



Mrs. Androula Vassiliou
Commissioner for Health
 European Commission
 B-1049 Brussels

21. April 2009

**“Vaccination and Birth Control is better than Culling”
 Handover of 60 000 individually signed European Resolution for Stray Animals
 in the European Union**

Dear Mrs. Commissioner Vassiliou,
 dear Mr, Tod,

first of all we all want to express our thanks, having the opportunity to hand over personally to the European Commission, the signed Resolutions of about 60.000 European citizens from nearly all Member States to end the suffering of Stray Animals in Europe. Add to this the fact that we still receive new signatures daily proves the serious Europe-wide engagement of European citizens for these forgotten animals on the streets of Europe.

Who we are and whom we are representing

Our four Animal Welfare Organisations together are representing the wishes and concerns of more than half a million European citizens. Firstly, an overview of our organisations and their differing focuses so you can see our cooperative and constructive attitude:

The **Bund gegen Missbrauch der Tiere** is one of the leading Animal welfare Organisations in Germany and is running Stray Animals Projects in Romania, politically working on that topic and initiated the Resolution with an event in January 2008.

The **Europäische Tier- und Naturschutz e.V.** is an Animal Welfare Organisation working throughout Europe, based in Germany, with projects and partners for stray animals in many European Members States.

Tasso e.V. is a an Animal Welfare association based on a private companion animal registration database with more than 2.5 million members with 4.5 millions registered animals in Germany and now supporting the development of registration systems of companion and stray animals in Romania and other EU Member States.

The international Animal Welfare Foundation **VIER PFOTEN – Stiftung für Tierschutz**, based in Vienna, has affiliates in eight countries, seven of them in European Memberstates plus the European Policy Office in Brussels - working on stray animal projects in many Member States and politically in Brussels e.g. by organizing a Parliamentary evening and conference on this topic (in association with the Bund gegen Mißbrauch der Tiere) in October 2008 in Brussels.

What we ask for:

To end the suffering of the stray animals in the European Union by supporting the respective Member States to end the problem by a systematic and science based approach and practical help for prevention and sustainable measures

Herewith we ask again urgently the European Union for a European wide solution of the growing problem of the stray animals on the streets particularly in South- and South Eastern Europe and the legal responsibility of the European Union for these animals.

Facts and status quo in Southern and South East Europe

The reason for our serious and urgent demand of the European citizens, represented by us, and supported by the European Parliament, is the ongoing cruelty to these helpless animals by catching and killing them in various brutal ways. Dogs are shot, strangled or beaten to death, sometimes even in full public view. In some so called 'shelters' there is a well developed grey or black market with the collection of animals for money but not taking care of them. Dogs and cats are left to die in an awful way, receiving no food or water. In some shelters or institutions, dogs or cats are killed using the cheapest poisons, leaving the animals dead only after struggling for their lives for hours or days. There are lot of recorded events, we are sure you are aware. Please be aware, these are 'real time' documentaries and this documented daily cruelty is unacceptable to see or ignore in the streets and backyards in European Member States.

Our arguments

Stray animals are companion animals gone wild (usually due to abandonment) and therefore in the scope of the Community Animal Health Strategy and the legal competence of the European Union has to be considered.

The solution is the implementation of strategies for these animals in the scope of the **Community Animal Health Strategy "Prevention is better than cure"**. We welcome this headline, developed originally for the farm animals, as millions of

healthy animals having been culled 'en masse' due to fear of epidemics. This was a shock for the European citizens and since then they are paying closer attention to the ethics of animals and food production. The approach of the "one Health Strategy" of the EU leads also to the strict enforcement of regulations meaning healthy stray dogs, who are wildered companion animals, are also brutally killed. Companion animals like dogs and cats have been domesticated for more than 3000 years and are expressively mentioned in the scope of the Strategy. So this strategy, taken in context for the population of stray animals means "**Vaccination and birthcontrol is better than culling**". The European Parliament has amended this in their official decision of June 2008 in the amendments Nr 16. and 20.

We also need a strategy for companion animals, as there is a growing movement of people in the European Union with their companion animals. A further argument is the climate change that will lead us inevitably to new geographical zoonoses risks also regarding stray animals, e.g. Leishmaniose.

1. Killing of the stray animals is no sustainable solution

As it is proven by statistics and science based research by the WHO and some other institutes, killing is not leading to a sustainable result, as the habitat's capacity will recreate a pack in a few years. We can present you herewith the summary of the current best practices in India by the leading Animal Welfare Organisation there.

2. Killing of stray animals does not mirror the Animal Welfare Principle of the Amsterdam Treaty (Protocol 31)

Stray animals are part of the European civilisation. Therefore, the killing of these animals is neither a tradition nor an act of religious rites or part of the cultural heritage therefore there's no derogation of the protection of these animals.

The protection of the animals will be strengthened too in the draft Lisbon Treaty, there the animal welfare is even in the proper text of the treaty. This also shows the growing meaning and impact of animal welfare in Europe.

Another aspect is that the cruel methods used to kill these animals in the streets (as it happens very often) is giving a very bad example for the children and the public and is also hindering an ethical based development of those societies. This approach of showing cruelty as a normal behaviour is 'numbing' the society to the truely shocking nature of the animals deaths and deeply contradicts our educational projects and teaching respect and responsibility for animals as sentient beings in schools.

3. We need a European wide compulsory registration of companion and stray animals

To create the culture of responsibility of humans for their animals – this is the ethical outcome of the basic principle in the Treaty – this responsibility has to be strengthened by law and implemented as strictly as possible. This might also support the control of the movement of animals and the illegal trade of puppies, the control of diseases and to get relevant data about stray dog population development.

4. We need an information and communication strategy for the European citizens in the respective Member States

As some of the old Member States (in the Southern part) and almost all new Member States (in the Eastern part) of Europe don't have a tradition or a have a legal roman

tradition – and more than this no experience of Animal Protection - the population has to be educated and informed, from a young age, in schools. The public has to be

informed as well. They have to be aware that stray animals as comperse of nature also need our respect and are part of our society.

On the political and professional level the respective target groups like veterinarians and juridical and administration citizens have to be educated and trained. Here we count on the future European Animal Welfare Centre, mentioned in the Community Animal Welfare Action Plan.

5. We need a European wide and systematic birth control and vaccination program in the respective European Member States

As there are some hotspots in Member States and in countries where the government and the municipalities have not enough financial and personal capacity, there has to be training and some unique support measures, as investment in professional solutions.

What our organisations have done

Our organisations have so far given many projects an enormous amount of financial support and information. More than this hundreds of thousands of private and independently acting people in these respective countries have spent a high amount of money to bring to an end, the unnecessary suffering of stray animals. These projects already show positive results in some regions and cities, also assisting on the legislative level in some Member States like Romania and Bulgaria.

However, as long as the European Union is not competent, there are limits. The high number of stray dogs populations is asking for a unique and systematic and comprehensive control.

The political support in these countries is needed and investment of money has to be distributed effectively, monitored and controlled in a professional way. In some cases the national veterinary services and the mayors want to be active and want to spend money but don't have a budget for this activities.

Finally, as long as there is no legal competence of the European Union, and no sanctions by not taking the rule of law, the decision making political persons will not respect even the existing laws and certainly will not give any financial resources for this topic. They will continue to kill using the barbaric methods described previously.

This is beyond the limit of permissable activities of the citizens, deeply unhappy with this current climate and demanding change. There have to be developed systematic solutions, politically and legally supported Europe wide and on European standards, starting in the hot spots.

As long as there exists this limitation in the economic and personal capacity and in the political will of the respective persons – even with the support of hundreds of thousands of single solutions and projects - there will be no sustainable solution to end the suffering of these animals in Europe.

We offer cooperation to the European Union

As part of a public private partnership the Animal Welfare Organisations are able to continue supporting the Member States to solve the problem with proven projects, birth control measures, vaccination, education, training and consulting. But there is the need that the European Union shows its legal competence and will support European training projects (e.g. TAIEX programs) where there are not enough resources in the Member states.

We have started various activities and we would like to also support the European activities in any way possible.

Finally we thank you for your open minded attitude and hope we can continue this dialogue either personally or in the framework of the advisory board of the animal health strategy.

With kind regards