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Brussels,

Dear Mr Vandenbosch,

Dear Mr Sansolini,

I would like to thank you and your co-signatories for your letter of 7 June 2022 regarding the situation of animals in and from Ukraine and calling for higher visibility to be given to animal welfare at European Commission level.

We have all been shaken by Russia's unjustified military aggression against Ukraine. Many traumatised people have fled, and continue to flee, their country to neighbouring EU countries, and some with their beloved pets, because of the ongoing war. The Commission and the EU Member States have shown solidarity and taken immediate actions in support to the refugees including those fleeing Ukraine with companion animals.

As you rightly pointed out, since the very first day of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, the Commission has asked the competent authorities of all Member States to show flexibility vis-à-vis the non-commercial movements of pet animals in order to facilitate the entry of such animals travelling with their owners from Ukraine.

The competent veterinary authorities, in cooperation with other national authorities, veterinarians and NGOs, have since implemented such arrangements, which aim generally to provide all necessary veterinary assistance, including free marking, vaccination, feeding and watering and, where needed, isolation of these animals under appropriate conditions and in adequate facilities.

Although a full harmonisation was not possible, a coordination mechanism has been put in place between Member State authorities to ease the entry of pets travelling with refugees for which the entry country is not their final destination. Meetings of EU Chief Veterinary Officers are also regularly organised to address specific issues.

Mr Michel Vandenbosch, President, GAIA  
Mr Adolfo Sansolini, Coordinator, #EUforAnimals

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I understand very much your concerns related to shelter animals. However, in these circumstances, I shall draw your attention to the fact that, due to the endemic presence of rabies throughout the Ukrainian territory and the high number of cases of rabies detected every year in Ukraine in both wild and domestic animals, facilitating the entry of stray animals or animals from shelters – which are almost all captured stray animals – remains very risky, also because such animals have no rabies vaccination history, which is the norm for family pets.

In this regard, it is important to recall that rabies is a fatal disease in animals and humans. Therefore, I count on your support to encourage your members to give priority to direct aid on the spot than trying to transfer such animals into the EU.

In your letter, you also mention that no measures have been taken to relax entry requirements into the Union for other farmed animal species. These animals can enter into the Union where this is in accordance with the applicable rules. However, there again, Member States have shown flexibility in the first days after the aggression of Ukraine by accepting, in exceptional cases, animals, especially horses, that fled the war zones and by applying quarantine to those which did not comply with the EU requirements and thus presenting a disease risk for such species in the EU. Recently, my services received positive signals indicating that the Ukrainian competent authorities are operational and able to provide the necessary guarantees to allow animals to enter the EU in accordance with existing EU rules.

European citizens want animal welfare to be improved, including through clear legislation. The current EU animal welfare rules are old and have not always been implemented in a consistent manner by the Member States. To address this, and other shortcomings related to the sustainability of the agri-food chain, I have committed, in announcing our Farm to Fork Strategy, to revise the current EU animal welfare legislation by 2023. This ambitious work is performed under my responsibility as European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety.

I have taken good note of your suggestion to establish a specific directorate for animal welfare within DG SANTE, and to modify the title of my portfolio.

In closing, let me once again assure you and the co-signatories of your letter about the importance the Commission attaches to this subject and to its support for the Ukrainian people in these dark times.

Yours sincerely,

