animal welfare, transport, and the reality of implementation

Few topics in EU livestock policy are as contested as animal transport. Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 remains a central reference point in ongoing debates, and Dr. Noga does not avoid its complexity. He acknowledges that the regulation sets high standards, but argues that the real issue lies in implementation rather than principle.

“The question is not if the regulation is good or bad,” he explains. *“The question is how it is implemented.”*

Over time, stricter rules have reshaped the structure of the sector. Some smaller operators have exited the market due to compliance costs, leading to greater concentration in production systems across Europe. This, in turn, has reinforced cross-border dependencies, for example, animals raised in one country and processed in another. He uses the example of traditional European meat production chains, such as pork products requiring multi-country coordination, to illustrate how transport is not optional but structural. In his view, improving animal welfare in transport cannot mean simply tightening rules without considering operational feasibility.

He recalls a practical initiative he developed with NGOs and other partners, where regulatory language was translated into simple visual guidance for operators.

“We created a guideline...with very few words, many pictures,” he says. The goal was simple: make compliance understandable in real operational conditions. For him, this represents the direction regulation should move toward: less abstraction, more practicality, and better alignment with real-world logistics.

One health and the fragility of global systems

Dr. Noga’s work with PREZODE and the World Veterinary Association has shaped his strong commitment to the One Health concept, which links human, animal, and environmental health. But he is also critical of how the concept is sometimes used.

“One Health is becoming a marketing of everything,” he warns. *“We are losing the concept.”*

For him, One Health is not a slogan but a coordination framework requiring genuine collaboration across disciplines. When applied properly, it can significantly improve trade safety by integrating biosecurity, zoonotic disease prevention, and environmental monitoring into decision-making.

The COVID-19 pandemic, in his view, demonstrated both the importance and the limits of global preparedness. He notes that zoonotic disease risks remain difficult to predict due to biodiversity loss, climate change, and increasing global trade flows.

He compares prevention to everyday healthcare habits: people often avoid preventive systems until problems become unavoidable. *“We do not invest enough in prevention,”* he says, drawing a parallel with dental care. *“People only go when it is painful.”* For Dr. Noga, this short-term mindset remains one of the biggest weaknesses in global biosecurity systems.

Competitiveness, geopolitics, and Europe’s future in trade

European livestock producers, he acknowledges, often feel under pressure. They operate under strict environmental, welfare, and climate regulations, while competitors outside the EU may have different standards. He does not dismiss these concerns. Instead, he frames them as part of a structural imbalance that policymakers must address carefully.

At the same time, he rejects the idea that global standards can simply be equalised.

“We can have the same principles, but not the same standards,” he explains, pointing to differences in economic development, infrastructure, and production systems across world regions. He warns that excessive regulatory pressure without economic viability risks accelerating consolidation in the sector, reducing the number of producers and increasing dependency on imports.

Geopolitical instability adds another layer of complexity. Conflicts, trade disruptions, and shifting alliances all impact feed supply chains, logistics routes, and export stability. In his words, the system has become less predictable and more fragile: *“We do not live in uncertainty. We live in instability.”*

A vision for the future: pragmatism, responsibility, and optimism

Despite the challenges, Dr. Noga remains fundamentally optimistic. He sees his role as one of constant adaptation and problem-solving rather than crisis management. *“I look at problems and I do not stay there,”* he says. *“I always look for solutions.”* At UECEBV, his current focus is on restructuring and modernising the organisation to make it more future-oriented and proactive. He emphasises that the livestock sector must move away from a defensive posture and instead take ownership of its role in feeding populations. He also calls for a renewed “societal contract” between society and food producers—one that recognises the complexity of food production and ensures fair conditions for those working in the sector. *“We must change the unwritten contract we have today,”* he argues. *“Society expects high standards of everything but does not always support the conditions needed to produce it.”*

For him, the future of healthy trade depends on balance: between ambition and realism, regulation and practicality, and global expectations and local realities.

As he reflects on the broader direction of the sector, his conclusion is grounded but forward-looking. The livestock and meat trade will remain under pressure, but also full of opportunity—if stakeholders are willing to cooperate. And cooperation, as his entire career suggests, is where he feels most at home.

A sector at a turning point

Dr. Zeev Noga’s perspective offers a rare combination of technical veterinary expertise and high-level policy experience. His message is not one of alarm, but of recalibration. Healthy trade, in his view, is not achieved through stricter rules alone, nor through deregulation, but through alignment—between science, policy, economics, and society.

As Europe navigates increasing geopolitical tension, environmental expectations, and supply chain vulnerability, his message to the sector is ultimately pragmatic: progress will not come from perfection, but from practical solutions built in collaboration and alignment between societal needs, environmental responsibility, and resilient food production.

And if there is one thread that runs through his entire career, from Milan to Brussels to Paris, from One Health initiatives to European trade policy, it is that lasting solutions are never built in isolation.