



TURKIYE'S ANIMAL MASSACRE LAW EXPLAINED

The so-called Animal Protection Law now persecutes our centuries-long friends and neighbors, the stray animals, into a painful birth, life and death cycle. We don't accept, we won't comply!

#WithdrawTheLawTurkiye #YasayıGeriÇek

“Humans first”

The name of the law is “Animal Protection Law” but the main clause focuses on “ensuring animal welfare with regard to human, animal, and environmental well-being.” This is precarious in terms of its broad and anthropocentric perspective, as the AKP government repeatedly stated that the law was prepared for “humans first”. It is clear that the law will not give precedence to the well-being, freedom, and right to life of animals, especially when it comes to vague concepts like public order. This provision is susceptible to various forms of exploitation in real-world implementations in light of past experiences. Potential manipulation and the prioritization of human interests over those of animals is imminent, as it may lead to decisions that favor human convenience or economic interests at the expense of animal well-being, which potentially undermines the ethical considerations that should guide animal rights policies.

Moreover, it also raises questions about the perceived "hierarchy" of species.

Life-long captivity for “all”

Domestic animals who are not adopted “by a person, organization, institution or legal entity, whose care, vaccinations, periodic health checks are not carried out, and not recorded in the Ministry's database” will be deemed as “unowned animal”. Although stray cats seem to be removed from the law's scope, as a result of the motion proposed by the opposition party, the risk is still there due to lack of proper legislative classifications. The final definition suggests that the law, in fact, may extend its reach to all animals inhabiting the streets.

The reference to the European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals in the law's Article 13 suggests that “if it is determined that the number of stray dogs poses a problem, killing procedures (so-called euthanasia) may be carried out solely to reduce the number without any further justification. This clause can again be easily manipulated, as the AKP government has recently passed this law permitting mass incarcerations and killings without possessing accurate population data. The lack of reliable and scientific data on the number of street animals, and the absence of shared data collection methods by local municipalities, the Turkish government, and the Ministry of Agriculture, who are all legally responsible for managing street animals and auditing temporary care centers, has persisted for two decades. This situation raises immediate concerns about transparency, accountability, and the ethical treatment of animals.

Previous “temporary rehab centers” also changes into “places where unowned animals are held until adoption”. This critical amendment brings life-long captivity and suffering for all street animals, including the healthy ones, and their removal from their habitats (streets) where they have been taken care of by animal activists and their killing will be valid whenever deemed “necessary” in line with questionable human interests. Life-long, even short-term captivity means eventual death for animals in shelters due to their despicable conditions all around Turkiye, including the big cities.

Due to municipalities not fulfilling their legal responsibilities for 20 years and the lack of supervision by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, temporary shelters have become "death camps." Confining animals to these shelters means they will die due to diseases, hunger, thirst, and fights in overcrowded areas. Animals entering these temporary rehab centers, commonly known as shelters, quickly contract fatal diseases or develop chronic ones.

One of the other unacceptable and unrealistic demands of this proposal is also found in this article. Turkey has a total shelter capacity of 105,000, and approximately 85% of municipalities across Turkey do not have shelters. Despite the 2021 updated law requiring the establishment of shelters, the deadlines have passed for some municipalities and are approaching for others, yet new shelters have not been opened. This situation has not been monitored by the ministry, and municipalities that have not opened shelters have not been penalized. Considering the unknown basis for the government's claim of 4 million dogs in Turkey, it is impossible to gather animals in existing shelters and expect them to live "healthily" or be "adopted" properly, based on our 20 years of field experience.

Adoption issues and the "banned breeds"

The law mandates that all unowned animals be "taken to shelters" and kept in there until adoption, instead of being released. However, it doesn't address ongoing legal, economic, practical and cultural hurdles to adopting from rehabilitation centers.

Issues still persist with inadequate and non-transparent adoption processes implemented by the shelter workers, as well as insufficient screening of adopters and lack of awareness-training for adopters.

Adoption from shelters is nearly impossible for visitors and volunteers due to entry and photo/video capture restrictions implemented arbitrarily.

Furthermore, those who wish to adopt animals face "apartment, residence, site management rules" which usually ban pets indoors. People are beaten or even killed by animal antagonists while feeding animals in residential areas, on streets, and in their own regions, and almost all of these crimes go unpunished. There is no positive step seen in the law towards solving these polarizing incidents. Let alone the dreadful economic situation in Türkiye and very expensive, highly taxed animal food and veterinary care expenses.

Since the so-called "banned breeds" cannot be adopted due to previous unethical and non-scientific directive, they will also be the first to be killed now! These dogs are already confined within concrete walls and are deprived of care by shelter workers due to unfounded "fear" incited by the government-backed media and troll accounts.

Sick and traumatised to be killed too!

Instead of properly managed treatment, rehabilitation and adoption processes, dogs with various (contagious) diseases and "negative" behaviors will be killed too!

The clause in Article 13 states that among the dogs taken into shelters "those who pose a danger to the life and health of humans and animals and whose negative behavior cannot be controlled, who have a contagious or untreatable disease or whose ownership is prohibited" will be killed (euthanised).

It permits killing not only for medical reasons but also for other legal/exceptional situations. This proposal clearly means that dog, who could survive despite the horrific effects of confinement, will also be killed. It is neither ethical nor acceptable in terms of the right to life to imprison and kill animals with contagious and/or untreatable diseases that could be treated. They should be able to spend their remaining time in loving and caring homes and streets where they have been taken care of by volunteers for years.

This fascist approach means that no chance will be given to sick, debilitated and traumatised (so-called aggressive) dogs other than death.

Killing on “legal grounds”

Permission to kill and harm animals based on arbitrary and ambiguous “legal grounds” is given in the new law. Article 14, which previously mentioned only “medical grounds”, was changed into “legal and medical reasons”. Now it is not prohibited to “perform artificial interventions or administer foreign substances that may harm animals or their offspring in the womb or their eggs” based on (which) legal and medical grounds!

In the justification of the law, such legal reasons were explained with expressions such as "any increase in population" and "risk of public security".

Prison for mayors resisting the law

The law aims at punishing municipal officials who don't build “confinement” centers, collect or kill street animals with 6 months to 2 years in prison.

However, since the enactment of Law No. 5199 in 2004, mayors who have not built temporary rehab centers, ordered mass killings of animals or relocated them to rural areas and other districts, and Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry officials who failed to monitor these municipalities, have faced no penalties. Cases filed have either been dismissed or not pursued due to "lack of grounds for prosecution." Despite repeated calls from animal rights advocates in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey and Animal Rights Commission to remove obstacles to prosecution, the persistent system of impunity and injustice has not been questioned or changed.

Declaring municipalities that defend freedom and the right to life as guilty while not prosecuting the real perpetrators for 20 years is unacceptable.

This provision aims to pit the public against current municipalities, further indicating that the law was prepared with sordid political motivations in mind because in the latest local elections, the AKP municipalities lost greatly and the opposition party CHP has won more than 400 municipalities in Türkiye.

Furthermore, a 2021 amendment stripped citizens and associations of the right to apply directly to the courts, leaving the prosecution of acts of violence and cruelty against animals by municipal and public employees to the discretion of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

This provision seeks to continue a system where the real perpetrators are not prosecuted.

Volunteers defunct

"Local animal protection officer" concept and implementation is now defunct in the new law because "there will be no stray animals in the streets" according to its justification!

The removal of the concept and practice of "local animal protection officers" in 18th article of the law is justified by stating that "there will be no need for local animal protection officers because there will be no stray animals in need of care and protection on the streets." When considered alongside other articles in the proposal, it becomes clear that this is paving the way for the mass imprisonment and killing of all animals, including cats and dogs.

Furthermore, local animal protection officers signify voluntary and democratic participation. Given that many temporary shelters and municipalities already do not cooperate with volunteers, the elimination of this role and authority will exacerbate the issues of lack of surveillance, inspection and public pressure, leading to greater concealment of cruelty.

This law, which already falls short of protecting animals, also takes away the rights of those who protect animals and their rights, thereby regressing the struggle. The responsibility for the supervision of animals cannot be left in the hands of municipal personnel who do not love animals, do not respect the right to life, are uneducated on animal rights, and lack ethical values. A law proposal that does not cooperate with volunteers and NGOs is unacceptable.

Breeding, sale and abandonment of animals ignored

The law seemingly suggests a fine of 60.000 TL (1,700 euros) per person for the abandonment of an "owned animal" by their "owner".

However, one of the most fundamental barriers to population control has been the lack of any prohibition on the breeding and sale of animals as commodities for 20 years. The law neither prohibits, nor regulates legal/illegal animal breeding and trade, nor does it address the fact that the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has failed to develop a robust and enforceable system for animal abandonment since 2004.

The Ministry has rendered the identification system unworkable and ineffective, failing to track animal abandonment and apply penalties. Should the law pass, these offenses will continue to be untracked, and the penalties will remain merely symbolic.

Although the sale of cats and dogs in pet shops was banned in 2021, production and sales continues legally and illegally via catalogues, in breeding farms, through imports from abroad, and through underground/in-house production and sales.

A law that does not propose any bans and sanctions on this perpetuates a system where animals are seen as commodities, while continuously being exploited and subjected to sexual violence, and abandoned to the streets only to be killed under various pretexts. A law that does not identify the root problem and implement policies and penalties accordingly is unacceptable.

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The original updated Turkish version of the 5199 Animal Protection Law can be found [here](#).



Independent animal rights group campaigning to end all types of animal cruelty in cooperation with national and international animal rights organizations.

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