

**International conference on “Welfare of dogs and cats involved in commercial practices” at
the permanent representation of the State Baden-Wuerttemberg in Brussels;
November 12th, 2015**

Summary and suggestions

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The participants of the conference are concerned about animal health and welfare aspects involved in commercial practices with dogs and cats in Europe as well as resulting consumer protection hazards and risks for the public health. Within the EU, national legislation on animal welfare for dogs and cats differs greatly across Member States. Recognizing this situation, the Council of the European Union concluded that these differences may lead to unequal breeding and marketing costs which could create animal welfare problems, zoonotic risks and the deception of citizens due to the purchase of animals carrying hidden diseases, including genetic defects and/or with severe behavioral problems.

As a result of growing concerns, both the Council and the European Parliament urged the Commission to study the situation. This study, carried out in 12 representative Member States in 2014, examines the extent to which initiatives would be necessary to achieve key objectives including the proper functioning of the internal market, protection of the consumer, public health, and the health and welfare of animals. The results of the study, which are based on the evaluation of socio-economic, technical and legal data, and the answers to questionnaires and conduction of interviews, are presented at the conference. Overall, the study identifies the necessity for initiatives in the areas of dog and cat breeding, transport, knowledge and information for the keeping and for market data of pets.

The study reveals that systems of registration and licensing of dog and cat breeders and traders and national legislation on commercial transport of dogs and of cats differ among participating Member States leading to unequal conditions for competition on the dog and cat market. It also shows that there are discrepancies between numbers of dogs and cats involved in commercial operations (including imports from non-EU countries) derived from literature and those registered in TRACES. This is seen as a relevant problem in assessing the real dimension of the market in the EU and the risks for animals, public health and the associated welfare problems. Furthermore, the study recognizes the consumers' lack of knowledge and information on responsible ownership. Finally, it sees chances for the protection of cat and dog welfare by improved data collection and traceability, general education and training and improved enforcement of current legislation and better exchange of knowledge between the Member States.

During the conference, many further issues concerning dogs and cats involved in commercial practice are identified. Beside the risk of high costs for curing sick puppies distributed by illegal

breeders and dealers and the increasing significance of internet pet shops, the need to license professional breeders and to develop a code of good practice for breeding establishments, for consistent enforcement of legislation, for additional quarantine facilities and for restrictions on dog and cat cross-border trading are expressed. The mandatory identification (chipping) and registration of dogs and cats in a EU-wide harmonized system is stipulated by the majority of the participants. Additionally, the strengthening of the collaboration between authorities of the Member States to detect frauds, joint control efforts and campaigns across borders are suggested. Finally, a comprehensive, long-term approach aiming at responsible ownership and breeding while looking at it from the “One Health” perspective is postulated.

Altogether, the conference underlines the necessity for full traceability for dogs and cats involved in commercial practices including well-regulated mandatory identification and registration, mandatory licensing of professional breeders, upgrading TRACES and intensifying its enforcement in all Member States. It confirms that efforts should be taken concerning enforcement of European and Member State legislation and in increasing the attention and knowledge of the consumer by general education regarding responsible purchase decisions and ownership of dogs and cats. It recognizes, that a good deal of cat and dog purchases in the EU are related to internet sales and as such require increasing attention. The conference also acknowledges the diverse difficulties some Eastern European Countries are confronted with attempting to implement animal welfare legislation for dogs and cats (i.e. identification) in their countries.

The Member of the European Parliament and Chair of the Intergroup on Animal Welfare congratulates the hosts for organizing the conference and states that within the European Parliament there are intentions to improve the status of dog and cat welfare.

It seems to be foreseeable that the high profitable illegal dog and cat puppy trade¹⁾ will increase strengthening the black markets and leading to a further distortion of the proper functioning of the internal market, consumer protection hazards, risks for public health and the health and welfare of the animals, if no actions are taken.

¹⁾ puppy trade that is not compliant with applicable national or EU legislation