



ABSTRACT

Responsible ownership – the basic principle of European Animal Welfare policy and the EU new Animal Welfare Strategy (2011-2015)

Andrea Gavinelli

Head of the animal welfare unit (SANCO D5), Directorate General for Health and Consumers, European Commission

Pet animals are a constant priority for EU citizens. More and more the Commission receives a number of calls for actions in this field. In view of the Article 13 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union¹, which defines animals as sentient beings, the Commission is preparing today its second EU strategy for animal welfare.

In this context, in 2010 the Commission mandated an external consultant to evaluate the past EU policy on animal welfare. Despite the absence of EU rules on pet welfare and due to the high priority given by European citizens to the issue, the Commission has specifically requested the consultant to investigate this issue. The results of the evaluation included the recommendation to consider introducing pet welfare legislation at EU level in order to address in a harmonised way the welfare issues that affect millions of pets in Europe.

In parallel the Belgian Presidency decided last year to open for the first time in Brussels a debate on the welfare of companion animals, with a particular focus on four areas of reflections: identification and registration of dogs, breeding and trade of dogs, non curative surgical interventions, shelters and stray dogs. For that purpose a detailed questionnaire was sent in July 2010 to all Member States. The information provided by the EU Member States highlighted that those topics are mainly interlinked with the concept of responsible ownership.

The debate developed within the EU Member States in the following weeks identified the areas where the EU could help the Member States in improving the welfare of pet animals. The priorities agreed by the Member States were fixed in a political document adopted by the Council on 29 November 2010. In this document, the Council calls the Commission to study and possibly propose options on the breeding and the EU trade of dogs and cats, their identification and registration as well as on non curative surgical interventions (except for neutralisation). It also asks



to consider appropriate EU actions to promote and support education concerning responsible dog and cat ownership.

Based on the outcomes of the evaluation and the Council conclusions, the future animal welfare strategy would possibly foresee initiatives covering a scope indeed wider than the current EU animal health rules. EU health rules require that dogs and cats intended for trade or accompanying their owners in the EU must be identified and accompanied by a passport certifying a valid anti-rabies vaccination.

Thus, the Commission will consider the welfare of pets and aspects related to responsible ownership in the framework of the preparation of its future EU strategy for the protection and welfare of animals that is planned to be adopted in December 2011.

But the future EU strategy will not only look to possible legislation but to other type of initiatives. Education is one of the key elements to improve animal welfare. Several initiatives, such as the CARODOG project are supported by the Commission in line with the same principles expressed above.

"Everyone is responsible", the key-words used recently for Commission initiatives related to animal welfare, should include also the "Responsible ownership" concept, a strategic issue for the development of the first European animal welfare law.

ⁱ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:115:0001:01:EN:HTML>