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europaean commission for the  
control of foot-and-mouth disease

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# Report on FAO-EuFMD/EC/OIE Tripartite Meeting on control of FMD and other exotic diseases in the Southern Balkans

A meeting of the FAO- EuFMD/EC/OIE Tripartite on the Control of FMD and other exotic diseases in the Southern Balkans was held in Sofia, Bulgaria, on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2019, with the participation of representatives from the State Veterinary Services of Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, and from the EuFMD, EC and OIE

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**17<sup>th</sup> January 2019**

**Venue: Sofia, Bulgaria**

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## Introduction

A meeting of the FAO-EuFMD/EC/OIE Tripartite on the Control of FMD and other exotic diseases in the Southern Balkans was held in Sofia, Bulgaria, on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, with the participation of representatives from the State Veterinary Services of Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey and from the EC, EuFMD and OIE (see **Appendix 1** for Agenda and **Appendix 2** for list of participants).

The **main objectives** of the meeting were to:

- Summarize the activities and outcomes of the EuFMD's Component 1.3 (THRACE);
- Review and discuss the epidemiological situation, and the control measures for Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD), Sheep and Goat Pox (SGP), Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR), Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD) and similar transboundary animal diseases (TADs) in the three countries;
- To scope the potential for synergy between EuFMD Balkans and Thrace Programmes including diagnostic networking and support, early warning surveillance, and simulation exercises.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Conclusions

1. The representatives of the three veterinary services and of OIE, EC and EuFMD, discussed and endorsed the EuFMD Workplan 2017-19 for Component 1.3 THRACE, as developed and agreed with the Management Committee at their meeting on the 16<sup>th</sup> January.
2. The THRACE surveillance programme, implemented as part of the EC funded activities and managed by EuFMD, provided high (above 94%) level of confidence in the absence of circulating FMDV in the European part of Turkey and the neighbouring areas of Greece and Bulgaria.
3. The continuous active surveillance program of activities under the THRACE Component will be conducted by the three countries and continue without interruptions until the end of Phase IV funding cycle in September 2019. By that time, a decision should have been made on the continuity of the programme under Phase V, for implementation in October 2019.
4. There were no reported SGP outbreaks in Thrace region during 2018. The last SGP outbreak in Greece was reported at Island Lesbos in January 2018. However, SGP remains a potential threat for the area as Turkey continues to experience new SGP outbreaks in the coastal regions bordering the Greek Islands.
5. PPR vaccination in Turkish Thrace was re-introduced as a response to the PPR outbreaks reported in Bulgaria in 2018. Bulgarian experience with PPR outbreaks shows that the clinical manifestation of the disease can differ significantly from text book descriptions and pose a challenge for reporting and diagnosis, and therefore serious consideration is needed on how to improve the detection of PPR cases.

6. The results of the PPR post-vaccination serology study conducted on small ruminants originating from Turkish Thrace, were satisfactory and a high percentage of seroconversion was demonstrated in all regions included in the study.
7. The continuity of the PPR vaccination programme in Turkish Thrace in 2019 was not clear and the Tripartite requests the Turkish authorities to communicate its decision on this at the earliest opportunity.
8. Bulgaria and Greece will continue with the mass vaccination campaign for LSD on the whole territory in 2019, using homologous LSD vaccine. The lack of reported cases in western Anatolia in 2018 is also a positive situation supporting the potential for cessation of vaccination in the European territories. The preparation of an exit strategies from vaccination is needed, covering issues such as risk based surveillance after vaccination, diagnostic preparedness in the region, and exercises to test response.
9. The THRACE surveillance system can be used as an example for a coordinated regional surveillance programmes for different TADs in the wider Balkan region. The programme of surveillance can be adapted on the basis of risk of incursion. The structure used in the Balkans and THRACE Components, of a regular Management Meeting for programme and logistics and with use of CVO meetings (Tripartite, Executive or at the OIE) for higher level agreement, were considered to be a good model.
10. Rapid supply of diagnostic reagents during the early stages of FMD or similar TAD epidemics would be a serious problem for the countries. This could have a negative impact on the country's emergency response capacity due to the inability to ensure rapid confirmation of all new outbreaks".

## **Recommendations**

1. That a joint simulation exercise be organized with participants from the three countries in June 2019, under the THRACE Component;
2. That a workshop be organized to adapt the Cameron model and optimize the surveillance system for FMD, LSD, PPR and SGP, as part of the design of the programme for the next programme (2019-2023);
3. To hold the next EuFMD Component 1.3 management meeting in July 2019, Athens, Greece, and combine this with the Component 1.4 (Balkans) management meeting. The better integration between Balkans and THRACE components is recommended in order to improve both the early detection of TADS across the region but also to better prepare for region responses, such as may be needed after cessation of LSD vaccination.
4. To further progress the design of diagnostic reagent supply chain ("bank") for FMD and similar diseases, to support the early diagnostic response in crisis.

## Acknowledgements

The Bulgarian Food Safety Agency (BFSA), is gratefully acknowledged for hosting the Meeting.

The Agenda of the Meeting is given in Appendix 1.

The first Session was chaired by Keith Sumption (EuFMD), who welcomed the participants to the first meeting of 2019 and thanked the host, Dr Damyan Iliev, BFSA for the kind welcome and hospitality that had been generously extended to all. He reminded the meeting of the long history of the Tripartite meeting and its importance to co-ordinate efforts which had been successful in limiting the spread of FMD and other diseases, since the early 1960s. The good co-operation seen had assisted with control of LSD, as Turkey had hosted training on natural cases that had assisted Greece and Bulgaria in developing experience and messages for farmer awareness.

Sharing information between the countries on an urgent basis, is an expectation of the agreement between the three countries. The annual meeting assists to also share information on the planned control measures in each country, particularly the upcoming vaccination programmes.

Dr Füssel, EC, reminded the meeting that the THRACE surveillance programme was initiated after the 2011 epidemic of FMD.

## THRACE programme workplan for 2019

Daniel Donachie (EuFMD) presented a summary on the activities of Component 1.3. The surveillance report for the last cycle proved high confidence level in the absence of circulating FMDV in the Thrace region for the reporting period (see **Appendix 3**). The presentation initiated discussion on surveillance programmes for other TADs and participants agreed that adaptation of the Cameron Model for other diseases would be beneficial. A workshop to integrate these diseases and optimize an overall “FAST” surveillance system was proposed and accepted.

The conclusions of the Disease Reporting Workshop held in Bulgaria in May 2018 were discussed. It was agreed that it would be very useful to apply the workshop methodology in Greece and Turkey to better understand reporting issues and potential problems. Educative webinars for veterinarians and farmers were suggested as a useful tool that can contribute towards increased sensitivity of disease reporting system.

The proposal for a joint simulation exercise in the Thrace region and the initial exercise plan were accepted by all participants. Representatives of Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey agreed to contribute in further exercise conceptualization and realization. New study proposal for non-invasive wild boar sampling in Anatolia was described. It was agreed that wild-boar studies are very important to better understand their role in the disease epidemiology, and that there is a continued need for such studies.

# PPR, FMD and Similar TADS surveillance and control in Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey

## *Country Presentations*

### **Situation in Bulgaria**

Dr Tsviatko Alexandrov and Dr Aleksandra Miteva gave the country presentation on behalf of Bulgaria (see **Appendix 4** for the presentation). The clinical and serological surveillance activities in the Thrace region have continued. 6747 animals were clinically examined and 1188 animals were serologically tested during the last quarter in 2018. Continued work on improving awareness and reporting system by the farmers has been suggested. Bulgaria has an approved co-financing program funded by European Commission on protective measures against transboundary animal diseases (TADs) for 2018, and care has been taken to ensure no overlap between the programme and THRACE activities.

Extensive active surveillance activities for PPR were undertaken in the protection and surveillance zones following the PPR outbreaks in June and July 2018. Bulgaria reported 6 outbreaks in total; one of the secondary PPR outbreaks was in the Thrace region and was detected under the THRACE programme. The last PPR outbreak was reported in July 2018 and a dossier to regain the PPR free status is in preparation.

During 2018, 28 outbreaks of HPAI H5N8 were detected in poultry, affecting more than 1 million poultry in six regions. Enhanced active surveillance (serological and virological) and laboratory results confirmed persistence of the H5N8 HPAI virus in the country, without new introductions by wild birds. ASF outbreaks were reported for the first time in the country in September 2018. There has been four outbreaks in total, three in wild boar and one in a backyard holding. Veterinary measures compliant with EU legislation were immediately implemented, and a large-scale surveillance program has been launched. BFSa conducted extensive awareness campaigns, regular meetings with stakeholders and hunting organizations and biosecurity trainings for commercial farms. The sample submission procedure was reorganized and includes incentives for submission of samples for both, ASF and Trichinella.

## Situation in Turkey

Dr Abdulnaci Bulut reported on the FMD situation in Turkey and the control measures in place to prevent entry into Turkish Thrace (see **Appendix 5**).

### *Foot and mouth disease (FMD)*

Anatolia is still endemic for FMD. Currently, the circulating virus strain is Serotype O (O PanAsiaII); serotype A (Asia/GVII) has not been reported since January 2018, and the last detection of Asia1 was in July 2015. Three hundred and eighty two outbreaks of FMD were reported in 2018 (January-December). Turkish Thrace still remains free with vaccination (since 2010); in 2018, a total number of 63420 animals were clinically examined and 9 855 animals were serologically tested.

Large ruminants are vaccinated twice per year in the whole of Turkey, whereas small ruminants are vaccinated once per year in Thrace and only upon owner's request in Anatolia (except in identified risk zones). The same vaccination policy for Thrace and Anatolia will be implemented in 2019.

Two serosurveillance studies were organized in the second half of 2018: one study to estimate the FMD prevalence in large and small ruminants (Anatolia), and a second study to evaluate the level of protection in vaccinated large ruminants (results are still pending).

### *Lumpy Skin Disease and Sheep and Goat pox (LSD and SGP):*

The last outbreaks of LSD in Turkish Thrace were reported in 2016 in Edirne. However, LSD is still present in other parts of Turkey (Anatolia) and 51 new outbreaks were reported in 2018. Mass vaccination of cattle with heterologous (SGPV) vaccine is performed annually. The vaccines are produced by the Pendik Veterinary Institute and two private companies, and are used at three times a sheep and goat dose. LSD vaccination on whole territory is expected for 2019 as well.

There were 188 SGP outbreaks reported in Turkey in 2018, but none in Thrace. The last SGP outbreak in Turkish Thrace was reported in 2017. However, some of the SGP outbreaks are in the coastal regions bordering the Greek Islands.

Turkey implements SGP vaccination of all small ruminants in the Thrace region, whereas in Anatolia small animals are vaccinated only in the outbreak zones. The same SGP vaccination strategy for Thrace and Anatolia is planned for 2019.

### *Peste des petits ruminants (PPR):*

During 2018, a total of 129 PPR outbreaks were reported in Anatolia, but none in Thrace. The last PPR outbreak in Thrace was in 2013. In response to the PPR outbreaks in Bulgaria, clinical surveillance was launched in areas extending 45km from the Bulgarian border. Preventive vaccination of small ruminants was implemented in the same area. Following PPR vaccination, serological survey was organized to assess the vaccine efficiency. In total, 1730 sheep and 325 goat samples from 5 regions were tested. The percentage of seropositive samples was high in all regions (lowest 88.6%, highest 95.8%).

It is still not decided whether the preventive vaccination in Thrace will be continued in 2019. In Anatolia, annual preventive vaccination will be the same as in 2018, and will cover all newborn and unvaccinated adult small ruminants.

## Situation in Greece

Dr Chrysoula Dile gave the country presentation on behalf of Greece (see Appendix 7). The surveillance activities under the THRACE project have continued, and clinical surveillance activities for FMD are carried out throughout the country through slaughterhouse inspections and via inspections under other control and eradication programs, such as LSD vaccination. The telephone line where farmers can report absence or presence of clinical signs characteristic for FMD and other TADs is still operational and call records are automatically stored in a data base.

Under the THRACE project, 24 792 animals were clinically examined in 2018 (9 053 bovines, 8 660 sheep and 7 079 goats). In addition, 4 606 small ruminants were tested serologically. There were no clinical signs suggestive for FMD in examined animals, and all serum samples tested negative. Small ruminants showing suspected for BT or SGP are serologically tested for FMD and PPR.

In addition to the THRACE activities, Greece is implementing its active surveillance programme that covers 4 exotic diseases (FMD, PPR, SGP and BT). Under this programme, 48 287 bovines and 59 600 small ruminants were clinically examined in 2018; in addition, 12 462 animals were sampled and tested serologically.

After the PPR occurrence in Bulgaria, Greece organized series of activities to increase the preparedness. Greek representatives were also trained through the EuFMD and BTSF activities.

Measures that have been in place following the SGP epizootic on the island of Lesbos (December 2016 – January 2018) were lifted in June 2018, that is 6 months after the last stamping-out. No further SGP outbreaks have been reported since then in the Island of Lesbos and entire Greece.

There were no new LSD outbreaks reported in 2018 and mass vaccination of cattle was in place in all regional units. Greece will continue with LSD vaccination of cattle in 2019.

## Strategic directions for the THRACE programme over next 2-4 years

*Potential for synergy between the Balkans and THRACE programmes: diagnostic networking and support, early warning surveillance, and simulation exercises*

Dr Kiril Krstevski presented the potential options for synergies between the Thrace and the Balkans components and proposed areas for experience exchange through increased networking in the wider Balkan region (see **Appendix 8**). A specific focus has been given on a proposal for setting-up an emergency diagnostic bank, which would aim to cover the acknowledged gap in prompt supply of diagnostic reagents during the early stage of FMD or similar TAD (FAST) introduction, but will also contribute to keeping up active and confident testing procedures. The proposal was welcomed by the participants, however, the EC representative raised concern that EU countries are expected to ensure continuous readiness of the national reference laboratories, thus should not be eligible for the routine supply by EuFMD/EC.

## APPENDIX 1

### AGENDA

	<b>THRACE programme workplan for 2019</b> Chair: EuFMD	
<b>09:00 - 09:30</b>	Short summary on the recent activities and outcomes of the THRACE Component 1.3	<b>EuFMD, Component Manager 1.3</b>
<b>09:30 - 09:45</b>	Report of the Management Meeting held 16 <sup>th</sup> January and plan for the THRACE programme activities in 2019	<b>Rapporteur for the MM</b>
<b>09:45 - 10:15</b>	Discussion and Adoption of the work plan	
<b>10:15 - 10:30</b>	<i>Coffee break</i>	
	<b>PPR, FMD and Similar TADS surveillance and control in Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey</b> Chair: OIE	
<b>10:30 - 10:45</b>	<b>PPR, FMD and Similar TADS</b> (SGP, LSD) surveillance and disease control activities in Bulgaria	Bulgaria
<b>10:45 - 11:00</b>	PPR, FMD and other exotic animal disease (SGP, LSD) surveillance and control measures in Turkish Thrace	Turkey
<b>11:00 - 11:15</b>	<b>PPR, FMD and Similar TADS</b> (SGP, LSD) surveillance and disease control activities in Greece	Greece
<b>11:15 - 11:30</b>	Overall FMD situation and vaccination program in Turkey	Turkey
	<b>Strategic directions for the THRACE programme over next 2-4 years</b> Chair: FAO	
<b>11:30 - 11:45</b>	Potential for synergy between the Balkans and THRACE programmes: diagnostic networking and support, early warning surveillance, and simulation exercises	EuFMD/Kiril Krstevski
<b>11:45 - 12:15</b>	Viewpoints and discussion on gaps to be addressed and priorities for FAST diseases in Balkans/Thrace over next 2-4 years	Viewpoint of Greece Viewpoint of Turkey Viewpoint of Bulgaria
<b>12:15 - 12:30</b>	Meeting Recap and Closing Remarks	<b>All</b>
<b>12:30 - 14:00</b>	<i>Lunch</i>	

## APPENDIX 2

### LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

<b>Name</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Email</b>
Keith Sumption	EuFMD	<a href="mailto:Keith.Sumption@fao.org">Keith.Sumption@fao.org</a>
Daniel Donachie	EuFMD	<a href="mailto:Daniel.Donachie@fao.org">Daniel.Donachie@fao.org</a>
Kiril Krstevski	EuFMD	<a href="mailto:Kiril.Krstevski@fao.org">Kiril.Krstevski@fao.org</a>
Alf-Eckbert Füssel	EC (DG SANTE)	<a href="mailto:Alf-Eckbert.Fuessel@ec.europa.eu">Alf-Eckbert.Fuessel@ec.europa.eu</a>
Fabien Schneegans	OIE	<a href="mailto:f.schneegans@oie.int">f.schneegans@oie.int</a>
Damyan Iliev	Bulgarian Food Safety Agency	<a href="mailto:damyan.iliev@gmail.com">damyan.iliev@gmail.com</a>
Tsviatko Alexandrov	Bulgarian Food Safety Agency	<a href="mailto:t_alexandrov@bfsa.bg">t_alexandrov@bfsa.bg</a>
Georgi Chobanov	Bulgarian Food Safety Agency	<a href="mailto:georgi_chobanov@yahoo.com">georgi_chobanov@yahoo.com</a>
Aleksandra Miteva	Bulgarian Food Safety Agency	<a href="mailto:a_miteva@bfsa.bg">a_miteva@bfsa.bg</a>
Abdulnaci Bulut	Sap Institute, Turkey	<a href="mailto:abdulnaci.bulut@tarim.gov.tr">abdulnaci.bulut@tarim.gov.tr</a>
Chrysoula Dile	Greek Animal Health Directorate	<a href="mailto:chdile@minagric.gr">chdile@minagric.gr</a>