Evolution of animal welfare in Europe and its role for safeguarding animal health [Evolução do bem-estar animal na Europa e o seu papel na salvaguarda da saúde animal]

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This paper will put most of the attention to farm animals as the most apparent animal health and welfare problems nowadays seem to be in this category. This does not mean that the pet animals, the sport animals or the experimental animals are regarded as without animal health and welfare problems.

From farm animal husbandry to farm animal production - some examples of the consequences for animal health and welfare.

The radical changes in agriculture from 1950s onwards, when traditional animal husbandry successively became intense animal production, involved changes of animals and changes of their environment and thereby change of the relationship between animal and environment.

The changes of the animals can be described as follows: The animal breeding in traditional animal husbandry had several goals, like good health, good temperament, and long life. It became from the 1950s concentrated on one goal: high production, it may be milk, eggs or faster growth. Also the feeding became more intense, aiming at high production. As example of this the development in Sweden might be a good example, table 1 and figure 1.

Table 1. Some changes of the animal material (phenotype) during the decades after 1950 in cattle, swine and poultry expressed in per cent of production figures 1955. Examples from official control in Sweden.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTOR</th>
<th>Change %</th>
<th>Situation (Year)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dairy cow average production. Kg 4% milk/year</td>
<td>+ 128</td>
<td>9000 (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broiler growth rate (Age at 1,2 kg live weight 1955 resp. 1995)</td>
<td>+ 38</td>
<td>31 (2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fattening pig back fat thickness (1955-88)</td>
<td>- 31</td>
<td>22,3 (1995)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The changes of animal environment and management has been characterised by a change from keeping several species on the farm to specialization in one species or just one age category, e.g. fattening pigs or broiler chickens. The herds have been bigger, the manual labour has been replaced by machines, for milking, feeding, egg collection, dung removal etc. Natural ventilation has been...
replaced by mechanical, which in many cases has caused a constant and often high noise level in the animal environment.

These changes brought about a change in animal disease panorama with a great increase in frequency of man made diseases for all species of farm animals.

This change has led to a new disease panorama and increased frequencies of many man made diseases. Thus there has been shown that sows restricted in stalls or cages have higher incidences than sows kept loose as well as their piglets (e.g. Bäckström 1973), that cows with no or very little straw as bedding have higher incidences of teat tramps and mastitis than cows with enough bedding (Ekesbo 1966), that hens in cages have a much more fragile skeleton than hens kept loose (Knowles & Brown 1990), that some diseases, e.g. mastitis and parturient paresis in cows increase in frequency with increased production (e.g.. Bendixen et al 1987, 1988), that cows kept on pasture in the summer are healthier than those kept in the barn the year round (e.g. Bendixen 1986).

An example of this international development of the farm animal health situation the changes of the disease incidences expressed in per cent of the number of cows is given in figure 2. The example is from Sweden and based on the annual reports from the Swedish veterinarians and the number of cows in the official cow recording system. From the table it is apparent that the percentage of diseases per 100 cows has increased.

Figure 1. Annual increase of average milk production per cow in Sweden 1800-1905. Prerequisite: 1000 kg milk/cow/year in 1800. From 1905 figures from official recording in 25 year periods 1906-1980 and the period 1981-2000.

Animal husbandry in the EU countries
Structure and production intensity.

The total herd and cow number, annual average milk production/cow, average number of cows per official recorded farm, and the percentage officially controlled herds and cows in 1996 in EU are presented in table 2. The number of herds in official control differs remarkably between countries. The table shows the considerable differences between EU-countries in annual milk yield per cow and in the percentage of cows and herds in the official milk recording system.

Table 2. The total herd and cow number, annual average milk production/cow, average number of cows per official recorded farm, and the percentage officially controlled herds and cows in 1996 in EU (reported to ICAR).
The number of sows and slaughtered pigs are given in table 3.

Table 3. Number of sows x 1000 1997, prognosis for number of slaughtered pigs x 1000.000 in 1998. (Source: Agra Europe).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>SOWS</th>
<th>PIGS SLAUGHT.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>5,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>754</td>
<td>11,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>1212</td>
<td>20,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>902</td>
<td>16,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>2,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1516</td>
<td>26,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>2610</td>
<td>39,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>2,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland</td>
<td>1422</td>
<td>15,6 b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>3,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>690</td>
<td>12,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxemburg</td>
<td>a)</td>
<td>a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>4,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>2,241</td>
<td>30,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>4,0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a) No information available; b) In 1994 24.800.000 pigs slaughtered.

Figure 2. Number of cows, number and percent of the treatments reported by the Swedish practising veterinarians 1947, 1957.
The situation in animal transport

The transport of animals within, to and from the EU is extensive, in total about 21.5 million mammals, table 4.

Table 4. Number of animals x 1000 transported in 2000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Within the EU</th>
<th>Import from non EU country</th>
<th>Export to non EU country</th>
<th>Total transport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pigs</td>
<td>13,303</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>13,389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>2,637</td>
<td>1,553</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4,235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>2,778</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>3,590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goat</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donkey</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total mammals</strong></td>
<td><strong>18,865</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,278</strong></td>
<td><strong>393</strong></td>
<td><strong>21,536</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chickens &lt;185 g</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>268,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hens 185g-2kg</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>121,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hens&gt; 2kg</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total poultry</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>465,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


All these transports are not long transports but it is not possible from available statistics to find out how long the individual animal is transported. An animal might be transported from the farm to a market and from the market to a market in another EU-country and from there to a slaughterhouse or to a farm. As each such transport often is regarded as a single transport in the ANIMO-system the total transport time might be several days. It happens that in this manner transported animals are not offered feed, water or rest, which naturally result in health and welfare implications which should not be tolerated. It is shown in many studies, clinically or by subclinical methods, that any transport has an effect on the animal irrespective of species (e.g. Warriss 1998; Warriss et al 1992, 1995).

However, strict animal welfare transport rules, if complied with, also means an improved protection against infectious diseases. The experiences from the epizootics of Swine Fever and Foot and Mouth Disease is a good example of this.

Laws, which regulate animal health and welfare

Since more than 100 years most European countries have had legislation regarding animal health. But this legislation has been limited to epizootic diseases. There does not exist any animal health law.

The situation in animal husbandry since the 1950s where so much of the relationship between animal and environment has changed resulting in increase of man made diseases and so much of the modern animal environment and management is governed by “animal keeping systems” makes it necessary to have an animal health legislation. But, in the absence of a legislation, which can
safeguard the animal health, the modern animal welfare legislation has to take this responsibility. Especially the recommendations adopted by Council of Europe’s Standing Committee for farm animal welfare are good examples of such legislation.

**Background to current animal welfare legislation in the European countries**

Animal welfare problems became an issue in several European countries during the 19th century. In several countries associations for prevention of cruelty against animals were founded. The interest was mainly focused on single cases of mistreatment of farm animals, usually horses and dogs. In several European countries either animal welfare acts or paragraphs in other laws already in the middle of the 19th century were passed making it possible for the society to condemn people for cruelty against animals. In the end of the century and the beginning of the 20th century the interest successively was broadened to also cover the treatment of experimental animals.

In one after another of the European democracies the ethics of agriculture and the way animals in many new systems were kept were questioned. There were articles in newspapers and other media and in some countries also debates in the parliaments. Two authors and two books more than anything else drew people’s attention to the consequences for fauna and farm animals of the measures taken by man. The authors and books were Rachel Carson’s “Silent Spring” and Ruth Harrison’s “Animal Machines”. The latter was one of the main reasons why in England the Brambell Committee was established and given the task to investigate the animal welfare situation in modern intensive animal production and to propose measures. At the same time the attention was also put to the conditions under which animals were treated during international transports.

**The Council of Europe and its animal welfare conventions**

The Council of Europe was founded in 1949, originally on the proposal of Winston Churchill, who wanted all Europe’s democracies to go together in order to defend freedom and democracy against threats from Communist and Fascist dictatorships. 10 member countries originally formed it, now they are more than 40. The Council of Europe has three main tasks, to protect and strengthen democracy and human rights, to try to find solutions to society problems and to promote the development of a genuine European cultural identity.

The Council of Europe decides of international binding rules, “conventions”, within the field of ethics. These conventions cover ethical issues like human rights and animal welfare, but also others like freedom of the press.

**Five animal welfare conventions in the Council of Europe**

The Council of Europe has issued five conventions regarding animal welfare: animal transport (Dec. 1968), farm animals (March 1976), slaughter (May 1979), experimental animals (March 1986), and pet animals (Nov. 1987). At present, a convention regarding biotechnology is being planned and the convention on transport from 1968 is under revision. The convention regarding farm animals decrees that a standing animal welfare committee for farm animals shall elaborate detailed rules for the keeping of farm animals.

The conventions are very different from each other in their design. The conventions regarding transport, slaughter, pet animals and especially experimental animals contain detailed rules whereas the farm animal convention has the character of a frame law. The reason for this is that this convention presupposes that the standing committee will elaborate detailed rules with the same legal status as the convention itself.

I will give a short presentation of the two conventions, the one for animal transport and the one for farm animals.
Transport convention of 1968

The convention does not regulate transport within a country, only between countries. It comprises transport both of mammals, birds and cold-blooded animals.

This convention consists of one section containing general rules and four sections containing specified rules for road, railway, boat and air transport. The original convention from 1968 contains a number of general requirements regarding means of transport, management and care for most animals, without prescribing measures or time limits. The exception is a ban on transporting animals for more than 24 hours without feed and water. For farm animals except birds it also prescribes that a national appointed veterinarian must after inspecting the animals and the loading procedure, to make sure the transport is feasible, without risk for the animals. He has to certify this on a special form.

The Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers has thereafter issued detailed additional rules for international transport of cattle. All Council of Europe’s member countries have been urgently requested to ratify these rules as soon as possible. The Council of Europe’s is at present working with a revision of the transport convention.

Farm animal welfare convention of 1976

General

The convention for farm animal welfare contains general rules for housing, management and care of all farm animals irrespective of species. Its most prominent article says that:

“Animals shall be housed and provided with food, water and care in a manner which - having regard to their species and to their degree of development, adaptation and domestication - is appropriate to their physiological and ethological needs in accordance with established experience and scientific knowledge”. Other articles demand freedom of movement, rules regarding light, noise, indoor climate, feed free from substances, which may cause suffering or injury and that the condition and state of health of animals shall be thoroughly inspected.

The Standing Committee for Farm Animal Welfare

Finally two articles demands a Standing Committee to be created for elaboration and adaptation of detailed recommendations for various species of farm animals. These recommendations, in practise rules, shall be based on scientific knowledge and practical experience and the nations, which have ratified the Convention, have to implement these rules in their legislation within six months or one year after the adaptation. It is important to note that the recommendations decided by the Standing Committee shall be based on scientific knowledge and practical experience.

The recommendations state demands on breeding, housing and management in order to fulfil the biological characteristics of each species. Breeding must be performed in such a way that suffering to any of the animals involved is avoided. Feed shall not contain substances, which may cause unnecessary suffering or injury. For e.g. pigs it is said that their keeping should allow performance of exploratory behaviour and fulfil their need to differentiate between a laying, feeding and dunging area.

In the Standing Committee all nations, which have ratified the Convention, have full membership, they are "contracting parties". Ratification in most countries means a decision by the national parliament. Each Contracting Party has the right to appoint a representative to the Standing Committee. The Committee has about 25 member states, which are contracting parties to the convention. As EU has also ratified the convention it is also a contracting party.
Any Member state of the Council of Europe, which is not a Contracting Party to the Convention, has the right to be represented on the Committee by an observer, who may attend all meetings of the Committee. About 20 Council of Europe member countries have such observer status.

In the Standing Committee also nations outside Europe can participate as observers. Thus the Holy See, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, United States of America and Thailand have got the right to be represented by observers. Thereby the Council of Europe’s activity on the field of animal welfare can get an impact also outside Europe. There are also a few good examples on such an impact.

As a rule the representative is a veterinarian. Some countries even send delegations of several persons, so that the delegation might include experts not only on veterinary medicine but also on biology, law and animal husbandry for the species in question, etc.

The following international organisations have been invited to appoint experts who will be available for consultation: The International Society for Applied Ethology (ISAE, previous called: "The Society for Veterinary Ethology, SVE"); The World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) together with Eurogroup for Animal Welfare; The European Confederation of Agriculture (CEE) and The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE).

The Committee started its work in 1979. Since then recommendations have been elaborated for Egg laying hens; Pigs; Cattle; Sheep; Goats; Fur animals (mink, polecats, foxes, coypu; chinchilla); Ratites (ostriches, emus, nandus); Geese; Ducks; Muscovy ducks; Turkeys; The recommendation for Fur (mink, polecats, foxes, coypu, chinchilla) is revised and the new version adopted. At present the Committee is elaborating recommendation for Fish; Rabbits and a revision of the Pig recommendation.

**Implementation of the Standing Committee’s recommendations**

The intention is that these recommendations shall be transformed into not only national law but also as EU legislation. However, as we know, there are EU-directives only on pigs, calves and egg laying hens.

Since the Committee started its work there has been intensive work in European countries to improve existing animal welfare legislation or, in countries where no such legislation existed, introduce legislation based on the Convention and the Recommendations.

It is important that each nation, which has ratified the Convention, really does observe the rules agreed upon in the Committee. This is especially important, not only for the welfare of farm animals, but for the ethics and welfare of farmers and consumers. Therefore the Committee has during recent years introduced on its agenda for each plenary meeting a report from each contracting party an account for its legislation with respect to the commitments as a contracting party.

**Relationship between the Council of Europe and its member states what regards the conventions**

Each Council of Europe member state, which has ratified a Council of Europe convention, must apply the intentions of the convention in its animal welfare legislation. The observance of the Council of Europe’s recommendations is presupposed to be made within the framework of national legislation.

**The European Union**
The European Union (EU) has its origin in the European Economic Community (EEC). EEC was originally founded in 1957 by six European countries with the aim to promote free trade over the state borders in accordance with the so called Rome Treaty, which is regarded as a sort of constitutional law for the EEC. The EU-directives within the area of animal welfare are as a rule founded on the Council of Europe’s conventions, or, for farm animals, on the recommendations elaborated and decided by the CE Standing Committee for Farm Animal Welfare.

The EU Commission has appointed a lot of Committees for preparing its legislations. One important committee is “The Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Welfare SCAHAW”. This committee can form subgroups for preparing reports on different issues. Thus SCAHAW in March 2002 delivered a comprehensive report on the welfare of animals during transport. Such reports will then be discussed in the Commission before the Commission makes a proposal for legislation, e.g. a directive or a change of a directive, to be discussed in the Committee of Ministers until it will be formally adopted by the ministers.

EU animal welfare directives

EU has issued the following animal welfare directives: International transport 1977; new directive 1991, revised 1997; Experimental animals 1986; Animals for slaughter 1988; Egg laying hens in cages 1988 but cancelled by the entering into force of a new directive on egg laying hens in 1999; Pigs 1991; Calves 1991, at present under revision; For other farm animals there are at present no directives.

The motives for EU: s animal welfare directives are to facilitate the common market’s function by introducing obligatory minimum animal welfare standards in the keeping of animals. These intend to prevent competition between member countries caused by differences in national animal welfare laws, and, should the occasion arise, they remove technical hindrances for the trade with living animals, while at the same time trying to attain a satisfactory level of protection for the animals concerned. The EU animal welfare directives are thus characterised by EU: s role as a free trade market often resulting in that market and economic interests have got priority over animal welfare interests. During recent years, however, there is an ongoing change in this respect. Thus the Treaty of Maastricht gave a higher priority to animal welfare within EU legislation and recent revisions of EU animal welfare directives have sharpened the animal welfare demands.

EU can exercise control in the member countries to ensure that the directives are complied with. Such controls have occurred e.g. regarding the animal transport directive. However, in recent years investigations by animal welfare organisations have revealed repeated offences against the animal transport directive indicating that these controls are not as effective as they were intended to be.

Relationship EU and its member states what regards animal welfare directives

The minimum requirements of a EU directive must be applied in a member country. However, there is nothing to prevent a member country raising its requirements provided that such measures do not cause a trade barrier between the EU member states. Some directives, e.g. the directive for animal transports, however, are binding in each detail in each EU member state.

A Swedish experience of animal welfare legislation as an instrument also for health protection

As an example of how animal welfare legislation and health protection are connected the situation in Sweden will be described as this might be of general interest.

Research results regarding impact of environment and management on animal health
In Sweden, like in all other countries, the time after World War II, especially the 1950s, meant the beginning of a radical change from animal husbandry into “animal production”.

The Swedish veterinary practitioners’ annual reports from the 1930s until the 1950s showed a decrease in the annual total morbidity. Sweden was completely free of TB and Brucella in the early 1950s but also other diseases decreased. However, from the second half of the 1950s they reported an increase in total disease morbidity. These facts forced research already in 1960 at the veterinary faculty to clarify the connections between factors in the animal environment, including management, and the animal health and welfare.

Many farmers very soon utilized the research results. Thereby the trend towards adapting the animals to the environment more and more common in Europe in the 1960s was broken in Sweden. Instead a development to adapt the environment to the basic biological needs of the animals started.

**Disease prevention through animal welfare law**

However, of great importance for why the development in Sweden was radically otherwise than in all other European countries was also a change in the animal welfare legislation. The Swedish parliament in 1970 decided, after a proposal from the government, that no new- or rebuilding of animal housing was allowed until the plans and drawings had been scrutinised and appointed by for this purpose specially educated veterinarians. The purpose was to avoid “building in” such risk factors for disease, which could be discovered by this scrutiny. This first caused some noise from firms selling equipment to farmers and from some agricultural engineers but as the Farmers’ Union supported this veterinary scrutiny for prevention of man made diseases it successively was accepted by all concerned.

In its prominent paragraph the Swedish law decrees ”animals shall be protected from unnecessary suffering and disease. The reason for these two last words is to get rid of methods in breeding or keeping animals, which, although they might be widespread and commonly used, cause considerable disease incidences or create disease risks. This stipulation is an old demand from the Swedish Veterinary Association.

The Swedish law underlines the need of preserving the animal health and promote natural behaviour in the following formulation: “Animals ... shall be kept and handled ... in such a way as to promote their health and allow natural behaviour”.

These two paragraphs have given the government the possibility in the animal ordinance to ban cages for egg laying hens, permanent confinement of sows, use of electrical so called cow trainers, debeaking of poultry, and other methods which can cause animal injury, disease or suffering. The two paragraphs have also made it possible to demand that cows must be kept on pasture in the summer, to decree that animal houses must have natural light through windows or otherwise, etc. This has resulted in improved animal health.

The government also has issued regulations that all plans and drawings for animal premises must be scrutinised from animal health and welfare point of view by the county veterinarians who for this purpose have got special education. This scrutiny procedure was introduced in Sweden in 1970. It was combined with a testing of new technique from animal health and welfare point of view. Both these procedures, but to greatest extent the first one, have caused a canalisation of the technical development in for the animal health and animal welfare positive direction. Sweden is the only country to have the first mentioned scrutiny, but the testing of new technique are introduced in the Swiss and the Dutch legislation since 1980 respectively 1994.

**Results for animal and human health of the animal welfare legislation**
As a result of a parliamentary decision in 1985 antibiotics is not allowed as growth promoters and the Swedish government has totally banned use of hormones to animals for increase of performances. The ban on antibiotics as feed promoters is not formally associated with the animal welfare law but with the animal feed law, although it has more to do with animal health than with feed. This ban has in practice great animal health and welfare implications. However, without the farmers’ acceptance and use of the above-mentioned research results and the veterinary scrutiny of all plans for animal housing since 1970 it had been difficult to get this ban. The Swedish experiences since the feed antibiotic ban in 1985 shows that animal production can be highly effective without the constant use of an "umbrella" of antibiotics. And that ban on feed additives means a reduction in total use of antibiotics ((Wierup et al 1987; Björnerot et al 1996). The ban means less risk for antibiotic resistance problems in humane and veterinary medicine. It is also important that the consumers can be confident that the food they consume comes from animals well treated and not given antibiotics in order to compensate for a bad environment or management.

Animal welfare regulations are often said to imply extra costs for the farmers. However, a study has shown (Ekesbo & Lund 1994a, 1994b) that animal welfare rules, aiming at preserving the animals' health and welfare, are cost efficient. However, they must be based on scientific evidence and practical experience regarding disease and injury incidences associated with environmental factors.

Concluding remarks - The new role of animal welfare legislation

The following concluding remarks are based on my experience from regular clinical practise on farm animals since 1953 and of scientific research in Animal Hygiene since 1960.

The radical changes in animal husbandry since the 1950s, greater than in any known limited period in the mutual history of man and farm animals, have implied that animal welfare legislation has got a much more wide and important role than earlier. However, in order to thoroughly understand this, it is necessary to view animal husbandry in a much more holistic way than most people usually do.

It is necessary to realise that the animal welfare rules are the only instrument for protecting farm animals against the most common diseases, namely those caused by factors in the environment or the management, and which cause the great majority of to-days farm animal diseases. This means that modern animal welfare legislation, if carefully formulated and based on scientific evidence and practical experience, is also a farm animal health law.

However, such legislation is also the only instrument for the society to protect not only the health and welfare of individual animal or group of animals, but also to protect the microbiology environment against threats through unethical and unbiological factors and management measures which can exist in modern animal production. Thus, these rules have gradually received a broader ethical importance than is generally perceived as they also diminishes the risk for human diseases.

I hope we will in Europe be able to avoid the labelling of food, warning for the risks of microbiological infections like salmonella and campylobacter. Such labelling is common in several of the states in the US.

Furthermore, it is shown that animal welfare legislation besides its ethical effect also implies economical advantages for both animal husbandry and for society.

For the future, animal welfare rules therefore will, and must, play a much more prominent role than until now. However, only if they are carefully formulated and based on scientific evidence and practical experience.
A further very important issue: An animal welfare law, and ordinance, can look very nice from animal welfare point of view. But if it is not followed by detailed rules, which really fulfils the principles, it is without any real effect! And, the society must control that its citizens respect and comply with the rules.

References