



# EUROGROUP FOR ANIMALS FIGHTING FOR ANIMAL WELFARE IN THE EU



## Vegan insider Maria Slough talks to the Director of Eurogroup for Animals about how promoting veganism within the EU could save countless lives

Rain clouds gather in Brussels as I arrive at the picturesque 19th century building that houses Eurogroup for Animals. Once inside, a small cream dog named Mila stops halfway towards me before turning on her paws and running to hide behind a door. I sit on the floor and wait. Eventually she braved the length of the corridor; lithe spirit with crooked legs enhancing her grace. After a cursory sniff, she kissed me on the nose, twice, before running up the stairs.

“What a perfect way to start a meeting,” I said to Reineke Hameleers, the Director of Eurogroup for Animals, who tells me how her vegan journey evolved.

“It was a very natural process. Vegetarian at 16, I kept learning about the suffering in the dairy and egg industries. I cut back on all animal products. For me this is an ethical personal choice. I don’t understand societal selective compassion between species, plus I just love the taste of my plant-based food.”

Eurogroup for Animals is not a vegan or vegetarian organisation. It was founded by the RSPCA in 1980 and currently represents 61 animal advocacy organisations in the EU and beyond.

“We believe that it is fundamental that the animal advocacy movement sticks together. As the only Pan-European

animal advocacy organisation, our primary mission is to unite to improve the well-being of as many animals as possible by improving legislation, its enforcement, upgrading standards for animals and changing societal attitudes.”

I asked Reineke how this work translates into results.



“I am pleased to say that we have a unique position in the European Parliament. We have acted as the Secretariat of the EP Intergroup on the Welfare and Conservation of Animals for more than 30 years. This Intergroup serves as a discussion forum among MEPs and is one of the oldest, most regular and well attended Intergroups in Parliament.

“Last year’s campaign #StopTheTrucks was a great success. Thanks to the overwhelming support from EU citizens we handed over 1 million signatures to the EU asking for an end to the transportation of live animals over long distances.

““Protect our Pets’ campaign mobilised by our members, asked the EU to tackle the unscrupulous pet trade raging throughout Europe. We obtained the full backing of the European Parliament behind our political asks for which we hope to see new legislation soon.

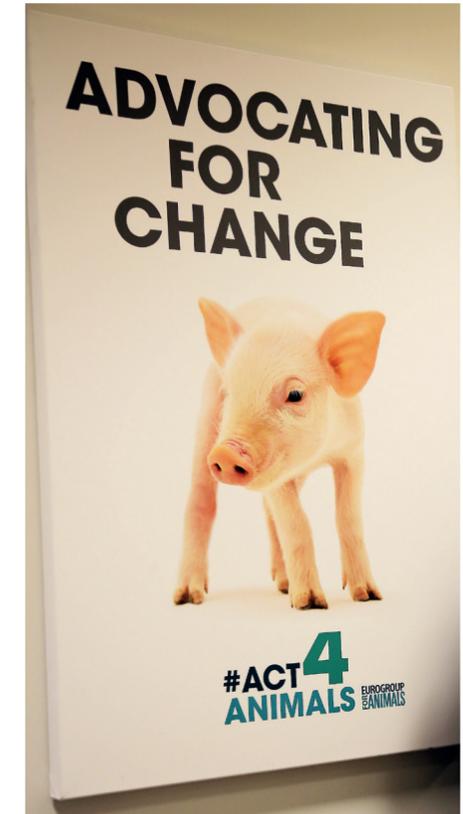
“The Eurobarometer on animal welfare (EU wide survey) of 2016 showed that the support for animals is much stronger than 10 years ago. The survey showed that the vast majority of EU citizens want to see much better protection for companion animals and for farm animals. Our challenge is to make sure these voices are being listened to and

that this will lead to institutional and societal change.”

On the wall are a collection of tragically sad photographs showing piglets being subjected to mutilation and torture. Visibly moved, Reineke said, “We are currently building momentum for pigs. In the European Union millions of pigs are painfully castrated yearly to avoid the risk of boar taint despite more humane alternatives existing. Piglets have their tails cut or burned off; their teeth are clipped or ground away to control behaviour, particularly in barbaric intensive farming systems. Our campaign End Pig Pain emerged in reaction to those pigs’ suffering; we want to show the urgency of their plea so politicians will act to stop it now. By mobilising the people of Europe behind our political call, we will succeed to obtain the legislative uplifting pigs need.”

A small bark announces the return of Mila. I asked Reineke how her team deals with compassion fatigue?

“Our biggest challenge is the legislative inertia and lack of leadership among EU decision-makers. We deal with this by partnering up with likeminded stakeholders and being very creative in the way we advocate for change. Being surrounded by so many passionate



and driven animal advocates in our community is a great source of motivation. I’m truly convinced that if we really want to make a difference for the greatest number of animals who suffer the most, we have to advocate at EU level and drive institutional change.”

She reaches down to stroke Mila’s head.

“Animals will only truly be respected as sentient beings across all 28 Member States if comprehensive and effective EU legislation is in place. Eurogroup for Animals are here to collaborate and help achieve just that.”

If you would like to support the work of Eurogroup for Animals please visit [www.eurogroupforanimals.org](http://www.eurogroupforanimals.org)

Follow Maria Slough on Twitter and Instagram for even more behind-the-scenes content.

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