

## *Bio-ethical education in Belarus*

There is a National Committee on Bioethics in Belarus. What a grand title! In reality this committee is a commission inside the Ministry of Health. The members of this committee are employees of the ministry designated by order of the minister. These people are mainly concerned about health of people than the humane treatment of animals. For them it is apparently not a problem if 20, 40 or 100 dogs die for obtaining scientific results in drug-tests or for writing a PhD paper.

This committee is not a legal person and it doesn't have a statute of its own which puts its independence into question. The National Committee on Bioethics of Belarus is acting on the ground of orders from the Minister of Health.

The activities of the Committee encompass legalization of scientific experiments on animals, including dogs. The mission of such a committee, however, should be to inform and educate on the topic of ethical treatment of animals which would raise awareness to the issue in the population and result in a positive attitude towards animals.



These photos were taken in June 2009 in vivariums of Belarusian State Medical University. They display laboratory dogs which are abused for experiments. An article about laboratory dogs, suffering and dying in vivariums of Belarus, will be brought to your attention as an individual topic.

Svetlana Harevich, lawyer and volunteer with the animal rights group Egida, went to see Robert Cheisnot, chairman of the National Committee on Bioethics, in July 2009 during his regular public office hours. Mr Cheisnot serves as First

Deputy of the Minister of Health of the Republic of Belarus. He certainly has a very responsible job, he considers his participation in the National Committee on Bioethics as an example of social work. Mr Cheisnot stated that the situation of bioethics is complicated and it is necessary to change something. He argues that his everyday work doesn't leave time for this subject. It seems that the state remains largely careless. In Svetlana's opinion, it is not as complicated as the deputy states. The problem is that nobody in higher administrative ranks cares about the meaning of "bioethics".

Another important in the sphere of bioethics person is Tatiana Viktorovna Mishatkina, professor of International State Ecological University (ISEU). She also represents Belarus in the Moscow UNESCO Office. With the support of UNESCO the project "Ecological ethics in the system of bioethical education in Belarus was conducted at ISEU between April 2008 and April 2009. As the result of this project, educational programs on bioethics for pupils and students were developed.

Unfortunately, in the case of schools these programs are merely recommended for utilizing. Thus, they can be organized only as elective courses and therefore depend on the good will of teachers who are mostly not aware of the subject of «Bioethics». However, after the

seminar "Ecological ethics and bioethics - bridge into future" was organized for school-teachers at the university in September 2009 and after an introducing speech of Svetlana Harevich teachers were encouraged to spend some class time with their pupils on the issue of bioethics.



There are also programs and work-books provided to universities in the sphere of bioethics. This has gained little attention due to poor advertising and the small quantity and little appeal of according materials. Thus, in the end only students of ISEU who study the subject "Bioethics" are seriously concerned with the topic.

T.V. Mishatkina is a member of the National Committee on Bioethics, the only participant from outside of the Ministry of Health. Her activities with respect to bio-ethics remain largely on a general and abstract level while animal protectors had hoped she would promote bio-ethics-related programs and projects during the meetings of the committee in order to launch a nation-wide educational process on bioethics.

A general problem in animal rights is that it is impossible for people who care about the issue to reach officials responsible for taking necessary animal-right related measures. Numerous proposals and inquiries of citizens and animal protecting organizations are forwarded to public utilities authorities who consistently reply with formal phrases only.

In order to improve the situation with practical measures animal protection organizations conduct informational, inspirational and educational work with children and adults on their own initiative. See, for example, the activities of animal rights group "Egida" in Minsk.

**The first action «Dog's holiday»** was held the October, 4, 2008 to the address: Minsk, Gurskogo str. 42



**"Our best friends"** was held on January 27, 2008 at the secondary school #222 in Minsk



«Window into the summer» took place May 20, 2009 in «Ranak», Minsk



"International Day of Homeless Animals" was held August 16, 2008 in the adventure park «Dreamland», Minsk



All promotions and activities of «Egida» are getting the increasing interest both from adults and children.

We believe that it is particularly important to work with children, mostly because children are highly expressive in their desire to become pet owners. We believe that by explaining to children that a certain percentage of liability falls on a person after the purchase of an animal, we are educating them and raising them with a sense of duty and responsibility.

We believe that by developing children mercy towards animals at an early age, we are contributing to the fact that they grow up good, merciful and kind people.

We want to introduce you to the inner world of children in Belarus, which they expressed in their artworks submitted for the contest of children's creativity «Children against animal cruelty».

«Egida» announced the contest in October 2007. We spoke about it in children's newspapers and magazines, schools and creativity groups.

We have received more than 1 000 (one thousand) artworks. These were poems, sculptures, stories and paintings.

Take a closer look at photos of children works presented to the contest. Every picture is unique:



And many others excellent pictures...

The contest was finalised on April 3, 2008 at the Palace of Children and Youth in Minsk. It was a occasion for «Egida» and for all children who came from all over the country. Children of Belarus are just children, they are the same as children around the world: sweet, sensitive and emotional. Of course, they are against animal cruelty! Children all over the world are against animal cruelty!

What will children of Belarus face when they grow up?

Will anything change in this country?

Or will their beloved dogs and cats fall under the legislation of «trapping, shooting and euthanasia»?

[www.egida.by](http://www.egida.by)

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