



In this Friday, Aug. 19, 2011 file photo, two dogs are seen in the kitchen of a privately run animal shelter in the town of Hostomel outside Kyiv, Ukraine.

AP

calls for end to killing of stray dogs (updated)

Nov 17 at 15:36 | Associated Press

Ukraine

Succumbing to pressure from Western civic groups, the Ukrainian government on Thursday called for an end to the brutal killing of stray dogs ahead of the Euro 2012 soccer championship next summer.

Ukraine's Environment Ministry said Thursday it has urged all the country's mayors to stop euthanizing dogs ahead of the June event and build animal shelters instead.

Thousands of stray dogs have been killed in Ukraine over the past year, often poisoned or injected with illegal substances in an apparent effort to clean city streets of strays ahead of the prestigious sports event, according to Associated Press research.

That has caused outrage from local and international animal protection groups.

"Today I am publicly turning to all city mayors: let us stop the deaths of those poor stray animals for half a year and build shelters together," Environment Minister Mykola Zlochevsky told a Cabinet meeting Wednesday, according to his press service.

The ministry's statement followed a meeting with representatives of Naturewatch, a British-based group that is actively campaigning against animal cruelty in Ukraine.

"This is a fantastic victory for Ukraine, its citizens and its animals," said John Ruane, head of Naturewatch.

However, it remained unclear how the killing ban would be enforced. Ukraine has a large stray dog population, often numbering tens of thousands in big cities, and building shelters to house them would take months.

Ministry spokesman Serhiy Syrovatka told the AP that the government would work on adopting legal and other changes to make the moratorium on euthanasia legally binding across the country and said that mayors who disobey would face punishment.

The Ministry also intends to help manage and finance construction of shelters, Syrovatka said.

Syrovatka vowed that dogs that couldn't be housed in shelters would be sterilized and released, as is done in the West, but those measures are costly and finding funding would be hard at a time when the Ukrainian economy is relying on international loans.

Also, the minister's comments appeared to suggest that the six-month killing ban is a temporary measure aimed at quelling criticism ahead of Euro 2012. It was unclear whether the ban would remain in force beyond the championship.

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