

The New Master Plan of the Animal Welfare Policy of the EU and Responsible Ownership as One of its Key Elements

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The protection of pet animals is an issue that strongly interests EU citizens. Indeed the Commission has received a number of calls for action in this field. The Commission is currently preparing its second EU strategy for animal welfare. In this context the Commission mandated an external consultant with an evaluation of the past EU policy on animal welfare. Despite the absence of EU rules on pet welfare, the Commission has specifically requested the consultants to investigate this issue. The results of the evaluation are expected for December 2011. The Commission expects that the evaluation will already provide a clearer view of the situation at European level concerning the welfare of pet animals in economic and social terms.

In parallel the Belgian Presidency has decided to open a debate on the welfare of pet animals, with a particular focus on four areas of reflection: identification and registration of dogs, breeding and trade of dogs, non-curative surgical interventions, and shelters and stray dogs. For that purpose a detailed questionnaire was sent to all the Member States in July 2010. A number of those topics are interlinked with the concept of responsible ownership. We hope that this debate will identify the areas where the EU could help the Member States in improving the welfare of pet animals.

Based on the outcomes of the evaluation and the Council debate, the future animal welfare strategy would possibly foresee initiatives dedicated to the welfare of pet animals, covering a scope indeed wider than the current animal health rules. The issue of responsible ownership could represent a strategic issue for the development of the first European animal welfare law.

But the future EU strategy will look not only to possible legislation but also to other types of initiatives. Education is one of the key elements for improving animal welfare. A conference has been organized in Brussels specifically on education and animal welfare. The results of the debate will contribute to the development of the strategy for AW. The CARODOG project recently presented is supported by the Commission in line with the same principles expressed above.

Research is also an important policy ingredient for the future strategy for animal welfare and needs long-term support. One of the possibilities investigated by the Commission would be the establishment of a European Network of Reference Centre modelled on the reference laboratories supported by the EU for animal health issues. Such a network would combine education and research in the field of animal welfare, making scientific information more easily available at a national level and providing a framework for good training and education in all Member States.