



FEDERATION OF VETERINARIANS OF EUROPE

PRESS RELEASE

FVE helps Balkans reflect on animal welfare challenges

1-2 September 2006

How can animal owners, children, the media and even veterinarians learn more about animal welfare? How do European attitudes to animal welfare change? How can new animal welfare legislation in the Balkans be enforced? These were amongst many questions discussed recently at an animal welfare conference in Belgrade, organised by the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) in cooperation with DG Enlargement (TAIEX).

Over 100 participants from across Eastern Europe attended the conference at the Veterinary Faculty of Belgrade (1-2 September 2006) to discuss how best to help veterinary surgeons in non-EU Balkan countries familiarise themselves with European animal welfare legislation and face the challenges of transposition, implementation and control.

The FVE invited speakers from DG SANCO, DG SANCO's Food and Veterinary Office (FVO), the Council of Europe, Eurogroup for Animal Welfare, the University of Bristol, the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture and the pharmaceutical industry to challenge the audience and stimulate lively debate.

"Animal welfare faces similar challenges across all these countries", said Gordana Blitva, Serbian practitioner. "On the one hand citizens need to be more informed about animal welfare principles, for which veterinarians would be the best source of information. On the other, animal welfare is rarely included in the very demanding veterinary education syllabus, making this conference an excellent tool for training and increasing awareness in the veterinary profession in the region".

Professor John Webster (University of Bristol, U.K.) recommended that animal welfare be an integral part of the veterinary undergraduate syllabus from the first year and carried forward into final-year clinical teaching for both farm and companion animals. He also discussed a distance-learning package that Bristol has developed in association with the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA). FVE Deputy Executive Director, Nancy De Bryine argued that a European College of Animal Welfare should be created in the frame of EBVS, the European Board of Veterinary Specialisation and that animal welfare research should increase in veterinary faculties. "This would allow the education of more veterinary experts in animal welfare", she added.

Participants also agreed that animal welfare education should not only be included in veterinary studies but also in related degrees like agricultural sciences. In the same way, citizens, pet owners and especially children need an education in animal welfare. Furthermore, the media in the region should also be trained in animal welfare principles as a way of generating awareness and concern amongst the public. "The Council of Europe could develop a strategy to tackle the problem of stray dogs faced by many Balkan countries to ensure that humane killing of stray dogs was enforced", said Gordana Blitva.

Implementation and enforcement of animal welfare law was discussed further. Animal welfare legislation in Balkan countries is either very new or does not exist at all, but is essential in this region. However, such laws would prove fruitless if not followed by effective enforcement, so there is a need for a more efficient cooperation between all bodies in charge of supervision.

Encouragingly, recent work by Eurogroup indicates that Europeans' attitudes towards animal welfare are tending to change. With such lively and intense debate, this conference provided a good start for raising awareness of animal welfare issues amongst the veterinary profession and general public in the western Balkan countries.

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Federation of Veterinarians of Europe AISBL
Rue Defacqz, 1
B – 1000 Brussels
Tel: +32.2.533.70.20 - Fax: +32.2.537.28.28
E-mail: info@fve.org - Internet: www.fve.org

Notes for Editors:

1. The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) is an umbrella organisation of 43 veterinary organisations from 36 European countries, representing a total of around 200.000 veterinarians.
2. For further information, consult the fve website <http://www.fve.org> or contact the FVE Secretariat at tel +32 2 533 70 20 or by e-mail to info@fve.org
3. TAIEX is the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange Instrument of the Institution Building unit of Directorate-General Enlargement of the European Commission. In operation since 1996, TAIEX provides centrally managed short-term technical assistance in the field of approximation, application and enforcement of legislation. TAIEX offers its services to new Member States, candidates for accession to the European Union, and the countries of the Western Balkans.
4. All presentations given during the conference can be downloaded from the FVE web site (www.fve.org) and the TAIEX website <http://taix.cec.eu.int>
5. The main objectives and duties of the European Board of Veterinary Specialisation (EBVS) are to recognise new speciality Colleges, to set up and maintain a register of European veterinary specialists, to assure the quality of these specialists by monitoring the Colleges and to encourage and promote the enhanced utilisation and availability of speciality services to the public and the veterinary profession. (<http://www.ebvs.be>)

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