

# EU Policymakers and campaigners come together to discuss pet trafficking

A Parliament Magazine and Dog & Cat Alliance event heard strong calls for an EU action plan to tackle the illegal trade of cats and dogs

**O**rganised by the Parliament Magazine in association with the EU Dog & Cat Alliance, the receptilite last month heard calls for an EU action plan to tackle the illegal trade of cats and dogs.

Host Sirpa Pietikäinen the Chair of the European Parliament's animal welfare intergroup underlined that the issue of dog and cat welfare in breeding and trade was "extremely important - there are 63 million dogs and 72 million cats in the European Union, and almost one in the three households owns a cat or a dog."

Pietikäinen pointed out that the illegal trade of cats and dogs - including so-called 'puppy factories', "causes enormous suffering for the animals, but also for families and children when animals fall ill. Of course, this also results in increased costs when taking care of our dear pets."

Pietikäinen, a Finnish member of Parliament's EPP group, called for a register of pets, something she said was "doable, we have the framework for it." She also urged policymakers to set up a status for legal breeders and their activi-

ties, as well as a regulation requiring animals for sale to be registered, and for sellers to be legally approved breeders.

European health and food safety Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis, pointed out that the EU has had a comprehensive set of EU animal health rules in place for several years. "They ensure, among other important objectives, the safe cross-border movement of dogs and cats, and in particular help prevent the spread of rabies", he told attendees.



**"We need the European Parliament and member states to support the push for an action plan which would cover animal health and welfare, public health, consumer protection, internal market and anti-trafficking methods"**

Adrian Burder, EU Dog & Cat Alliance



**Call for an Action Plan to tackle the illegal trade in dogs and cats in the EU**







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"The enforcement of these rules is the responsibility of member states," he explained, adding that national governments "need to develop the neces-

sary tools and procedures to carry out controls and identify penalties for infringing this legislation. It goes without saying these sanctions must be effective, proportionate and dissuasive."

Andriukaitis also gave an update on the creation of the EU animal welfare platform, which he hoped would be operational by summer 2017 and "should be composed of all the stakeholders involved in animal welfare, from member states to consumers, from breeders to animal welfare organisations and as such it should become

the real engine of future progress in the area," he said.

Adrian Burder, the CEO of Dogs Trust, a founding member of the EU Dogs & Cats Alliance said he was pleased that the alliance had "grown to 60 organisations from 21 EU countries."

"There is very little EU legislation protecting the welfare of dogs and cats," he said, and explained that "illegal trade of dogs and cats means unscrupulous breeders are abusing pet passports designed for non-commercial pet travel to commercially import pets and dogs", sometimes with the help of veterinarians. Hundreds of thousands of cats and dogs are bred each year for illegal practices, said Burder, which could lead to "behavioural problems as well as genetic and communicable diseases", as the animals are often kept in extremely poor conditions.

He emphasised that illegal pet trafficking "also affects citizens and public health", posing the risk of spreading diseases such as rabies or tapeworms. Additionally, "owners often don't realise the experiences trafficked pets have gone through; these experiences could lead to potential behavioural issues," said Burder. "People often don't realise where their pets have come from, and a sick pet cannot be easily exchanged or returned because often, an emotional bond has already been formed."

As a result of illegal trade, "Unsuspecting owners are often left with vet bills, or the pet is simply abandoned on the street or handed over to a rehoming centre, which is certainly what we are seeing in the UK." That is why, said Burder, the EU Dog And Cat Alliance was launching its campaign for an EU action plan to tackle illegal trade in dogs and cats.

He added, "Only through a coordinated approach" →



**"It might take years, but we must close doors for illegal pet trafficking"**

Petras Auštrevičius MEP



**"It is not just about discussions, it is also about conclusions, outcomes and steps which should be undertaken in the future"**

Martin Chudý, Permanent Representation of the Slovak Republic to the EU





can pet trafficking be stopped, arguing that this would help protect the millions of people “whose welfare and rights are being undermined by unscrupulous offenders every day.”

“We need the European Parliament and member states to support the push for an action plan which would cover animal health and welfare, public health, consumer protection, internal market and anti-trafficking methods.”

Martin Chudý from the Slovakian permanent representation then addressed attendees on behalf of the Slovakian EU Council presidency, stressing that pet welfare was “very important to the presidency” and featured on their agenda.

He also said that the Slovakian EU Council presidency had been discussing several topics related to animal trade, including “stray dogs, the identification of pets, the sharing of information among the relevant authorities and the illegal trade of puppies.”

But, he warned, “it is not just about discussions, it is also about conclusions, outcomes and steps which should be undertaken in the future. All of these steps must be feasible and realistic.” Chudý said he was pleased that most member states supported the establishment of an animal welfare platform.

He said that the Slovakian presidency was working on a range of issues, although it was difficult to cover all topics in only six months. “One of the member states’ concerns is the harmonisation of breeding techniques,” he said, “It seems to be a very challenging topic, each member state has its own system. Slovakia, not as a presidency but as a member state, is ready to participate in finding solutions.”

He also stressed that, “in order to protect pet animals, all member states should cooperate,” and called on the Commission and Parliament to unite on policy efforts.

The final speaker of the evening



**“Member states need to develop the necessary tools to carry out controls and identify penalties for infringing EU animal health legislation”**

Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis



**“Illegal pet trade causes enormous suffering for the animals, but also for families and children when animals fall ill”**

Sirpa Pietikäinen MEP

was Petras Auštrevičius, a Vice-Chair of the European Parliament’s animal welfare intergroup. The Lithuanian MEP said, “It might take years, but we must close doors for illegal pet trafficking.”

He added that there was an impor-

tant role to play for regions and local governments; “animal welfare policy is especially visible at regional level.”

Auštrevičius concluded by saying, “There is a lot of talk about ‘Better Europe’. ‘Better Europe’ will come when we have better protection for pets.” ★