Resolution on protecting the EU’s internal market and consumer rights against the negative implications of the illegal trade in companion animals

2019/2814(RSP) - 12/02/2020 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 607 votes to 3 with 19 abstentions a resolution tabled by the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety on protecting the EU’s internal market and consumer rights against the negative implications of the illegal trade in companion animals.

Members recalled that NGOs, law enforcement services, competent authorities and veterinarians have produced evidence of the growing number of companion animals that are illegally traded across Member States, often by organised crime networks, through evasion of controls, document falsification and widespread misuse of Regulation (EU) No 576/2013, which is intended for the non-commercial movement of pet animals.

Parliament stressed that illegal trafficking in dogs and cats not only has disastrous repercussions for animal welfare, but also poses risks to public health and consumer protection.

Members called for the following measures:

Identification and registration of cats and dogs

Parliament insisted that a harmonised, EU-wide system of mandatory identification and registration of cats and dogs is a necessary first step in the fight against illegal trade in companion animals, and that these were two essential conditions for control, enforcement and traceability.

The Commission is urged to make full use of its delegated powers under the Animal Health Law and to come forward with a proposal for detailed, EU-wide, compatible systems for the means and methods of identification and registration of cats and dogs, setting a minimum threshold for the information required for individual animal identification and establishing rules for the exchange of electronic data between databases in the Member States.

Members called for a clear link between the EU pet passport and pet microchip registration to ensure that the origin of the companion animal remains clear even if the pet passport is replaced. They called on Member States to introduce policies to mark and register all cats and dogs by default as part of the fight against animal abuse.

EU action plan to address the illegal trade in companion animals

Members called on the Commission to draw up a cross-sectoral EU action plan to address the illegal trade in companion animals in the EU, taking on board the views of the European Parliament, the Member States and the relevant stakeholders. They considered:

- that a uniform EU definition of large-scale commercial breeding facilities, known as puppy mills, is necessary to tackle the illegal trade in companion animals;

- it necessary to take measures to prohibit breeding and marketing practices that are detrimental to the health, welfare and behavioural development of pets;

- it necessary for citizens to be better informed about the trade in companion animals and the possible risks of purchasing animals online or without regard for legal procedures.

Controls and better enforcement of EU legislation

Parliament called on the Member States to improve law enforcement and to apply tougher sanctions – which should be effective, proportionate and dissuasive – against economic operators, veterinarians and national competent authorities in source, transit and destination countries who supply counterfeit pet passports, in order to curb the illegal trafficking of companion animals efficiently.

The Commission is called on to propose common standards for the breeding and marketing of cats and dogs to be put in place across the EU with the aim of preventing unfair commercial practices.

Member States should:

- ensure that detailed rules are in place for the monitoring of companion animal breeders and appropriate oversight by veterinarians;

- be encouraged to set up a compulsory register of authorised companion animal breeders and sellers that can be accessed by those responsible in other Member States;

- introduce in-country compliance monitoring with regular checks on traders and permit holders.

Cooperation, communication and training

Parliament invited the Commission and Member States to build on and disseminate the output of the Voluntary Initiative Subgroup on Health and Welfare of Pets in Trade within the framework of the EU Platform on Animal Welfare and to adopt measures to address the illegal trade in companion animals in forthcoming legislative and non-legislative work by 2024. In this context, there is an urgent need for active cooperation and the exchange of best practices between all Member States.

The Commission is called on to put forward measures, including the use of technologies and tailor-made training, to better equip customs and veterinary authorities to detect the smuggling of companion animals.

Lastly, Member States are invited to carry out more information and awareness-raising campaigns to encourage the adoption from trustworthy animal rescue centres, rather than the purchase, of companion animals and to inform citizens about the negative effects of the illegal trade in companion animals.