



## THE GENERAL SITUATION OF THE ANIMALS TYPICAL ABUSE

### Stray dogs management

#### ■ until 2008:

Hundreds of thousands of street dogs have been killed in whole Romania at a cost of tens of millions of Euros.

Despite legislating improvements such as catching dogs by civilized methods, good shelter conditions, killing the dogs by euthanasia etc, in general reality on the ground is:

- legislative provisions were not respected
- most dogs were hunted, tortured, beaten to death, stabbed, strangled, being dragged over the streets often bleeding from mouth and nose and treated like rubbish. After that the common fate of all: a pitiful and miserable prison, where they waited, exhausted by fear, hunger and thirst, until they were finally killed by the cheapest method possible after 7 days, despite these killing methods being illegal.

Although these shelters were publicly financed and were officially public places, and the law permitted the access of the press, animal foundations and the public, access to these “shelters” was usually denied. Visitors were often only allowed access if the mayor agreed to an advance request in writing, which he would not do if he feared there was something to hide.

Residents living close to such extermination centres were distressed by the moans and howls of the dogs.

The methods for catching dogs were cruel. Some dogs died long before they were taken to the extermination camps, they were strangled in the street by the catching teams or suffocated in unventilated vans in summer.

Dogs were often kept in inhumane conditions without water, food or room to move. Puppies were kept together with adults, ill dogs with healthy dogs, in urine and excrement, full of stress and fear etc.

“Euthanasia” in practice meant starvation, poisoning, strangulation, being burnt alive or injected with magnesium sulphate. Thousands of dogs have been poisoned. Others were shot. Sometimes dogs were thrown into deep pits from which they could not escape. Most publicly financed shelters were illegal extermination camps managed by untrained, poorly educated, underpaid and brutalised personnel.

#### ■ after January 2008

Cruelty to a street kitten beaten to death and shown on television shocked Romania. This was the start of a television campaign (Stop torturing animals!) and citizens started to object openly to what they had already been seeing for many years, sending movies and information showing the cruelties to animals. This “wave of revulsion” has contributed to recent improvements in animal welfare legislation.

Thus euthanasia of healthy dogs and cats has now become illegal and cruelty to animals has become a criminal offence.

Furthermore an amendment to the law on the management of street dogs proposing that all animals with or without owner be neutered, identified and registered, was adopted unanimously by the Senate. Unfortunately this amendment has been halted for more than one year at the Chamber of Deputies (*details: “Animal Protection and Stray Dogs Management Romanian Laws” paragraph “Recommendations for improvement”*).

#### *in reality*

Because of this stalemate at the Chamber of Deputies contradictions in the law persist and nothing is being done to solve the problem of surplus dogs; dogs are multiplying in the streets; municipalities often respond to

complaints with illegal “catch and kill” actions; some animal welfare legislation exists on paper but has no practical effect on the ground.

Local and national politicians consistently avoid getting to grips with the problem.

Some municipalities cooperate with neuter & return programs and a few others show signs of wishing to embrace a new strategy.

However most municipalities, because they lack the funds and the understanding of dog ecology necessary to implement Neuter & Return, exploit contradictions and vagueness in current legislation to kill or dump dogs. Many municipalities collect and dump dogs in other towns or in rural areas.

Generally, **the stray dog management means the same illegal methods** for catching, killing, and the same municipalities’ camps where the dogs starve to death.

### **The reasons for the current situation:**

#### ■ ***Dog removal (Killing or Incarceration) is futile, never-ending and unaffordable***

*<killing is like applying a sticking plaster to an infected wound. It does not cure the underlying problem.>*

If killing worked the stray dog populations of Romania’s towns would have been eliminated long ago. The result of the extermination campaigns: ZERO. The streets are crowded with dogs up to their carrying capacity.

#### ■ ***The Romanian authorities will achieve nothing for as long as they address only the symptoms, rather than the causes, of the problem.***

One fertile pair of dogs can produce tens of thousands of offspring in a few years. That is why killing has no effect on the street dog population.

■ There is nothing to prevent abandonment of dogs, nothing **to hold the irresponsible dog owners liable** for the costs they cause to society and for the suffering they cause to animals. Most dogs of breeding age on the streets are the offspring of dogs with owners or feeders.

#### ■ ***the lack of motivation of the responsible authorities (DSVSA and ANSVSA) to enforce legislation and prevent cruelty to animals, especially by municipalities***

#### ■ ***Easy profits from killing dogs: “the Street dog business”***

Catch & Kill programmes have become big business for the municipalities and for the people involved in managing stray dogs (including some businesses which masquerade as NGOs)

- Because extermination doesn’t solve the problem the streets are permanently populated with new or dumped dogs. Thus more and more dogs have to be collected so that “managing” dog problems becomes a constant and reliable source of easy profits at tax-payers’ expense. A gravy train for contractors with good relations with mayors.
- Such contractors can make higher profits if they economise on dogfood, veterinary medicine, cleaning materials etc. There is little or no verification of their purchases and no-one is able to monitor the condition of the animals in closed municipal shelters.
- Rehoming and adoption of dogs from municipal shelters is made difficult by limited visiting hours and expensive for ordinary citizens.
- Dog catchers often extort money from animal lovers living in small flats who have dogs outside their blocks of flats or who feed community dogs, by threatening to take and kill their dogs unless payments are made to them.

■ there is no national programme to **educate people** in responsible pet ownership and in compassion towards animals.

### **The ignorance and complicity of the authorities responsible for implementing the law**

In 2004 the European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals was ratified in Romania by the law no. 60.

5 years later article 12 of this Convention is still being ignored in Romania. Thus dogs and cats are not identified, not registered, and there is no promoting of the neutering of the animals to reduce over-population.

Occasional controls and checks (generally as the result of many complaints by citizens or NGOs) by the Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Directorates don't lead to any result. The DSV is ineffectual.

Despite huge sums of public money being wasted the results of official investigations are normally to brush problems under the carpet or to impose symbolic, derisory fines.

The only authority that often responds to NGOs' or citizens' complaints is the Ministry of Administration and Internal Affairs, through the Police.

### **Romanian people and the animals. The mentality, education, behaviour**

In general Romanians are tolerant towards animals; hence most community dogs are deliberately fed by compassionate people or kept as guard dogs for businesses. However, most people lack the money, property and education to care for dogs responsibly as is normal in Western Europe.

A legacy of communism is that most ordinary citizens are afraid to confront authority and passively accept the removal and killing of their dogs.

Most officials believe that they are the masters of the citizens rather than public servants; corruption feeds off bureaucracy, and bureaucrats benefit from corruption. Municipal officials exploit their powers for personal gain or satisfaction; there is no culture of public service.

Many compassionate animal lovers try to protect dogs from municipal dog catchers by cramming them into unsuitable premises; they unintentionally end up producing canine prison camps of their own, as more and more dogs are thrust on them and as they lack the money, personnel and space to care for their dogs humanely.

Dog catchers usually take the path of least resistance and catch friendly dogs, used to human contact. By definition these are the dogs most likely to be neutered and vaccinated, either by semi-owners or NGOs. Shy, feral dogs are almost always fertile and are almost never caught by municipal dog catchers.

Most municipal politicians and officials are not deliberately cruel to animals. They are not sadists. They are simply ignorant, lazy and sometimes corrupt. They delegate the management of dogs to uneducated, poorly paid and poorly motivated municipal employees.

Dogs are almost never kept inside homes; they are kept outside to protect property and reduce vermin. Dogs are often kept on chains.

There is general ignorance on the benefits of neutering; some vets still tell owners of bitches that it is healthy for a bitch to have at least one litter during her life time. Other dog owners believe that their dogs should enjoy "recreational sex".

Horses are another species of animal often enduring cruelty, no rest, inadequate food and water. Beaten, tortured, tired, with harness wounds on their, these animals walk in the streets pulling overloaded carts whipped by their owners in a brutal manner.

Animal markets where brokers sell horses are cruel places; in order to prove the physical capacities of the horses to potential buyers the horses are often atrociously mistreated.

DSV inspectors generally turn a blind eye to illegal activity in animal markets (including the slaughtering of animals for food).

### **Conclusion**

Both dog haters and dog lovers have the same aim: to make the streets of Romania like those of Western Europe, with no unsupervised and unwanted dogs. The only question is: how can this common aim be achieved? Killing does not work and is in any case barbaric and now illegal. Removal and incarceration, with or without euthanasia, is futile, never-ending and unaffordable.

Therefore the problem of surplus dogs must be solved logically in an effective and civilised way. For decades dog elimination policies have been an expensive failure. **Control of reproduction, combined with education in responsible dog ownership, is the only practical solution: free neutering and returning of all dogs, with and without owners, to the territory where they were found or to their owner or keeper.** 'Neuter & Return' is the only practical and permanent solution, but it requires central finance, political will and efficient implementation.