Appendix 4

Report of the
FAO-EUFMD/EC/OIE Tripartite Group Meeting on the Balkans
held in Athens, Greece on Friday, 25 October 2002

Keith Sumption, Secretary EUFMD
Animal Health Service, FAO

Introduction
The Chairman of the EUFMD, Dr. Leos Celeda, welcomed the participants (see Annex 1) representing the countries involved in the Tripartite, Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey, and the international organisations. He thanked Dr Stylas, Director General of the Veterinary Services of Greece, for representing the OIE at the meeting, and Dr Alf Füssel for representing the European Commission. He emphasised that the Tripartite gives a good opportunity for discussion of important technical items and the exchange of information was very valuable for disease control in the region. He reminded the participants of the importance of FMD to the region and the continuous threat that it poses to Europe, and that for this reason FMD would again form the main part of the meeting. He then handed the floor to Dr Stylas, who welcomed the participants to Athens on behalf of the Veterinary Services of Greece. He indicated that the Tripartite had become an institution in the region and that it was a matter of great pride and pleasure to record the progress made through the Tripartite, and again to meet with the heads of the Veterinary Services from the region to exchange information in such an open and friendly manner. He reminded the participants of the impact of the 2001 FMD epidemic in Europe in terms of economic and social impact, and that vigilance should be maintained to guard against such a recurrence. In the light of recent history, international organisations should support efforts at the regional level for prompt control of FMD and the other major epizootics. He welcomed the new Secretary of the EUFMD, Dr Keith Sumption, to the meeting and wished him well with the tasks involved in undertaking the important work required over the months and years ahead. He recorded that he had been requested by OIE to represent them at the meeting, and that Dr D Panagiotatos would represent Greece.

The Chairman of the EUFMD, Dr. Leos Celeda, thanked the Ministry of Agriculture, Greece, for having accepted to organise and host the meeting. He then presented the provisional agenda (Annex 2) which was adopted. The meeting included two parts, the first on FMD and the second on Bluetongue and other epizootic diseases.

PART I: REPORT ON FMD

Item 1: FMD situation and control in Turkey
The country report for Turkey was presented by Dr Musa Arik. In 2002, up to the end of September, three serotypes were considered to be circulating although outbreaks caused by type Asia-1 had not been recorded since April 2002. There had been 34 outbreaks in this period, of which 19 were due to type O, 13 due to type A and 2 due to type Asia-1 (Table 1). At the time of the report five outbreaks were considered active, in five Provinces. Three of these are in Eastern Anatolia (in Erzurum, Kars, and Siirt provinces), and two in Central Anatolia (Nevşehir and Nigde Provinces). No outbreak has been reported in Thrace region since June 2001.
All of the FMDV isolates antigenically characterised which originated from outbreaks in 2002 were found to have a good antigenic relationship to vaccine strains used in Turkey. Fourteen virus isolates had been characterised at the genetic level; type A viruses were closely related to A/Iran/96 group, and type O viruses were related to O Manisa, as previously found. Ten positive samples had been sent to Pirbright for characterisation.

Table 1. FMD outbreaks in Turkey in 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Type O</th>
<th>Type A</th>
<th>Type Asia-1</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
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<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The control of illegal animal movement had been improved in recent years through increase in the penalties for those involved in illegal animal movements. These include a 3 month removal of the vehicle license in the case of those found to be carrying animals without the correct licenses. The changes associated with Law 3285 have had a high public profile and this has been beneficial for control. A high amount of effort had been required in public relations when the law was introduced and enforced. Strict control measures are performed at the borders working with the co-ordination of the relevant authorities.

Identification of all bovine animals in Turkey was started in September 2001, and all 81 provincial directorates and most district directorates have internet connections and e-mail addresses to enable connection to the central database. About 7 million cattle out of the 10 million bovines in the country had been tagged and registered. About 4.4 million cattle and approximately 830,000 bovine animal holdings have been recorded into the database.

The quality and quantity of FMD vaccine has improved in the last two years through changes in the vaccine production unit of the SAP institute, and in the testing of every batch of vaccine in the field for herd immunity levels. The quantity of vaccine produced was reported as sufficient to cover the needs of the spring and autumn campaign. A total of 21,950,000 monovalent doses of FMD vaccine had been produced so far in 2002. The vaccination programme in 2002 aimed at vaccination of at least 80% of all large ruminants, with trivalent FMD vaccine (O1 Manisa, A Aydin 98 (Iran 96), and Asia-1) produced by the SAP Institute Ankara, and mass vaccination twice per year for large ruminants over the country, and once per year for small ruminants in Thrace and Marmara region. Ring vaccination would be used around outbreaks, and strategic vaccination in the Black Sea region. The spring vaccination was carried out in March and April 2002, and 97% of cattle (range 86% to 107% of estimated cattle population) and 73% of small ruminants (range 58% to 82%) were vaccinated in Thrace region, and 70% of cattle in Anatolia. The spring campaign in Thrace used vaccine produced in Turkey. The autumn campaign would draw from the 683,000 doses of trivalent vaccine
donated by the EC through EUFMD which were surplus to the requirements in 2001, as reported in the 67th Session of the EUFMD executive committee meeting in April. The autumn campaign in Thrace would require about 394,971 doses of vaccine from the residual 683,000 doses of trivalent vaccine supplied by EC/EUFMD.

The meeting debated the usage over several campaigns of the supply of 1.3 million doses of vaccine by EC/EUFMD which had been intended for a limited vaccination campaign. One reason was that the twice yearly vaccination of small ruminants had been discontinued after difficulties with farmer compliance, over the issue of vaccination of pregnant animals. The meeting agreed that achieving a vaccination cover of 97% in cattle in Thrace was a major achievement. The proposed plan of Turkey to vaccinate small ruminants in the spring campaigns was supported and a view was expressed that a very high vaccination coverage once per year would be more important than a lower level achieved in twice yearly campaigns. However the outstanding role of small ruminants in transmission must be kept in mind and the issue of vaccination of small ruminants needs clarification. The meeting considered the major improvements made over the past 7 years to be of great importance in FMD control and that this represented a successful role for the Tripartite group.

In relation to the country needs, the Turkish representative considered vaccine supply was adequate for the country needs in 2003, including in Thrace, but if in future national small ruminant vaccination was required, more vaccine would be required. Although FMD vaccine produced by Bayer was available and could be used, it was more expensive and therefore not the vaccine of choice to the veterinarians; in 2003 supply of vaccine from the SAP Institute should meet all the predicted programme needs. The FMD vaccine produced by Vetal was not currently allowed to be used, and could not be allowed until authorised by the Turkish authorities. The issue of QC of the batch of FMD vaccine intended for use in 2003 was discussed; a batch had been submitted to Pirbright six months before the meeting and the results of QC tests should be available by the end of January 2003. If unsatisfactory, purchase of vaccine on the open market may be required, but the time period to arrange supply and delivery would be short. The meeting requested that results from the testing be made available as soon as possible to ensure decisions on vaccine use could be made in sufficient time. The meeting agreed that vaccine QC remained an extremely important issue and that it hoped that an important milestone in FMD control in the region would soon be reached through independent QC at the Bornova facility.

The proposal of Turkey was welcomed by the meeting to determine levels of immunity in cattle and small ruminants in Thrace after vaccination in the spring campaign 2003, and following the plan prepared by Michael Thrusfield of Edinburgh University after meetings with EUFMD and Turkish representatives in Izmir in September. Dr Sumption proposed that the programme to be used should be, in principle, followed after every vaccination in Thrace as a management tool to determine the level of immunity in the population after vaccination. This was strongly supported by the representative of the EC who indicated that he wished to see routine use of vaccination followed by routine use of serology, and the Tripartite should be kept informed of the results of each round of vaccination upon level of herd immunity. The meeting agreed that to be of use to the authorities in Turkey and elsewhere, results from each vaccination campaign would be needed within a short time of that campaign having been conducted. The proposal of Turkey to collect 5,000 sera to determine herd immunity in Thrace, and also to test for antibodies to NSPs would require at least 20,000 tests, and would require strengthening of capacity to ensure timely reporting of results and to undertake other serology, for example in future in other parts of Turkey. The importance of strengthening
sero-diagnostic capacity was strongly supported by the meeting. The cost of equipment required would be identified by Turkey and submitted to EUFMD. Dr Füssel strongly supported further work with NSP ELISA tests which would clarify their applicability and use and that Thrace could be considered a good situation in which to evaluate their use.

Item 2: FMD surveillance in Greece
The country report was given by Dr Panagiotatros who explained that in late 2000 Greece implemented a new and comprehensive Contingency Plan for combating FMD which, among other things, enhanced disease awareness in the field and provided clear instructions on procedures to be followed for confirming or refuting suspicions of FMD. Between 1 January and 23 October 2002, 12 clinical suspicions were reported in 8 different Prefectures, which were widely dispersed in the country; 10 were in cattle and 2 in sheep and goats. The spatial distribution indicated uniformly high awareness across the country. All samples returned negative test results.

In 2002 tests for antibodies to type O1 were conducted on 170 cattle, 130 small ruminants and 267 pigs, respectively on animals imported through Border Inspections Posts from third countries, on a random, infrequent and non-discriminatory basis. All returned negative results. Furthermore tests on 257 cattle, 150 small ruminants and 297 pigs which were imported from EU member states returned negative results.

He reported with regret that in 2002 Greece had had to suspend the active surveillance ("Evros") programme in areas at risk, and as a substitute, introduced a pre-movement testing regime for animals moving off areas exposed to higher risk. The new regime involves clinical inspection and serological tests for detection of antibodies against types A22, O1, Asia-1 and SAT, on a random sample of all outgoing consignments. A total of 11,941 samples were collected to 23/10/2002, and all tests conducted returned negative results.

In discussion it was reported that less than 1% of samples give titres in the “suspicious” category, and in this case the animals are re-sampled and tested. The LPBE was used and it was not considered a problem to use the A22 antigen in testing for antibodies which would be expected to be induced by vaccination/circulation of virus related to A Aydin98(Iran96). Despite the additional work, testing for antibodies to structural proteins was seen as potentially more informative than for NSPs since it would assist detection of entry of vaccinated animals.

Item 3: FMD surveillance in Bulgaria
Dr Ivanov presented the country report for Bulgaria. In 2002 an FMD surveillance programme was implemented that involved the following; a clinical inspection service for cattle in the 10 km area bordering Turkey; control of movement and slaughter of animals from this 10 km zone; control of grazing and watering of animals in the 10 km strip in regions of Burgas, Yambol, Haskovo alongside the border with Turkey; monthly serologic surveillance of small ruminants bred in and around the border settlements in the border zones previously detailed, and in Kardgali administrative region; control on populations of wild ruminants. Tests for antibodies to NSP (Intervet-Bomelli kit) were conducted collected through the active surveillance programme and none returned positive results. The results for 660 small ruminant tests were presented; six tests per serum were used and no positive results were found. Tests for NSP antibodies were used since small ruminants are ear-tagged in this region and therefore illegally imported animals could be identified. As animals were
repeatedly sampled the scheme operated as a “sentinel” scheme rather than a random survey. A request was made for assistance in the supply of ELISA test kits for surveillance for the next year, and in the case of any outbreak supplies of vaccine would be required. Dr Sumption suggested that the basis of the sampling strategy should factor in the test performance of the NSP kits. It was agreed that Bulgaria should make a proposal to EUFMD which outlined its requirements for support for surveillance.

**Item 4: Strategy and support for FMD control in the Region**

Dr Sumption presented a draft of the framework paper he had written for the south-eastern Europe region for the control of FMD, for incorporation into the FAO/OIE Framework for a Global Plan of Action (GpOA) on the Control of Trans-boundary Animal Diseases. It was agreed that comments on the paper should be supplied to EUFMD by 31 October since meetings on the way ahead for the GpOA are scheduled for 4-6 November at the OIE in Paris.

**Item 5: TCP programmes in the region**

Turkey reported on their involvement in FAO TCP/RER/0066, Emergency Control of Trans-boundary animal diseases of livestock in Southern and Eastern Europe. Turkey and Bulgaria were involved, as well as Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Moldova, and Romania. The TCP had involved three workshops, two of which were held in Turkey, and a final national co-ordinators meeting in Skopje, Macedonia. The TCP was discussed in relation to the proposed TCP involving Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey on Control and Prevention of FMD and other exotic diseases in Thrace region. The proposal had been evaluated in FAO and was considered potentially eligible for funding provided that the possible overlap in objectives with the overlap with TCP/RER/0066 were addressed. The three countries represented at the meeting considered that the proposed activities of the TCP were still very necessary and should not be changed, and the technical gaps to be addressed were not addressed under TCP/RER/0066. Dr Sumption agreed to make minor changes to the formulation of the proposal on behalf of the three countries concerned, and would work on this with urgency.

**Item 6: Report of the Bulgaria workshop on FMD and Bluetongue, 18-22 March 2002**

Dr Celeda reported on this item. The report of the Workshop presented at the 67th Session of the Executive Committee was circulated in advance and the need for future workshops discussed. The meeting agreed that workshops on accreditation procedures, and routine in-house quality control of FMD diagnostic test performance would be useful, not simply for the three countries but also in other countries in the region. The Secretary agreed to carry this forward through discussions with the Chairman of the Research Group of the EUFMD.

**Item 7: Report on the Expert Mission to Iran, 5-15 October 2002**

Dr Sumption circulated the preliminary findings of the mission, and presented a brief report on the item, for information. The mission was of relevance to the Tripartite in that surveillance in Iran presented an important opportunity to identify emergent serotypes or types of FMDV before entry into Turkey. The future assistance and involvement of Turkey in developing surveillance capacity in the region was considered important by the Mission team.

**Item 8: Report on the Research group meeting in Çesme, Izmir, Turkey**

Dr Sumption presented a short report and recorded his appreciation to the Turkish Government for the excellent organisation of the Session of the EUFMD Research Group. The main item of relevance had already been raised under Item 6, namely the suggestion from the Closed Meeting of the Session that workshops on new approaches to management of
routine test performance in FMD diagnostic laboratories, and no further discussion was needed.

PART II: BLUETONGUE AND OTHER DISEASES

Item 1: Information on the current epizootiological situation, surveillance and control of Bluetongue

Bulgaria reported on the surveillance programme implemented in 2002. This involves testing for antibodies to BT of 10 cattle and 10 goats sampled once per month in each of the selected settlements alongside the southern border of Bulgaria, and along the western border. Sentinel sites along the western border are located 40 km inside the border. Serologic positives were detected using the VRMD ELISA kit, on 26th August 2002, among animals in settlements located close to the border with Greece. No clinical signs were detected. Emergency measures were taken including enhanced serologic testing and designation of new indicator animals in settlements 35-40 km inland. There was no evidence of presence of Culicoides imicola associated with the locations where the sero-conversions were observed.

Greece presented a report on the surveillance for BT in 2002 following outbreaks associated with 4 serotypes (4,9,16) in 2001; type 1 had been detected on serologic grounds only. Sampling of fifty sentinels, placed in five groups, in each of the affected areas in 2001, was undertaken on a routine basis, and 2486 samples had been tested with negative results. There had been no evidence for BT anywhere in Greece in 2002. The severe winter weather in early 2002 may have contributed to the control of infection through reducing the risk of overwintering. The main old world vector, C. imicola, is found in Greece to 40°30’ north, along the Aegean coast. By the end of the year if no disease or evidence of infection had been detected Greece would be in a position to claim freedom from disease after one and half years of absence of BT.

In their presentation Turkey reported that BT cases had not been reported since August 2000, at Izmir; types identified as involved in outbreaks up to and including 2000 were 4, 9 and 16. There were currently 620,000 doses of type 4 vaccine in the national vaccine stock, and 290,000 sheep were vaccinated to the end of September 2002.

Item 2: Other exotic diseases

In 2002 Bulgaria carried out mass serological screening for African Horse Sickness in equidae bred in settlements located near national borders. Test results, using the Ingenasa Co ELISA on samples collected from the 1,543 animals were negative.

In Greece two suspensions of PPR in sheep had been investigated and samples tested, and 54 suspicions of Sheep and Goat Pox (SGP); all samples had returned negative results. Twelve thousand and thirty one ovine samples had been tested for antibodies to PPRV, and 8389 for SGP, again with negative results, from sampling in areas considered high risk. From horses 4500 samples were tested for antibodies to AHS with negative results.

In Turkey in 2002 six outbreaks of PPR were reported, with 110 deaths in 253 clinical cases; two outbreaks were considered active in south-eastern Anatolia at the time of report. Since May 2002, production of a homologous PPR vaccine had occurred; 300,000 doses had been produced and 215,000 animals vaccinated until the end of September 2002. Vaccination in Thrace might occur if there was demand from veterinarians and the meeting considered it
very important that Turkey should use of PPR vaccination is controlled and the authorities should know the exact locations and flocks in which it is used. Sheep and goat pox was reported as endemic in Anatolia in 2002, with 16 outbreaks to end of the September 2002, with 51 deaths in 1091 cases. One and half million doses of SGP vaccine were applied in 2002, produced by the Pendik Institute, but a higher level of vaccination is actually the case since one a SGP vaccine is also supplied by a private company. Tests conducted for sero-surveillance for rinderpest, in animals born following the end of vaccination, were negative.

In discussion, Greece indicated it was conducting active surveillance in horses for West Nile virus (WNV) and positives were occasionally detected. Dr Ivanov considered the disease to be an emerging one and Bulgaria had an outbreak in 1998, and that the Tripartite group should monitor the situation.

Any other business
Turkey offered to host the next meeting of the Tripartite at the SAP Institute and the offer was received with gratitude by the meeting. The Chairman then closed the meeting, and thanked all the participants for their contributions and considered it had been a most useful meeting and conducted in a very open and constructive manner. Dr Sumption proposed a vote of thanks for the hosts for the exemplary hospitality, and in particular to Dr Panagiotatos for the practical arrangements and for selection of an excellent choice of venue.
FAO-EUFMD/EC/OIE Tripartite Group Meeting on the Balkans held in Athens, Greece, on Friday 25th October 2002

Venue: Hotel Armonia

Provisional Agenda
Italics indicate Country/Institution requested to make a presentation

Part I: FMD

Item 1
FMD situation in Turkey
Vaccination in Turkey
Vaccination programme in Thrace
Sero-surveillance in Thrace

Item 2
FMD surveillance in Greece

Item 3
FMD surveillance in Bulgaria

Item 4
Strategy and support for FMD control in the Region

Item 5
TCP programmes in the region:
TCP/RER/0066; Emergency Control of Trans-boundary Diseases of Livestock in Southern and Eastern Europe
Progress of TCP application (Bulgaria/Greece/Turkey)

Item 6
Report of the Bulgaria workshop on FMD and Bluetongue, 18-22 March 2002

Item 7
Report on the Expert Mission to Iran, 5-15th October

Item 8
Report on the Research group meeting in Cesme, Turkey

PART II: Bluetongue and other exotic diseases

Item 1
Information on the current epizootiological situation, surveillance and control of BT

Item 2
Situation of other exotic diseases in the region
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