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**FINAL REPORT ON THE  
4<sup>th</sup> TASK FORCE MEETING  
OF THE  
“CLASSICAL SWINE FEVER”  
SUB-GROUP  
BELGRADE, SERBIA  
6-7 April 2011**

## **PARTICIPANTS:**

Task force sub-group members:

- Dr. Volker Moennig( DE – Chairman)
- Dr. Jedrt Maurer Wernig (SI),
- Dr. Vilmos Pálfi (HU)
- Dr Olga Zorko (SI)
- Dr Christoph Staubach (DE)

European Commission

- Dr. Valentina Piazza DG-SANCO
- Dr. Ana Blass Rico DG-SANCO
- Mr Andrej Papic (EEAS Belgrade)

Host

- Mr. Zvonimir Rot (Serbia)
- Dr. Budimir Plavsic (Serbia)
- Dr. Sanja Celebicanin (Serbia)
- Dr. Slavoljub Stanojevic (Serbia)
- Mr. Aleksandar Ceranic (Serbia)
- Dr. Tamas Petrovic (Serbia)
- Dr. Miodrag Rajkovic (Serbia)
- Dr. Vesna Milicevic (Serbia)
- Mr. Claudio Bompard, (OPERA)
- Domenico Rutili (OPERA)
- Vittorio Guberti (OPERA)
- Yanko Ivanov (OPERA)

## **APOLOGIES.**

- Dr. Pencho Kamenov, ( BG),
- Dr. Sandra Blome (DE)
- Dr. Niculae Lazar (RO)
- Dr. Willie Loeffen (NL)
- Dr. Miroslav Mojzis (SK)

**LOCATION: Central Veterinary Authority-Belgrade**

**Objectives of the EU-Task Force CSF in Serbia:**

This is the first time that the CSF-task force is organised in a non-EU MS. Serbia had an outbreak of CSF in November 2010. During the last task force of the CSF subgroup in Budapest in December 2010, it was discussed the convenience of organising a meeting of the task force in Serbia. The proposal was very welcomed by the Serbian authorities who finally arranged to organise the meeting in April 2011.

The objectives of the meeting were twofold:

- Assessment of the CSF situation in Serbia
- Recommendations for improvement and future actions

Serbia presented a detailed description of the system in place and the experts of the task force answered to their questions and provided technical advise on how to improve the control against CSF.

The European Commission is funding projects on technical Assistance for the Control and Eradication of Classical Swine Fever (CSF) and Rabies in the Western Balkan countries

through their IPA (Instrument Pre-accession (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo). In Serbia the project is implemented by OPERA-EuropeAid/128177/C/SER/RS- and managed by the EU delegation in Serbia.

The overall objective, to which the project contributes, is to improve the animal health in Serbia and surrounding countries in line with EU standards, thus improving the prospects for trade of agricultural products. Some of the presentations were given by members of the OPERA team however it was clearly explained that it is not the objective of the task force to evaluate the work carried out by OPERA in Serbia.

After a short presentation of the Task Force and its classical swine fever (CSF) subgroup given by a member of the European Commission and by the chairman of the subgroup, presentations were given on the CSF situation in Serbia and related topics.

### **General structure CVS in Serbia (SA).**

The structure of the Veterinary Services within the Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Water Management of The Republic of Serbia was presented in great detail by Mr. Zvonimir Rot, the advisor of the Chief Veterinary Officer Dr. Zoran Micovic (Annex I).

### **Scientific Veterinary Institute, Novi Sad.**

Thereafter Dr. Tamas Petrovic presented the Scientific Veterinary Institute in Novi Sad. The institute consists of 8 laboratory and 5 clinical departments. It is located in the North Western part of the country where repeatedly outbreaks of CSF were recorded. The institute is well equipped including a high containment laboratory (BSL 3) and a facility for animal experiments with infectious agents. The diagnostic methods used for the detection of CSF virus and virus specific antibodies are up to date, including molecular detection techniques. Some methods are being newly introduced at present. There is a quality management system in place and some of the methods are accredited. The laboratory has the capacities for high throughput investigations.

Results of wild boar and domestic pigs surveillance were presented. In both populations - positive animals were found (real time RT PCR) and a mean of 5-10% wild boar was found seropositive. However, it must be taken into account that vaccination was applied in some areas (Annex II).

### **The National Reference Laboratory for CSF.**

Dr. Vesna Milecevic presented the National Reference Laboratory (NRL) for CSF in the Institute of Veterinary Medicine in Belgrade. The NRL has a quality assurance programme in place and is accredited since 2005. It regularly takes part in interlaboratory comparison tests organised by the European Reference Laboratory (EU-RL). Apart from that there is a close cooperation with the EU-RL in terms of diagnostic tests and characterisation of CSF viral isolates. The NRL has competence for relevant classical and modern virus and antibody detection techniques including nucleic acid amplification. Some methods are in the process of being established, in particular cell-culture based assays. The laboratory is equipped for the processing of high number of samples. The NRL has plans to perform a national interlaboratory comparison test and to train laboratory personal from other institutions (Annex III).

### **Legal basis for control and eradication of CSF, epidemiological situation, population of pig sector, hunting grounds and density of wild boars. (SA)**

Dr. Budimir Plavsic explained the Serbian activities with respect to the eradication of CSF, the respective activities (2006-2010), the Serbian animal disease notification system, the pig identification and registration system, the classification of pig holdings, the organisation of hunting, and the surveillance and monitoring activities.

Serbia is divided in 12 epidemiological regions and for each region 1 veterinary laboratory is responsible for diagnostic and epidemiological support. In order to harmonise control of animal diseases with EU legislation a National Animal Disease Notification System (ADNS) has been established. Software had been developed in the framework of ADNS helping the registration and documentation of all outbreaks. It is designed as a disease management and decision support tool. All relevant information is contained in a web-based application. In order to improve traceability of animals holdings and individual animals are being registered. The information is entered into the Veterinary Information Management System (VIMS).

After outbreaks of CSF in the years 2006 (402), 2007 (21) there were no outbreaks notified in 2008 and 2009. However, in 2010 there were two new outbreaks.

In a first phase (2006-2010) intensive vaccination was applied that was mostly paid for by the State. About 3.5 to 4 million pigs were vaccinated annually (120.000 holdings). 97% of all holdings in Serbia are backyard holdings. The categorisation of farms was basically adopted from the Bulgarian system (Commercial farm, family farms type A and B, backyard holdings and free ranging pigs). In parallel attempts were made to improve biosecurity measures on farms. Awareness campaigns (brochures, guidelines and trainings) were launched and surveillance of wild boar was introduced. The latter measures were improved over the years and in 2011 financial incentives were granted for the hunting of wild boar. There are doubts, whether the start of the non-vaccination policy in 2011 would be useful (Annex IV).

### **Hunting System.**

Mr. Ceranic explained the Serbian hunting system, which is under the control of the State. The total hunting area is 88361 km<sup>2</sup>. Most hunting activity is performed by the National Hunting Association. The estimated number of wild boar in Serbia is 30,000, and about 15,000 animals are shot annually. In Annex V a very general account of Serbian biodiversity and natural habitats is given.

### **Technical Assistance for the Control and Eradication of Classical Swine Fever (CSF) and Rabies Serbia.**

The EU funded (EuropeAid) project "Technical Assistance for the Control and Eradication of Classical Swine Fever (CSF) and Rabies Serbia" was presented and discussed by the managers of the project (OPERA) (Annex VI).

### **Surveillance Plan for CSF in Wild Boar of Serbia.**

Thereafter Dr. Domenico Rutili (Opera) presented the "Surveillance Plan for CSF in Wild Boar of Serbia". There are 300 hunting grounds and the average wild boar density ranges between an estimated 0.2 to 1.38 animals/km<sup>2</sup>. In the hunting year 2009/2010 one virus-positive animal was diagnosed. In 2010/2011 1374 samples were investigated and 4.8% were seropositive with no virus positive cases. About half of the positive samples were derived from animals from vaccinated areas. From the last hunting year on hunters were obliged to fill out a form for each sample. The number of samples investigated was lower than planned (Annex VII).

### **CSF Outbreaks of 2010.**

A detailed account of the CSF outbreaks in 2010 was given (Annex VIII). These outbreaks have occurred after 10 years with no CSF outbreaks. The first one was recorded in a large farm with an average level of biosecurity. Animals in the affected farms were killed using T61. The last outbreak was notified in a small family farm in November 2010. Several weaknesses were pointed out:

- There are employees of the big farms, who are keeping pigs for private consumption
- Vaccination coverage was probably not complete (interfering maternal antibodies in piglets?)
- A ban of swill feeding in family type farms is impossible to control

### **Contingency Planning, Vaccination and Surveillance.**

Dr. Slavoljub Stanojevic presented the Contingency Plan of the Ministry (Annex IX). There is a clear legal basis for the control of CSF and a manual containing the relevant procedures had been established. A contingency plan is about to be drafted with cooperation of the Opera experts.

Details on the vaccination campaign and data on monitoring of vaccination in 2010 were also given by Dr. Stanojevic. (Annex IXa).

### **Presentation database wild boar.**

Dr. Christoph Staubach presented the "Data Base for Monitoring Classical Swine Fever in Wild Boar in the EU". The data base was originally started by Member States that were affected by CSF in wild boar, i.e. Germany, France, Belgium, The Netherlands and Luxembourg. Recently the service was extended to all EU Member States. The data base ensures a transparent representation of the epidemiological situation on CSF between the participating Member States including an up-to-date report of the course of infection in the different countries. An evaluation of the data in time and space considering the restriction and vaccination areas is possible and the scientific assessment of the disease situation in different regions is facilitated. An integrated control approach across borders becomes possible. Last but not least the draft of official reports is made easier (Annex X).

## **Conclusions and recommendations Belgrade, April, 6-7, 2011**

This is the first time that the CSF-task force is organised in a non-EU MS. The objectives of the meeting were to provide assistance to the Serbian authorities in the implementation of the eradication programme for CSF. Serbia presented a detailed description of their systems in place and the experts of the task force answered to their questions and provided technical advice on how to improve the control against CSF.

N.b. It is not the role of the task force to evaluate the work carried out by the technical assistance project.

### **Conclusions:**

1. The Serbian Veterinary authorities are very well structured, they are developing a good system for the control and eradication of CSF, which includes a contingency plan and they have taken steps to increase awareness for CSF
2. Two presentations were given on laboratory capacities and capabilities, showing the high standard in this respect
3. The response to the outbreaks in 2010 was efficiently managed
4. CSF virus seems still to be circulating
5. The role of (uncontrollable) swill feeding is critical to avoid further outbreaks
6. There are certain shortages in personnel and equipment in case of eventual big outbreaks
7. The categorization of pig holdings which is progressively being implemented by Serbia is seen as a useful instrument for the control of CSF
8. The introduction of the national animal disease notification system is considered to be a very useful step.
9. Compulsory vaccination of domestic pigs as a first phase of CSF eradication is a proven and useful step for disease control. However, there are problems in reaching a sufficient coverage of vaccination, e.g. there seem to be discrepancies between official number of vaccinated pigs and real number in small holdings.
10. In general, the density of wild boar is low (90% of populations are  $<1$  wild boar/km<sup>2</sup>).
11. Seroconversion rates are relatively low (over several years); there seems not to be endemic CSF in wild boar populations. However, there was too little sampling in wild boar and insufficient information was supplied with the samples (i.e. age, sex, location)
12. 90% of hunting grounds are managed by the National Hunting Organization

13. There is a lack of cooperation in terms of disease control with veterinary authorities of neighboring countries

### **Recommendations:**

1. The National Hunting Organization should be more engaged in the control of CSF in wild boar
2. Regional labs should improve their communication with the National Reference Laboratory. The bio-security level of laboratories handling CSF virus should be reviewed and updated if necessary
3. The weaknesses of the vaccination policy should be identified and solved (age of vaccination, interference with maternal antibodies, repeated vaccination, high coverage of the population)
4. When vaccination will be stopped, appropriate surveillance strategies must be in place
5. Sampling of wild boar should be intensified and samples should be accompanied by the necessary information
6. After the stop vaccination slaughtered backyard pigs should be investigated serologically (possibly in conjunction with testing for trichinella, using the meat juice of the samples)
7. For the control of CSF in wild boar it is recommended that Serbia joins the wild boar data base.
8. Attempts should be made to improve bio-security in farms. Employees of larger farms should not keep private pigs. Instead the farm could supply pigs for private consumption.
9. Control strategies of CSF in wild boar should be established depending on the density of the wild boar population and the results of sero-surveillance. Vaccination should only be employed when there is evidence for endemic CSF in a high density population.
10. Strengthen communication and cooperation between veterinary services in the Balkan region is essential for the control and eradication of CSF.

### Annexes:

#### Agenda

- I. Veterinary services
- II. Wild boars and laboratory Novi Sad
- III. Laboratory Belgrade
- IV. Eradication of CSF in Serbia
- VI. TA support for CSF
- VII. Multiannual plan and strategy
- VIII. CSF outbreak
- IX. Monitoring on vaccination
- X. EU-database CSF