



ABSTRACT

Situation of companion animals in Lithuania

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Facts and figures

Lithuania does not have long-lasting traditions of animal protection. Before 1990 the legislation directly required from municipalities to catch and to kill stray animals (this norm was included in the 1974 Ordinance of Government (Council of Ministers) of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic). Animal protection organizations did not exist, state and its institutions did not consider animals as sentient beings. Animals were things that could be destroyed or used according to the desire of their owners. For many years this attitude remained prevailing.

Lithuania is divided into 60 municipalities (local authorities) (after 1 July 2010 administrative reform).

According to the Law regarding the Care, Keeping and Use of Animals (adopted in 1997) questions, related to companion animals, are attributed to the competence of municipalities. Municipalities adopt Rules of animals keeping on the territory of the municipality (requirements of registration and identifications of animals, number of animals allowed to be kept in the household, monthly fees for animal keeping and registrations and so on). According to the Law municipalities are having main responsibility for the minimization of the number of stray animals. However, the model chosen for implementation of this minimization is almost identical to the one applied in Lithuania according to the 1974 Ordinance of Council of Ministers of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic.

Municipalities buy stray animals catching and keeping services from service providers (usually joint stock companies, having nothing to do with animals). Animals are often treated as object of sanitary services, and in many municipalities often kept for period from 3 to 14 days in animal isolators are most of them are getting euthanized. As an example in Vilnius animal keeping services were given to the profit-making enterprise “Grinda” whose main activity is the construction and repair of streets and roads. However, according to Article 1, paragraph 4 the European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals Convention animal sanctuaries (animal shelters) shall be managed by non-profit organizations.

In 2010 out of 3997 animals kept in „Grinda” 2613 animals were euthanized. Municipality paid to „Grinda“ in 2010 669 402 Litas (194 000 EUR). 1301 animals were donated, out of them 552 animals were saved by NGO Lithuanian animal protection society, which does not get any municipal financing.



Legislation

From May 1 2004 Lithuania is a member of the European Union and therefore EU legislation is obligatory in the area of animal welfare and protection. Moreover, Lithuania has ratified number of international conventions on animal welfare: European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals (ratified in 2004), European Convention for the Protection of Vertebrate Animals used for Experimental and other Scientific Purposes and its Protocol of Amendment (ratified in 2007), European Convention for the protection of animals kept for farming purposes and its Protocol of Amendment (ratified in 2003), European Convention for the Protection of Animals during International Transport (ratified in 2003), European Convention for the Protection of Animals for Slaughter (ratified in 2003).

Law regarding the Care, Keeping and Use of Animals (the text of the current valid Law can be found here: http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=157696) is the main Law establishing the general principles of behaviour of natural and legal persons towards domesticated, designated for economic purposes, decorative, laboratory, captive and wild animals, in order to protect them from suffering, cruel treatment and other negative pressures and to ensure the safety of human beings. The Law was adopted in 1997 and does not provide for the proper protection of animals allowing for the cruelty to animals to be widespread in Lithuania.

In March 2010 the working group on the revision of the Law was established by the Ministry of Agriculture after requirement to do so by the animal protection activists. Draft Law has stronger emphasis on animal protection, competences of state and municipal authorities are defined in more comprehensive way, separate section is devoted to cruelty to animals, stronger protection is provided through animal registration, obligations of animal shelters. However, it remains unclear how this Draft law will be implemented in practice, also how it will be enforced.

What needs to be done

There is an urging need for stronger European Union legislation on animal protection based on Article 13 of the Lisbon treaty defining animals as sentient beings. Legislation on animal protections differs substantially between Member States of the EU thus allowing for stronger protection in some Member states and very weak – in other. Euthanasia of healthy companion animals shall be banned.

This may help to close animal isolators in Lithuania, which are examples of legitimised cruelty to animals.

European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals ratified by Lithuania in 2004 shall be better enforced.