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FINAL REPORT
OF A FOLLOW-UP MISSION TO BULGARIA WITH REGARD TO
ANIMAL AND PUBLIC HEALTH
FROM
8TH TO 12TH FEBRUARY 1999



27/05/99 - 15761

** Please note that certain comments from the Bulgarian Authorities have been included in the text of the report In italic type*

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1. MISSION DETAILS

1.1. Purpose of mission

A veterinary mission was undertaken to Bulgaria from 8th to 12th February 1999 as a follow-up in the context of eradication/control of animal disease to a mission of June 1998 which reported deficiencies in the protection against incursions of OIE List A diseases along the south-eastern border of the country.

The scope of the mission included the operation of the veterinary services at all levels in respect of animal and public health, to review progress in the identification and certification of livestock and to review the measures taken to protect the country from incursions of exotic diseases.

1.2. Organisation of mission

The mission team consisted of three inspectors from the Food and Veterinary Office, Dublin and a national expert from Spain. Initial and final meetings were held at the headquarters of the central veterinary service in Sofia. The team separated after the visit to the Central Veterinary Laboratory for Exotic Diseases in Sofia into two sub-teams and each was accompanied by a senior official from the Central Veterinary Services of the Ministry of Agriculture in Sofia.

Sub-team I inspected the regional veterinary offices of Yambol and Bourgas, each of which has responsibility for a section of the southern border with Turkey, as well as a sub-regional and a local veterinary office, a portal and a road border inspection post and two border villages. In addition, sub-team II visited the northern part of the country including two regional and two local veterinary offices, a milk plant producing sheep cheese, two slaughterhouses and a stud farm.

2. LEGAL BASIS FOR MISSION

The mission was carried out under the general provisions of Community legislation and, in particular:

- Council Directive 72/462/EEC of 12 December 1972 on health and veterinary inspection problems upon importation of bovine, ovine and caprine animals and swine, fresh meat or meat products from third countries.
- Council Directive 92/46/EEC of 16 June 1992 laying down the health rules for the production and placing on the market of raw milk, heat-treated milk and milk-based products.
- Commission Decision 93/197/EEC of 5 February 1993 on animal health conditions and veterinary certification for imports of registered equidae and equidae for breeding and production
- Commission Decision 96/730/EC of 17 December 1996 concerning protective measures with regard to imports of certain animals and their products from Bulgaria due to an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease and repealing Decision 96/643/EC as amended by Commission Decision 98/373/EC.
- Commission Decision 97/232/EC of 3 March 1997 drawing up lists of third countries from which the Member States authorise imports of sheep and goats.
- Commission Decision 97/598/EC of 25 July 1997 amending Commission Decision 97/252/EC drawing up provisional lists of third country establishments from which the Member States authorise imports of milk and milk-based products for human consumption.
- Commission Decision 98/371/EC of 29 May 1998 concerning the animal health conditions and veterinary certification for imports of fresh meat from certain European countries as amended by Commission Decision 98/546/EC.
- Commission Decision 98/372/EC of 29 May 1998 concerning the animal health conditions and veterinary certification for imports of live animals of bovine and porcine species from certain European countries as amended by Commission Decision 98/505/EC.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1. Summary of previous animal and public health mission findings

There have, in recent years, been a number of outbreaks of OIE List A diseases in Bulgaria in which the source, where identified, has been an illegal entry of one or more infective animals across the south-eastern border of the country. The report of a Commission mission carried out from 8 to 12 June 1998, reference number XXIV/1366/98, indicated that the presence of livestock populations in villages situated in the two-kilometre-wide corridor between the electrified border fence and the border itself constituted an unacceptable risk to the animal health situation in Bulgaria and, by extension, to that in the Community.

In addition, the 1998 mission and a previous one carried out from 21 to 25 April 1997, reference number XXIV/1313/97, have reported deficiencies in the identification and movement certification of animals which could have a serious effect on the efficiency with which the spread of disease could be controlled. Information was obtained that the epizootics of foot-and-mouth disease which have occurred in 1991 and 1993 in Bulgaria, and in particular the latest one in October 1996, have been brought under control after one outbreak. The last outbreak of sheep and goat pox was reported in September 1996.

The mission of 1997 reported that problems had arisen with the process of distribution of State-owned land and livestock to private individuals, resulting in a major decline in animal numbers and deleterious effects on the structure of the veterinary services.

During these missions dairy and meat plants were also visited. In 1997 non-compliances with Council Directive 92/46/EEC were identified in milk plants and delisting of establishments was recommended. The deficiencies found in a meat plant in 1998 led to a recommendation to remove this establishment from the E.U. approved list. One of the two slaughterhouses visited has been frequently inspected by the Commission services and the approval has been temporarily suspended on a number of occasions.

3.2. Legislative action affecting imports into the European Union

As a result of foot-and-mouth disease, Commission Decision 96/643/EC of 13 November 1996 was adopted to ban import of live ruminants and their products including fresh meat from Bulgaria. However, in response to actions taken by the Bulgarian authorities to prohibit the spread of the disease the country was regionalised by Commission Decision 96/730/EC of 17 December 1996 allowing import for some regions of the country under certain conditions whereas six southern and south-eastern provinces remained banned. Milk and milk-based products originating from these provinces are required to undergo special treatment as laid down in Commission Decision 95/340/EC. Commission Decision 98/371/EC of 29 May 1998 maintained this status of regionalisation for bovine, ovine and caprine fresh meat as did Commission Decision 98/372/EC for live bovines. Live sheep and goat imports were made subject to temporary suspension of approval due to the animal health situation by Commission Decision 97/232/EC of 3 March 1997.

Importation of live pigs and pigmeat is banned by Council Directive 72/462/EEC because Bulgaria operates a programme of vaccination against classical swine fever, at least in large herds. Horses can be imported under the conditions laid down in Commission Decision 93/197/EC.

Imports of milk and milk-based products from Bulgarian milk plants were suspended by Commission Decision 97/598/EC of 25 July 1997.

3.3. Current situation

Shortly before the mission an outbreak of classical swine fever was confirmed in the south east of the country, in an unvaccinated small herd. Waste-food was identified as the source.

There has been an improvement in the economic situation in Bulgaria over the past two years.

4. MAIN OBSERVATIONS

4.1. General veterinary administration

Documentation is complex and somewhat repetitive. Nevertheless, keeping of records at regional, sub-regional and local level was found to be well organised and well understood by the staff.

No vaccination against sheep and goat pox is carried out. On 21.7.97 a ministerial ordinance governing prophylactic measures was adopted restricting vaccination to secondary outbreaks.

Although bovine tuberculosis has been virtually eradicated all bovine animals continue to be tested at six-monthly intervals, initially using a single non-comparative intradermal test with ppd tuberculin produced in the country. Any animal showing a reaction is then subjected to a comparative test, a further test with double-strength mammalian tuberculin and finally, if it has failed all previous tests, to a detailed post-mortem examination after slaughter.

Brucellosis of sheep and goats has not been reported since 1941. Annual surveys indicate an absence of *Br. abortus*. On one occasion reference to a laboratory record positive for contagious epididymitis was found. However, neither evidence of a follow-up nor a satisfactory explanation as to the nature of the antigen was given.

The enzootic bovine leucosis infection rate on a national basis reaches 33%. No eradication programme is in place for this disease.

Use of the Komarov strain for vaccination of poultry against Newcastle disease has been forbidden since 1995. Hitchener B 1 and La Sota strains are used instead.

Animal welfare legislation taking into account the Community legislation is in discussion in front of the parliament.

4.2. Identification and movement certification

Eartag identification of bovines is complete in seventeen out of the twenty-eight provinces, including all those in the south and south-east, and particularly in the six regions banned for import of bovines into the E.U. The eartags provided by a PHARE programme some years ago have now been used up but a sum of two million Deutschmarks has been allocated from the current Bulgarian national budget for new tags. Among other things, the specification sets a maximum "fall-out" rate of 15%.

Small ruminants are not identified except in a defined area along the southern border to Turkey.

4.3. Border security

The border is protected by an electrified fence set back two kilometres from the actual frontier. The fence is patrolled by the military who also guard the access gates. *In regions on the border with Turkey veterinary inspectors specialised in exotic disease control are permanently stationed and their duties include training of other veterinarians.*

There are in total five small villages outside the fence, spread out along its 300 km length. In the larger of two villages visited, there is a stretch of open land about 1 km wide between the village and the frontier. A pond in this area has until recently been used as a watering-hole for livestock. However, in the past few months, a second pond has been created between the first one and the village with a view to eliminating the risk of animals from the other side of the border sharing the same drinking water as those from Bulgaria. In addition, all herds or flocks from the village are kept separate from each other when grazing in order to reduce contact between them. There is a resident official veterinarian.

The animals from this village are permitted through the fence only for immediate slaughter in designated abattoirs within the region. A proposal exists for these to be slaughtered within the village with the owner receiving a premium over the price which would be offered by the abattoir.

In the second village there are only seven families. Here the frontier is marked by a deep, if narrow, river. The livestock produced in this village are slaughtered for consumption by the villagers or by the army.

In each case, all the animals examined were individually identified according to the national requirements.

4.4. Trade in livestock

Import regulations were in general found to be stringent and include an import licence and a 30 days quarantine period for livestock imported into the country. Furthermore, livestock has to be kept under official veterinary control at the farm of destination for two years following import.

Apart from horses there are no indications for export of livestock into the E.U. In 1997 a number of horses were sent from a stud farm to Germany. The documentation used was found in compliance with Commission Decision 93/197/EEC.

The export certificates are printed and distributed by the central veterinary service. A good control on the distribution of those certificates was found.

4.5. Central Veterinary Laboratory for Exotic Diseases

Recording of results of serological tests for foot-and-mouth disease was inadequate and allowed misinterpretations.

4.6. Milk plant

In previous inspections problems were found in relation to the bacteriological quality of cow milk and hygiene of the milk establishments.

During this visit the Bulgarian authorities asked for the assessment of a milk plant producing sheep cheese. According to Bulgarian standards sheep milk is categorised in two different sections, grade A which meets E.U. standards and grade 2 which does not.

During the mission a milk plant not approved for export to the E.U. was visited. Attention was paid only to sheep cheese production. The plant produces cheese fully matured in brine for a period of 60 days. The mission team identified some structural deficiencies in the plant. No HACCP programme was in place. The final product undergoes chemical and bacteriological testing in conformity with E.U. legislation.

In one district visited by sub-team II, only somatic cells were counted in milk and no total bacterial counts were carried out.

4.7. Slaughterhouses

Two slaughterhouses approved for export of sheep meat to the E.U. were visited. Neither establishment was in operation during the visits. Significant differences in the standards of construction and equipment were noted between the two plants.

The management of the first slaughterhouse visited had been given a list of structural deficiencies as well as instructions to improve them within a specified deadline by the central

veterinary service. Although the local veterinary service in charge of hygiene supervision in the establishment reported significant progress the sub-team found that in practice the structural deficiencies still existed and most of the work indicated was not done. Furthermore, hygiene problems due to inadequate management were identified.

In the second plant the overall situation with regard to construction, equipment and veterinary supervision was found to be satisfactory.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Staff at regional, sub-regional and local level appeared to understand their duties and the records examined were well kept and up-to-date. The organisation of keeping records however leads to duplication of work and would benefit from computerisation

Progress has been made on the identification and registration of bovines and this was reported to have been completed in 17 out of 28 regions. However, small ruminants still remain unidentified in the major part of the country except in the border corridor. This has implications for the animal health certification.

Measures taken at the border to prevent incursions of important exotic diseases have been improved in recent years and were assessed as satisfactory.

At the time of the mission Bulgaria was free of foot-and-mouth disease and sheep and goat pox. Classical swine fever is present and is controlled by vaccination. The use of Komarov vaccine is forbidden.

Bulgaria has adopted a stringent livestock import policy. There is very little trade in livestock into the European Union and E.U. import regulations are implemented in a satisfactory way.

Recording keeping in the Central Veterinary Laboratory for Exotic Diseases was inadequate.

In a milk plant producing sheep cheese some structural problems were identified and no HACCP programme was found in place. The microbiological criteria for grade A sheep milk however meet the standards laid down in Council Directive 92/46/EEC, and the fully matured sheep cheese fulfils the requirements for export to the E.U. provided it is made only from grade A sheep milk.

Severe structural and supervision deficiencies were found in one slaughterhouse whereas in the second establishment visited the overall situation concerning construction, equipment and veterinary supervision was adequate.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Recommendations to the competent authority of Bulgaria

It is recommended that:

- the pace of identification of livestock be accelerated;
- draft legislation including animal welfare be implemented as soon as possible;

- that the veterinary services ensure adequate record keeping in the Central Veterinary Laboratory for Exotic Diseases;
- the veterinary services ensure, before proposing milk plants producing sheep cheese for approval of import into the European Union, that structural problems be solved, a HACCP programme be implemented and that the raw material be grade A sheep milk only;
- the veterinary services either suspend import of meat into the European Union from one slaughterhouse, where deficiencies have been identified, until it is brought up to standard, or delist it. A report on the actions taken should be submitted to the services of the European Commission within one month.

6.2. Recommendations to the services of the European Commission

It is recommended:

- to lift the restrictions on the imports of bovine, ovine and caprine animals into the European Union from certain banned regions in Bulgaria, except from the 20 km border zone with Turkey, provided that the animals are subjected to a quarantine period of 15 days under official supervision prior to the import into the European Union;
- to lift the restrictions on the imports of bovine and sheep meat into the European Union from certain banned regions in Bulgaria, except from the 20 km border zone with Turkey.