

(English version)

**Priority question for written answer P-001118/25
to the Commission
Emil Radev (PPE)
(17 March 2025)**

Subject: Animal abuse and the need for sterner measures in the EU

While the Commission has dallied over the creation of a comprehensive legislative framework on animal protection and a review of the existing rules has been slow to materialise, Bulgarian society has been rocked by revelations concerning an international criminal network that has turned the abuse and killing of animals into a lucrative business. An investigation has revealed that footage of cats, dogs, rabbits, guinea pigs and other animals being tortured and killed has been shown online for payment, including using cryptocurrency.

These and other similar cases highlight the need for urgent and decisive action at European level. A number of studies have proven there to be a link between the abuse of animals and violence against humans, so countering such crimes is not just a matter of values, but also one of security. The EU should not allow such crimes to continue, concealed behind the anonymity of the Internet and legislative loopholes or a lack of proper control.

In this connection, I would like to ask the following questions:

1. What legislative initiatives is the Commission planning to tighten up measures to combat animal abuse, including the illegal commercialisation and broadcasting of violent online material?
2. How will it expedite the adoption of minimum animal welfare standards and effective control of these standards?
3. Will tougher penalties and stricter mechanisms be introduced to prosecute cross-border animal crime, especially when this is committed online?

Submitted: 17.3.2025

**Answer given by Mr Várhelyi on behalf of the European Commission
(16 May 2025)**

1. Animal abuse is against EU ⁽¹⁾ and national legislation. The EU is only competent for legislating the keeping and breeding of animals in economic activities and has legislation on the welfare of farmed animals. The Commission adopted in 2023 two legislative proposals on the welfare of dogs and cats and their traceability ⁽²⁾, and on the protection of animals during transport and related operations ⁽³⁾.

The Digital Services Act ⁽⁴⁾ provides several safeguards against the proliferation of illegal content online, including obligations for online platforms to provide procedures for flagging illegal content, to act expeditiously to remove access to such flagged illegal content and to suspend their services to users who frequently provide illegal content. Very Large Online Platforms and Search Engines are further obliged to regularly assess and mitigate risks related to the dissemination of illegal content.

2. The above-mentioned proposals are currently under discussion by the co-legislators. The Commission conducts audits to verify Member States' control systems and the correct application of existing EU legislation, while supporting Member States in ensuring its proper implementation across the Union.

3. Penalties for operators breaching EU legislation, including in cases of cross-border animal crime, are set by Member States ⁽⁵⁾. The Commission supports enforcement through coordination tools such as the EU Agri-Food Fraud Network (FFN) ⁽⁶⁾ and the iRASFF, which enable rapid information exchange. The Commission has also organised joint enforcement actions targeting the illegal trade of dogs and cats, which have triggered further national investigations and judicial proceedings, including through Europol and Eurojust ⁽⁷⁾, ⁽⁸⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Article 3 of Council Directive 98/58/EC of 20 July 1998 concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes, OJ L 221, 08/08/1998, p. 23.

⁽²⁾ Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on the welfare of dogs and cats and their traceability, COM(2023)0769 final.

⁽³⁾ Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on the protection of animals during transport and related operations, amending Council Regulation (EC) No 1255/97 and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005, COM(2023)0770 final.

⁽⁴⁾ Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32022R2065>).

⁽⁵⁾ Article 139 of Regulation (EU) 2017/625 on official controls and other official activities performed to ensure the application of food and feed law, rules on animal health and welfare, plant health and plant protection products, OJ L 95, 7.4.2017, p. 1.

⁽⁶⁾ Article 2, point (11), Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/1715 of 30 September 2019 laying down rules for the functioning of the information management system for official controls and its system components ('the IMSOC Regulation'), OJ L 261, 14.10.2019, p. 37.

⁽⁷⁾ https://food.ec.europa.eu/document/aab09275-116d-46e0-856e-27fab233f093_en, https://food.ec.europa.eu/document/225a0402-10b8-4b04-97c1-5ccaafe1a409_en.

⁽⁸⁾ European Commission, Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety, Illegal trade of cats & dogs, EU enforcement action, 2023, doi:10.2875/236344.