



FAO/OIE/EC Tripartite meeting on control of Foot-and-Mouth Disease and other exotic diseases in the southern Balkans

**Mytilene, Island of Lesbos, Greece
30th October 2008**

Introduction

A meeting of the FAO/OIE/EC Tripartite on control of Foot-and-Mouth Disease and other exotic diseases in the southern Balkans was convened on the 30th October 2008 at Mytilene, Lesbos, Greece. The meeting was attended by delegates of south eastern Balkan countries of Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Turkey. The EC (DG-SANCO) was represented by Dr Fuessel, and the OIE by Professor Nikola Belev, OIE Regional Representative for Europe, and was chaired by the EUFMD Secretary, Keith Sumption.

The Meeting was opened by Dr Batziliotis, CVO of the Republic of Greece, who reminded the participants of the high impact of exotic animal diseases in the region, and of the recent sheep and goat pox outbreak in Lesbos in 2007. He indicated that Greece highly appreciated the efforts of Turkey to control FMD, and in particular the high and continuous immunity of the ruminant population in eastern Thrace. He thanked the organizations and countries present for the close and intense co-operation with Turkey in disease control, and especially for the funding of the major FMD control project by the EU from early 2008.

Opening remarks then followed from Professor Belev, OIE, who emphasized the continued importance of the meeting for liaison and confidence building between veterinary services in the region, and Dr Fuessel, European Commission, who indicated the support of the Commission for the inclusion of Albania and Serbia and other additional southern Balkan countries to the meeting.

On behalf of the FAO, Dr Sumption thanked the Government of Greece and the Prefecture of Lesbos for the offer to host the 2008 meeting and to the participants for their continued commitment to co-operation in animal disease control in the southern Balkans.

The list of participants is given in Appendix 1.

Recommendations of the 2008 FAO/EC/OIE Tripartite Meeting on Control of FMD and other exotic diseases in the Southern Balkans:

1. The future meetings on control of FMD and other exotic diseases in the Southern Balkans should continue between the national competent authorities of Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey, and the international Tripartite of FAO, OIE and EC, but invitations should be extended to include Albania, FYROM, Kosovo and Serbia in 2009.

Relating mainly to control of FMD:

2. The GDPC is strongly encouraged to enforce the planned control measures relating to the kurban/bayram festival. In particular, the number of unsold animals at markets should be recorded and the subsequent disposal or movement of these animals to quarantine should be documented and reported to future meetings.
3. The GDPC should report epidemiologically significant new FMDV genotypes, defined as > 2% genotypic difference (in sequence coding for VP1) from previous FMDV recorded in the country.
4. There should be a regular sharing of laboratory findings by teleconference of the FMD laboratory senior staff at least every 3 months, involving the FMD NRLs of Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria, and the WRL/CRL Pirbright and the EuFMD Commission Secretary.
5. Turkey should continue to prioritize the vaccination program in Thrace region, aiming at full coverage and continuous immunity of large and small ruminants against FMD in Thrace region, as part of the action required to progress towards the standards required to gain the OIE status of freedom from FMD with vaccination.
6. A training workshop, with participation of regional experts, should be held after the planned evaluation of the rapid portable PCR apparatus (Smith's Bioseq) and the Svanova lateral flow device in Turkey.

On surveillance and disease notification in Thrace region

7. The laboratory tests and analysis following the sero-surveillance in Turkish Thrace region and in Anatolia conducted in 2008 should be completed in advance of the 2009 spring vaccination campaigns. A workshop to analyze results and identify any changes required for the 2009 surveys is recommended, and make use in the epidemiological expertise of the EUFMD Standing Technical Committee.

On control of PPR and Sheep and Goat pox

The Turkish authorities are recommended to:

8. report ANY occurrence of PPR, SGP and BT, or other disease not normally present in Thrace region, as an emergency report within 24 hours, to the neighbouring countries (Greece and Bulgaria), as well as through ADNS to the EC and to the OIE.
9. Maintain in 2009 the policy of prevention of PPR through MASS VACCINATION, and eradication of PPR infection if detected in Thrace region, and to establish the necessary control on animal movements so to prevent the further entry of infection.
10. Report the level of **small ruminant vaccination** in 2008 to the Tripartite Group, to enter the final report (by 30th November 2008).

11. Heighten clinical surveillance for PPR and other animal diseases in Thrace region, particularly in December to January following the bayram/kurban festival, with emphasis on early detection of infection in epidemiological relevant livestock markets.

Mainly relating to surveillance and control of bluetongue

12. MARA is recommended to follow-up the reports of BT sero-conversion in Lesbos, Greece by immediate surveillance in the neighbouring area of Anatolia, involving serological surveys for evidence of BT exposure. The use of sera collected for FMD surveillance may allow a retrospective analysis of BT sero-conversions from the spring and autumn collections, but would be insufficient by itself to rule out recent and ongoing exposure.
13. MARA is requested to report the results of the recent sero-surveillance conducted in March to May 2008 in Turkey, for the final report of the Tripartite (by 30th November).
14. MARA is encouraged to develop a surveillance plan for BT for 2009, making efficient use of the >30,000 sera to be collected for FMD surveillance, and to follow up the implications of the results of the 2008 surveillance mentioned above.
15. FAO is encouraged to develop a project to assist countries in risk assessment and early warning of exotic disease risks including BT, PPR, LSD, EHD and FMD in the eastern Mediterranean region, with active involvement experts from Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria.

Relating to priority topics for the first GFTADS meeting of a Balkan forum on veterinary public health and transboundary disease control

16. Priority topics for the first meeting should include the assistance to countries to develop CSF control policies that are adapted to the production systems and which enable access to markets, for example through high health compartments; regional co-operation and support for brucellosis control; and planning of simulation exercises involving several countries which share land borders.

Report of the Tripartite Meeting

Item 1. Agenda.

The Agenda (Appendix 2) was adapted without change.

Part 1: FMD

Item 1: FMD control in Turkey

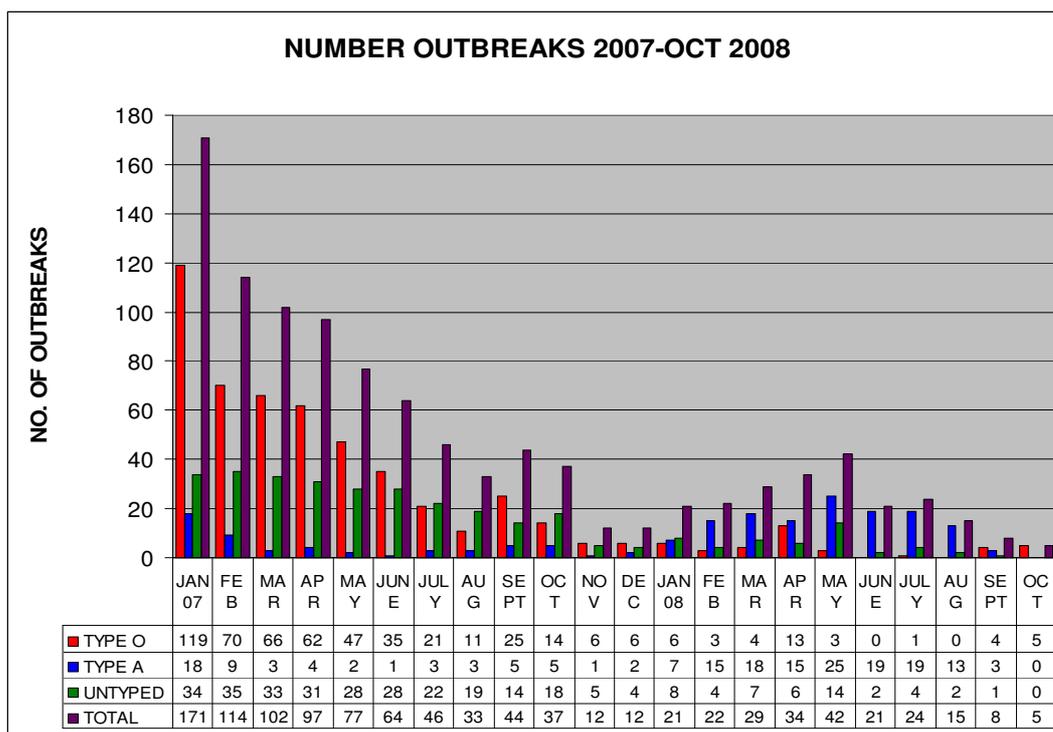
Part I Current situation report

Presentations were made by each country on the FMD situation. Dr Bulut, FMD expert at the SAP Institute, Ankara, gave a presentation (Appendix 3) on the FMD situation and FMD control programme in Turkey, the vaccination campaigns in 2008, including the performance of the spring and autumn vaccination campaigns in Thrace region and in Anatolia.

Turkey remains endemic for types A and O, but Asia-1 has not been recorded since 2002. No outbreaks of FMD have been reported from Thrace region in 2008, an improvement over the previous two years (6 outbreaks in 2007), and in line with the target of achieving 24 months without reporting (or circulation) of FMD in order to apply for status of freedom from FMD without vaccination, in 2010.

Two hundred and twenty outbreaks were reported in 2008, of which 168 were conformed (134 type A, 34 type O). Since August 2007, all type A outbreaks were of a new genotype, called A 05: ARD 2007; this was significantly different at genotype (5%) and vaccine matching to the A22 Iraq vaccine in use (r 0.2). A decision had been made to switch to A TUR 06 in the 2009 vaccination campaigns. The lack of cross-protection therefore results in a higher risk of type A, and may explain the upsurge in type A in 2008 compared to 2007 (Figure 1).

A new type O genotype was also detected from August 2008; termed O PanAsia II: TER-08, with 4% sequence change compared to the previous PanAsia II. The origin of the new variants was not clear, but presumed to be entries from the east (Iran, Syria, Iraq).



Discussion

Of concern to participants were:

- apparent under-reporting of outbreaks in the southern/eastern border regions; since incursions were expected, various suggestions were made to improve detection and typing of FMDV in these locations.
- lack of risk communication after detection of new variants; the type A ARD 2007 and PanAsia II TER-08 had not been communicated to OIE or neighbors as a new event of epidemiological significance.
- the type of production system affected, particularly in western Anatolia; FMD outbreaks should be analyzed for the association with type of production unit affected, e.g. individual fattening unit, or village system with multiple groups of animals in common contact.

The Chairman drew attention to the improved situation, with no outbreaks detected in Thrace region for one year, and on behalf of the group thanked the GDPC Turkey for their major effort.

Part II: Control measures: Thrace region and Anatolia

Dr Bulut reviewed the main control measures, now being supported under EU funded project TR06 03 02, to November 2010. Vaccination (with trivalent A Iraq22/O Manisa/Asia-1 Shamir) or bivalent vaccine (A/O) remained the key measure; minimum potency required is 3 PD50, and vaccine in spring 2008 was supplied by 3 producers.

Over 85% large ruminant (LR) vaccination, and > 70% small ruminant coverage had been achieved in Thrace region in spring 2008; trivalent Merial vaccine had been used. Autumn coverage in LR was expected to be similar, but priorities had to be set because of a 1 million dose deficit; priority had been given to Thrace, with vaccine for 100% LR coverage provided, whereas other areas received a maximum of 90% because of insufficient stocks.

Across Turkey, coverage rates had risen compared to 2007 (to 84% LR). SR coverage, in the once per year campaigns remained at approximately 33%, as a result of shortage of vaccine.

Discussion

The GDPC were thanked for their decision to prioritize vaccination in Thrace in autumn 2008 over other areas.

A repeat tender had been issued as suppliers could not provide sufficient vaccine for the SR campaigns in 2009; tender to be completed by end of December; therefore SR coverage in 2009 remains in doubt.

Bulgaria: coverage in Thrace is acceptable, but sero-surveillance data is requested to support the claimed immunity levels.

Greece: asked to see an analysis of immunity rates by vaccine producer.

In response, Dr Bulut indicated that lab testing was delayed, but smaller studies on immunity indicated over 80-90% immunity 2 months post-vaccination.

Dr Fuessel asked why vaccine for SR was not used instead to raise the available for LR in areas of shortage. Dr Bulut explained that in 2009 there should be no shortage in LR.

The Chairman concluded that it was highly unhelpful to disease control to not have the sero-surveillance results until May 2009, which is later than the spring vaccination, the NSP and SP results could have been used to adjust the spring programs.

Dr Fuessel asked for a cost estimate on the provision of kits to allow immediate testing. [Secretariat: about 40,000 € for NSP kits, based on 40,000 samples = 100 kits = 400*100 = 40,000 € approx; SP test kits are an additional cost].

Part III: Management of risk associated with kurban/bayram festival:

New biosecurity measures had been introduced, following the Tripartite recommendations of 2007.

Movement of animals would be prohibited from Provinces with < 85% vaccination coverage; and unsold animals after the kurban markets in Istanbul would be allowed to return to Thrace but would be slaughtered in place, or if sent to Anatolia given a 3 week quarantine.

Additional effort will be made in 2008 on biosecurity measures at the temporary and permanent markets in Istanbul.

Discussion

On behalf of the group, the Chairman congratulated the GDPC on the follow-up to the previous Tripartite recommendations. The festival period would remain high risk, given that outbreaks have been occurring to Provinces with high vaccination rates, and therefore even a coverage of >85% was not a guarantee that infected animals would not be traded in December.

Item 2 FMD surveillance in Greece, Bulgaria, Albania and Serbia in 2008 – recent and planned

These were provided by Dr Hondrokouki (Appendix 4), Dr Georgiev (Appendix 5) and Dr Plavsic, respectively (Appendix 6).

In Greece, sera from some 3570 cattle, 2804 sheep and goats, and 675 swine have been tested (NS serology – Ceditest) with negative results, collected from 11 prefectures of Greece, mainly located close to eastern borders. The sampling strategy was not described. Three tissue samples were tested for FMDV with negative results. The laboratory is considering to use decentralized tests (penside test kits) in borderline areas in future.

Chairman's comments: the EuFMD have developed a decision paper on decentralized testing which will be sent to all NRLs in EuFMD countries for their guidance. Action: secretariat



In Bulgaria, some 1171 samples were tested with negative results (3ABC, Bommeli test) from the sentinel herds testing program (30 animals each) located within 10 km of the Turkish border, from the program starting 1st March; in 2008 the scheme will continue until after the Kurban festival (to end of December). BUL participates in the FAO/EC proficiency testing program, receiving material for FMDV confirmation and serology; the high containment area does not permanently operate but is commissioned for live virus handling when required.

In Serbia, official FMD freedom was regained in 2006, after the last case of FMD in 1996. Surveillance for FMD comprises annual clinical inspection of each farm, and an annual national sero-surveillance, utilizing the brucellosis sampling activities, to reconfirm to OIE the absence of FMD, with survey design with 95% confidence of detecting infected epidemiological units if present at 1% or higher prevalence. Virological tests are outsourced to the WRL Pirbright. A high containment facility is under construction, and the current lab provides services to Montenegro and Bosnia-H.



Item 3 Training Requirements:

The Chairman requested each delegation to indicate its training priorities on FMD for the upcoming year.

Bulgaria: clinical investigation and FMD recognition, for the new generation of veterinarians who have not seen FMD.

Serbia: as for Bulgaria, need continuous training

Greece: laboratory training on rt RT-PCR application to FMDV confirmation. in PCR

Turkey: epidemiology training -continuation of the EuFMD supported program.

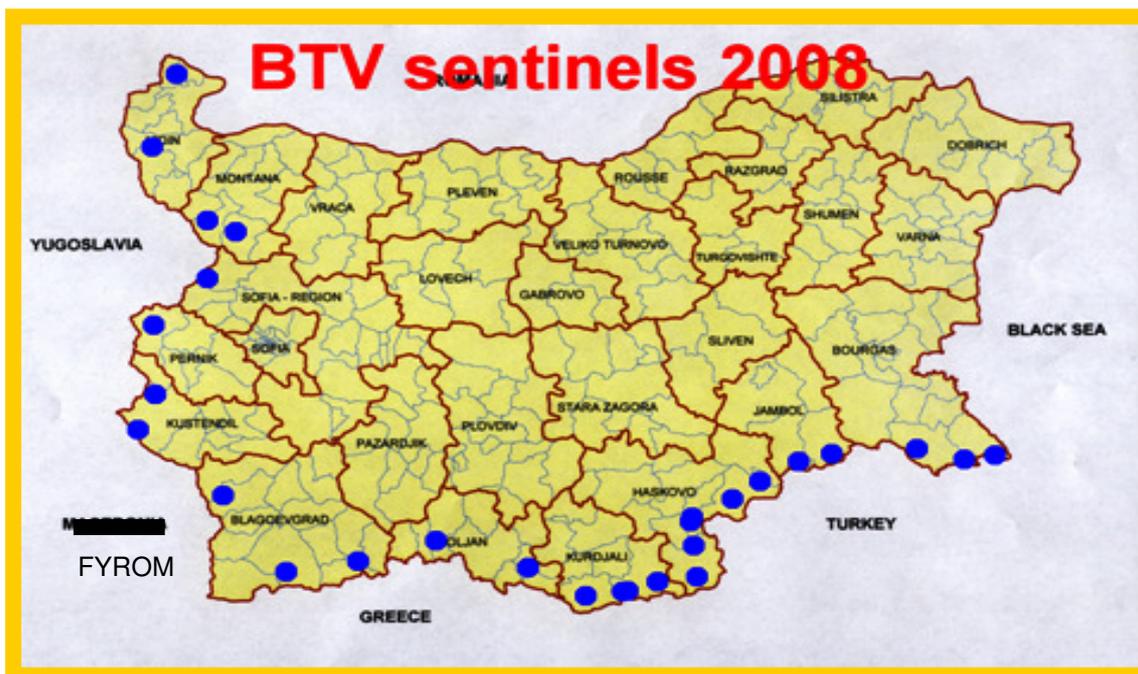
The Chairman proposed that the interest shown by Greece and Bulgaria to apply penside decentralized tests, could be a subject of a workshop following the trail of the Bioseq and Svanodip lateral flow devices in trial in Turkey in winter (November-March).

Part II: Bluetongue, Peste des Petits ruminants, and other exotic diseases

Item 1: Country reports

The meeting thereafter received and reviewed reports (Bulgaria; Appendix 7; Greece, Appendix 8; Serbia, Appendix 9; Turkey, Appendix 10) on the surveillance in 2008 for Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR), Sheep and Goat Pox (SGP) and bluetongue (BT).

In Bulgaria, the BT serum surveillance was performed in 9 sentinel serum-negative animal herds located in Western and 17 sentinels in South Bulgaria. The sentinel animals have been tested every 30 days for the presence of BTV antibodies. Each sentinel herd consisted of 10 cattle with individual ear-tags.



In 2008, 4504 sera have been tested, with negative results (kit test producers by VMRD and Ingenaza), as indicated in the Table provided below.

SPECIES	ORIGIN	NUMBER	RESULT
BOVIDAE	SENTINEL, IMPORT & EXPORT	3672	NEG.
OVINAE & CAPRIDAE	SENTINELS, IMPORT & EXPORT	925	NEG.
OTHERS	Camels, buffaloes and others	7	NEG.
TOTAL		4504	NEG.

In addition, *Culicoides* presence and abundance are monitored by trapping program. *C. imicola* midges were not detected and dominating *Culicoides* species were both, *C. obsoletus* and *C. pulicaris* complexes.

In 2009, they plan to extend the surveillance to sentinel villages on the border with Romania.

EHD, PPR, SGP: in 2008 only 40 [ruminant] samples were tested, with negative results.

CSF: one outbreak, 6km from border with Serbia, in a family farm; serology found additional 23 +ve animals within 3km zone. Wild boar vaccination program along 40 km strip along the western and northern borders; serology indicated a 61% immunity level in tested samples. Unfortunately, there has been no previous data collection prior to the wild boar vaccination to compare the results.

AHS: the laboratory participates in the ring trial under the European RL. Currently there is no active surveillance undertaken.

West Nile: sero-positives have been found but and sent to Teramo for confirmation and typing, no specific surveillance scheme, studies ongoing under BTNET2 project.

Greece –

BT: sero-surveillance in 2008; 10 randomly selected herds sampled in high risk locations; 300 samples collected, all samples collected to mid October were negative on groups specific ELISA. All samples collected randomly from sheep were shown to be negative as well.

PPR: all samples tested (how many) were negative; samples from SR.

CSF: have tested sera from 2000 breeding age pigs from different parts of Greece, and all results negative.

Serbia –

Dr Plavsic reviewed the progress made against CSF in the past 2 years. In 2006 401 cassettes of CSF were recorded. Obligatory vaccination is still carried out. The last outbreak was 4th of October 2007. Presentation cannot be opened

Turkey:

Bluetongue

The last case recorded as in August 2000. Control measures include vaccination against serotype BTV4 ; 20,386 small ruminants were vaccinated between February and May 2008 in Aydin and Mugla Provinces, on the Aegean coast.

Sero-surveillance was conducted on the southern coast, under a collaborative project between March and May 2008, in Adana, Mersin (also called Icel) , Antalya, Osmaniye and Hatay Provinces ; 1062 samples were collected, of which 361 (34%) were positive. Six antigen positive samples were found , of 137 tested. The serotype was not reported. *(Note: these results are of significance given the later finding of BTV16 on Lesbos, immediately following the TPT meeting; they raise the possibility of BTV16 or other types circulating between March to May 2008 along the southern coast)*

Sheep and goat pox

Remains endemic, with thirty three outbreaks in 2008, of which 20 occurred in the first two months; this may suggest an epidemic after the festival period in late 2007. Five of these were in Thrace region: in January (Cannakale and Edirne), February (Istanbul), March (Cannakale) and August (Cannakale).

The total SR vaccinated in 2008 was 1,657,904; and in the 5 Provinces of Thrace region , 106,083 (or 9% based on 2008 populations for the 5 Provinces).



Peste des Petits Ruminants

Thirty one outbreaks (31) until late October, all located in western Anatolia, including two in Thrace (Kirkclareli Province). Control measures include ring vaccination in susceptible animals localized within and around outbreak areas, in which the disease has been confirmed in the past two years.

In Thrace region, since 2005 the entire small ruminant population of Thrace is vaccinated against PPR.

In total, 843,270 SR were vaccinated in 2008, to the end of October; 478,323 in the 5 provinces of Thrace (40% coverage, based on 2008 population data).

A full program of small ruminant vaccination is foreseen under the EU Project "Identification and Registration of Small Ruminants and Control of PPR", under the Pre-accession Financial Assistance Programme, with budget of ~ 45 million Euros. This includes establishment of a database for ID and registration, 4 vaccination campaigns, with the 1st being vaccination of entire small ruminant population, and the following period being vaccination of the new-born population.



Figure: PPR cases in 2008 in Turkey (to 20th October)

Part III: Other Issues

Veterinary Public Health Forum (VPH) and Transboundary diseases (TADs) in the Balkan Region

This was introduced by the Chairman. The creation of a forum for discussion and co-ordination of animal health projects had been discussed at two previous EuFMD Executive Committee meetings, and received strong support from country representatives from the Balkan region. The CVO of Austria had proposed a first

planning meeting on 12th December in Vienna, to involve FAO, OIE, EC, and members of the EuFMD Executive with specific interest, plus the CVO of Croatia, the host of the first meeting planned for February 2009.

Since CSF, brucellosis and rabies had been priorities identified by the CVOs of the region, he had asked Dr Jemersic, FAO, to provide an illustration of the type of issues that need to be addressed and how technical and policy support could assist to solve these at national and regional level.

Dr Jemersic provided two presentations, on CSF and control of TAD's and neglected zoonoses (Appendices 11 and 12, attached).

The meeting agreed that policy guidance is a priority for CSF affected countries where wild boar and backyard systems are predominant. The guidance should cover the issue of different policy for production settings, including how to achieve access to international markets from high biosecurity systems, as well as management of vaccination and other control measures in backyard systems.

Acknowledgements

The participants of the meeting recorded a vote of thanks to Dr Batziliotis, Dr Aronis (Lesbos Prefecture) and Dr Doudonakis for the generous and warm hospitality and excellent organization of the meeting.

List of Appendices:

- Appendix 1. List of participants
- Appendix 2. Meeting Agenda
- Appendix 3. Presentation of Turkey on FMD
- Appendix 4. Presentation of Greece on FMD surveillance
- Appendix 5. Presentation of Bulgaria on FMD surveillance
- Appendix 6. Presentation of Serbia on FMD surveillance
- Appendix 7. Presentation of Bulgaria on BT, PPR and CSF
- Appendix 8. Presentation of Greece on BT surveillance
- Appendix 9. Presentation of Serbia on CSF control
- Appendix 10. Presentation of Turkey on BT, PPR and SGP control
- Appendix 11. Presentation of FAO on regional co-operation on CSF control.
- Appendix 12. Presentation of FAO on regional aspects of brucellosis control.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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on control of FMD and other exotic diseases in the southern Balkans/Aegean region
Lesbos - Greece
29-31 October 2008**

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Agenda of the 2008 Tripartite Meeting: Technical Items

Italics indicate the Country/Institution hereby requested to make a presentation

Item 1

Adoption of the Agenda

Part 1: FMD (0930-1300 hrs)

Item 1

FMD situation and FMD control programme in Turkey, with emphasis on prevention of incursions into Thrace

Part I. Current situation report

- Progress in FMD control in Turkey in 2008
- report on FMD outbreaks and their control in Thrace/western Anatolian regions of Turkey in 2008
Turkey

Part II. Vaccination campaigns in 2008

Turkey

Performance of the spring and autumn vaccination campaigns in Thrace region:

- sufficient immunity for the upcoming risk period?
- does the current programme provide adequate coverage, and duration of immunity, to the current type A and the O PanAsiaII virus strain?

Part III. Biosecurity measures ahead of the bayram kurban festival: report of Turkey on new measures to be taken in 2008.

Turkey

Item 2

FMD surveillance in Greece, Bulgaria, Albania and Serbia in 2008 – recent and planned
Statements or presentation: Greece, Bulgaria,

Albania, Serbia

Item 3

FMD training needs: 2007-8
discussion.

Brief

PART II: Bluetongue, Peste des Petits ruminants, Classical Swine fever, and other exotic diseases (14.30-17.00)

Item 1

Information on the current epidemiological situation, surveillance and control of PPR, BT, SGP and CSF.

Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia and Turkey
Country presentations : up to 15 minutes

each

Part III: Other Issues

Veterinary Public Health Forum (VPH) in the Balkan Region

FAO

Final discussions and summary of recommendations.

Close of Session