

Foreword:

Incredibly, we find ourselves once again accused of illegally transporting stray dogs from Greece to other EU countries, this time by the Ministry of Agriculture itself. Initially, the shock at reading the press release below (translated into English by Mary O'Connor, who also wrote the foot-notes to many points raised in the press release) paralysed us temporarily ... we just couldn't believe the contents, nor knew how to respond to the accusations! However, the shock wore off quickly when we realised that ALL rescue work would come to a halt if we allowed the slanderous accusations to win over the TRUTH, which is that animals in Greece have very few friends and if the only route to a happy life & secure future were to be blocked off, they would all be doomed to die prematurely and, in most cases, in agony (from poison, being hit by a car, from hunger and disease ...).

Thanks to a number of hard-working - mainly Greek – individuals, a campaign titled: CONDEMNED BY THEM, SAVED BY US! was prepared and launched early in July. The text in all campaigning material has been translated into English and will be followed by translations into German, Danish and Dutch.

Isn't it ironic that the first two words in the document below say: Greek Democracy!! The text which follows is a distorted interpretation of both the Greek AND the EU laws. I have highlighted several sentences in red, especially those which are blatantly untrue, though Mary's comments explain this in more detail in the foot-notes. The press release could (almost) have been narrated by (in)famous Garagouni, who must be deliriously happy right now!

PLEASE send this 'email package' far and wide ... the situation is VERY serious and nothing but a massive protest by thousands of people can repair the damage. Animals who could have been on their way to happy homes abroad are stranded in Greece and those who rescue them are paralysed and unable to carry on their vital work. Those who have websites or MySpace pages, PLEASE help us 'spread the word'. I can't stress strongly enough how vital it is for us all to unite in this campaign which simply has to succeed!

GAR's MySpace page is at: <http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendid=365473762> I haven't had time to put the information on the page yet, because I have been working on preparing this email. A petition with the same theme ('Condemned by them, saved by us') will also be set up - in German, it already has.

Take initiative ... write to local and national newspapers ...
to travel companies to your MEPs ...
Vesna

P.S. Request for photos (we need THOUSANDS!!!) is included on the campaign page ... I would like to ask all GAR supporters to please send copies of the photos to me as well; thank you.

GREEK DEMOCRACY
MINISTRY OF RURAL GROWTH AND FOOD
PRESS OFFICE
Athens, 24/6.2008

Press release:

The Deputy Minister of Rural Growth and Food, Mr Konstantinos Kiltidis, prompted by allegations and evidence from the (Ministry) Veterinary and Animal Health Departments, of large scale, illegal movements of stray animals from many airports, harbours and land exits of [Greece], dispatched special written directives to the responsible Veterinary Authorities of the country in which he draws to the attention of all authorities to such "phenomena", and calls on them to faithfully implement the current veterinary legislation.

The related document is also directed to SYKE [Greece], to the Ministry of Finance and Economy, to Customs Affairs, to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Commercial Shipping – the Port Police and the Department of Civil Aviation, to airport Directors, to the Department of Police Frontier Controls, to KEDKE and to the Greek Veterinary Association.

(my comment to the above: "... and not the president as well?? We are being treated as common criminals – well, more like an 'organised syndicate'! If the situation weren't so serious, it would be comical!")
Below is the document from the Deputy Minister to the responsible authorities.

GREEK DEMOCRACY
MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT
AND FOODS

Athens 24.06.07
Protocol no. 258864

GENERAL VETERINARY DEPARTMENT
SECTION: ANIMAL HEALTH
DEPARTMENT: Veterinary Health Control
TO: the recipients on distribution list
ADDRESS: Acharnon 2, 101 76
FURTHER INFORMATION: M. Foteinopoulos
TEL: 0030.210.212 5713
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SUBJECT: Illegal movement of stray animals

Based on information and facts at the disposal of the Ministry of Agriculture, it has come to our notice that co-ordinated, illegal transports of stray animals to other countries within the European community, are taking place on a large scale from airports, harbours and land exits in Greece. (1)

Usually, the individuals (involved) present themselves as animal lovers who are dispatching the animals for 'adoption and a better life.' (2)

For some time now, our country has undertaken many pioneering measures for the protection of stray animals and in combination with Community legislation, ensures their best possible existence. (3)

We draw attention to all the authorities involved to apply the current legislation to the letter and not to believe any of the animal loving sentiments or the threats of prosecution from those involved when they are impeded.

Bear in mind that some of these animals may potentially be stolen from their owners.

To assist controlling bodies who are unfamiliar with the veterinary legislation, we mention here the main points of the relevant regulations:

Each Greek citizen can maintain up to 2 domestic companion animals (dogs or cats) (Law 3170/2003 article 6). (4)

- Each privately-owned companion animal should have an electronic identity chip, which is identified in his European passport and bears the Greek ISO code, if issued by a Greek veterinarian. The name of the owner is entered in the passport. The public and private veterinarians of each prefecture, have at their disposal the appliances for reading the electronic identity chips recorded in each passport and which identify the dog with the passport. (5)

- A passenger can travel with his 2 (maximum) companion animals (6)

- Animal welfare associations or other legal bodies cannot be owners of animals - only individuals (N. 3170 article 7) (7)

- Travel with companion animals cannot be with the purpose of change of ownership of animals, either by gift or sale (Regulation 998/2003/EU, article 3). (8)

When a passenger's passport is checked, if the passenger is travelling with a domestic animal, the animal's passport must also be checked to ensure that the animals' passport contains the name of the owner and that this coincides with that of the passenger.

- A representative of the owner can accompany animals that belong to another owner, provided he has written authorisation for the transport that includes the details of the owner as recorded on the animal's passport. The authorisation must be ratified by the authority responsible for ensuring that the signature is genuine. If a Greek passenger travels abroad he must sign a responsible declaration that he will return with his animals. (9)

- Owners of animals, who leave with their 1 or 2 animals on a pet passport and return without the animals with which they began the journey, must be checked for the illegal disposal of the animal/s to another owner, unless they certify the death of their animals. This control should be undertaken by random checks 10 or 20 days after departure, on the basis of the responsible declarations drawn up at departure. (10)

Stray animals are under the supervision of the Municipalities, which are financed by the Ministry of Agricultural for their collection, sterilisation and return to their natural environment (N. 3170/03, (Article 7). (11)

*** my comment to the above: fewer than 20 municipalities of the 500 plus carry out neutering of stray dogs As for the 'streets being the dogs' natural environment ..."; well, what can I say?!"

- The adoption of stray animals must be proved with documents from the Municipalities. Ministerial Decision 280239/2003.

The Municipalities or Communities must complete the adoption documents with due care and responsibility drawing attention to those responsible that the process of transfer of ownership will be checked. (12)

- An individual (Greek or foreigner) can adopt up to a maximum of 2 animals. (13)

Adoption with the aim of further adoption, is something that should be closely investigated.

Any movement of the animals must be accompanied by the passport as described in article 5 of regulation (EC 998/2003). Otherwise the transport in question is characterized as commercial transport and will be subject to article 10 Presidential Order 184/1996 (SANITARY CONTROL)

Commercial transports

- Even 1 animal, if it travels unaccompanied(cargo), constitutes commercial transport and must be accompanied by the passport and a health certificate, from the responsible veterinary authority of the prefecture from where the animal is being sent and the TRACES document (directive 92/65/EU; Presidential Order 184/96 of A 137).

- Transports of more than 5 animals accompanied by the owner or other representative of the owner are classed only as commercial transports and thus require a certificate from the Greek veterinary authority at the place of departure and the veterinary authority at the destination. If the recipients of commercial transports number more than one, a certificate is required for each separate recipient.

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In case of any queries on the above information, or if the controlling authority encounters difficulty in making a decision, they are requested to contact the veterinary authorities of the prefecture, or border controls on the attached list. If the advice of a veterinarian is not possible at that particular moment, the animals must be detained until their ownership, or where they came from, is clarified and a decision from the responsible veterinarian is possible. The details of the owner should be retained so that they are available to the authorities until a final decision is made.

Offenders of the above legislation, should be prosecuted according to Law 2538/97 of A 242, article 13.

Deputy Minister of Rural Growth and Food

Notes to the above:

1. No information or facts have ever been presented by the Ministry of Agriculture to animal welfare organisations in Greece. Nor have any accusations against animal welfare workers been substantiated in court.
2. The individuals are members of registered Greek animal welfare organisations whose work proves they are animal lovers and whose records prove that they are indeed sending animals to adoption and better life.
3. Photographic evidence and the practical experience of animal welfare workers in Greece would suggest otherwise.
4. The law actually states that Greeks have the right to 'maintain' 2 animals in a residence not 'own' only 2 animals. This also of course means that allowing your companion animal to have puppies or kittens is in breach of the law.
5. Dogs entering Greece from other countries (Hungary/Romania etc) and being sold in pet shops do not bear m/chips with the Greek ISO code. The chips are inserted in the country of origin and are required to be inserted for the puppy can enter Greece. This means that their owners cannot travel with their animals as they will have a foreign chip but Greek issued passport.
6. The law does not prevent Greeks owning more than 2 animals. If you can own more than 2 animals, it follows that you have the right to travel with more than 2 animals.
7. Law 3170/2003, article 7, allows stray animals to be collected and cared for animal welfare organizations with the correct facilities. It does not state that the same organizations cannot own the dogs. In fact it does not refer to ownership at all.
8. The purpose of this clause in EU regulation 998/2003 was presumably to prevent animal traders/ pet shops etc using the pet passport scheme as a means of transporting their animals and also to prevent animals changing hands during transport. This needs clarification at EU level but presumably it is not illegal for an EU citizen EU country.
9. There is no legal basis for this requirement.
10. What law gives somebody the right to check a passenger if he doesn't return with his animals. What authority in another EU country is supposed to provide the certification that the animal/animals are dead. This would also mean that a Greek citizens moving to reside permanently in another EU country is unable to take his companion animals with him.
11. Correct in theory but few municipalities in Greece are undertaking their duties and there are major problems with funding.
12. For most Greek or EU citizens it is impossible to adopt a dog from a municipality or community because they have not undertaken their responsibilities towards stray animals as defined in Law 3170/2003. The relevant ministerial decision also refers only to adopting strays from shelters belonging to the municipalities and not any other form of adoption.
13. According to the EU, this is not correct. See following excerpt from the Question and Answer section of the Europa EU web page: http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/liveanimals/pets/qanda_en.htm

What rules apply to pets travelling alone, without their owner, to participate in a fair or exhibition? Do the same rules apply as for regular non-commercial movements of animals?

Yes. The new system considers "commercial movements" to be for animals moving to another country to be sold while all other types of movement are "non-commercial". Therefore animals travelling to exhibitions etc would be considered a "non-commercial movement" and covered by the rules outlined in this Q&A. For travel within the EU,

the animal must be accompanied by the pet passport. Pets coming from outside the EU must be accompanied by the relevant health certificate or other documents as outlined in Question 4.

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