



Standing Group of Experts on African swine fever in Europe
under the GF-TADs umbrella

Twenty third meeting (SGE ASF23)
18-19 September, Ohrid, North Macedonia

REPORT

List of members¹ present:

Country (non-EU)	Country (EU)
Albania	Bulgaria
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Croatia
Kosovo ²	Estonia
Moldova	Germany
North Macedonia	Hungary
Russia	Italy
Serbia	Latvia
Ukraine	Lithuania
	Poland
	Romania
	Slovakia
	Sweden

List of observer countries, GF-TADs organizations, and associated organizations:

Country or organization	Country or organization
Switzerland	Spain
UK	DG Santé
FAO Europe	WOAH Europe
WOAH HQ	WOAH Central Asia
EURL (Madrid)	IAEA

Summary

The 23rd meeting of the Standing Group of Experts on African Swine Fever (SGE ASF23) was held in Ohrid, North Macedonia, on 18–19 September 2024. The event was organized by the SGE ASF Secretariat and gathered participants from 19 member countries from the European region, with over 67 attendees. Due to certain circumstances the representatives from Austria, Greece and the Czech Republic could not attend the meeting.

After a brief overview of Global and regional activities from WOA, FAO and the European Commission, the member countries briefly presented their national epidemiological situation regarding ASF.

Experts from France, Albania, and Latvia shared case studies on their cross-border cooperation with neighbouring countries, highlighting both successes and challenges encountered in managing ASF. Their presentations illustrated how coordinated policies, shared resources, and communication are vital in addressing the unique complexities of border regions.

A representative from the ASF European Union Reference Laboratory (EURL) gave an online presentation, focusing on interlaboratory coordination and support for ASF diagnosis.

A representative from IAEA via Zoom presented the activities by joint FAO/IAEA Centre.

Expert from FLI (Germany) demonstrated the challenges of cross-border cooperation in wild boar management.

A group exercise was organised with the aim to formulate recommendations for improving cross-border cooperation (CBC) in the region. Participants brainstormed factors that strengthen or weaken CBC. The outcome of the exercise was used to feed the SGE ASF23 recommendations.

The SGE ASF23 were shown a set of recommendations. Amongst these, it was highlighted that:

1. *Cross-border¹ cooperation (see Annex) is essential for preventing, controlling, and eradicating transboundary animal diseases such as African Swine Fever (ASF). All countries should enhance cross-border **interdisciplinary** cooperation and coordination for effective management of ASF sharing resources, aligning policies, and communicating in a transparent way.*
 2. *All countries should collaborate on strategies to monitor and manage wild boar populations including cross-border coordinated hunting and culling, habitat management, and strategic fencing in selected at risk border areas.*
 3. *Field missions by GF-TADs experts should continue in recently affected or at-risk countries to rapidly provide support and science-based expert advice to the veterinary authorities. Interested countries should contact the SGE ASF secretariat.*
 4. *All countries should implement previous SGE ASF recommendations to prevent, control and eradicate ASF.*
 5. *The twenty-fourth meeting (SGE ASF24) of the Standing Group of Experts on African Swine Fever in Europe under the GF-TADs umbrella should be held in face-to-face format in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in April 2024.*
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Report

Presentations are available on the [website](#) of the SGE on ASF of the regional GF-TADs for Europe.

Introduction and objectives of the meeting

After welcome words by Drs Milanov, Gutu and Plavsic, the President of the Regional Steering Committee of the GF TADs for Europe, Dr Van Goethem, as chair, underscored the importance of the SGE and the longstanding collaboration between Member countries and international organizations. He welcomed the Deputy Prime Minister of North Macedonia and all attendees, introduced the meeting's objectives, and presented the agenda for adoption. He also noted that one of the key outcomes of the event would be a set of recommendations, to be jointly prepared by the participants and endorsed by the GF-TADs Presidency.

The 2-day agenda focused on three main topics:

- **First group:** Presentations from international organizations, including WOA, FAO, the EU, IAEA and ASF EURL.
- **Second group:** Countries' presentations on the epidemiological situation, divided into three blocks, starting with North Macedonia as the host country, followed by presentations from countries in the North and East.
- **Third group:** Case studies from France, Albania, and Latvia, highlighting their cross-border cooperation with neighboring countries and the challenges encountered in such efforts provided by FLI.

In addition to these presentations, a group exercise was conducted.

A total of 67 participants, representing 19 SGE ASF member countries in Europe, attended the meeting, along with several observer countries and representatives from the European Commission, FAO, EURL, IAEA, and WOA.

Updates from the Global ASF Working Group and regional activities.

Presentations were given by:

- Dr Charmaine Chng briefed recent global activities on ASF. She introduced the ASF Global Initiative (2020-2025) and the recommendations of the second meeting of the Global Coordination Committee on ASF. She also introduced the focus areas of GFTADs ASF WG for 2024-2025 and updated on key work areas of the WOA including consultancy projects on vaccination guidelines, the state of play of ASF chapter in the *Terrestrial Manual*, and plans to revise the Global Initiative.
- Dr Mark Hovari, FAO Regional Office in Europe, presented the summary of regional activities for ASF conducted by FAO, which covers virtual learning centres, preparedness course and latest materials (training of hunters on biosecurity, sampling

in the field for vets etc.) in local languages. Also, he introduced the emergency response to ASF outbreak in Balkans (2023-2025) and updated their outputs.

- Dr Simona Forcella, DG SANTE, European Commission, presented the ASF epidemiological situation in the EU and European Commission's activities. She highlighted that most of the outbreaks in Europe are detected in wild boars. She also introduced EU best practices for the management of ASF in Czechia, Belgium, Germany and Sweden, which was the most recent EU country able to eradicate ASF in wild boar. She emphasised that main challenges are biosecurity, wild boar management in large areas, cross-border natural movement of wild boar, human-mediated 'jump', enforcement WOAHS standards on zoning and absence of effective and safe vaccines worldwide. As a new challenge, recurrence of ASF in eradicated areas was raised. She concluded that science-based legislation and enforcement (in line with WOAHS standards), enhanced cooperation, international partnership and SGE ASF & GCC meetings are key to address the ASF challenge in the Region.

Updates from the member countries of the SGE ASF

Dr Van Goethem then invited Members of the SGE ASF to give presentations on their epidemiological situations. **Presentations are available at this link:** [23rd Standing Group of Experts on African Swine Fever in Europe \(SGE-ASF23\) - WOAHS – Europe](#)

- Dr Milenko Simovikj presented active and passive surveillance on ASF, number of positive cases, awareness activities, density and distribution of pig population and wild boars, challenges and next steps (e.g. simulation exercise, BTSF) in North Macedonia.
- Dr Era Llazani presented the current situation in Albania and informed about detected cases in February 2024 in wild boars and no cases in domestic pigs.
- A representative from Bulgaria showcased numerous ASF positive cases among wild boars (found dead and hunted) and 1 outbreak in domestic pigs in backyard.
- Dr Bafti Murati from Kosovo* demonstrated about the cases in wild boars and domestic pigs (in backyards - about 1000 animals were destroyed) showed the maps with outbreaks near the borders and informed about notification to ADIS, 1 simulation exercise conducted, and awareness brochures printed.
- Dr Sasa Boskovic from Bosnia and Herzegovina demonstrated the map with the highest density of WB in the North, 110 confirmed cases in WB, 1541 outbreaks in domestic pigs leading to 61331 animals died or got euthanasia. In 2024 the situation improved in comparison with 2023.
- Dr Francesca Pacelli, Italian representative showed the list of regions and provinces with restricted zones, 1.123 wild boars' cases and 28 domestic pigs outbreaks and detailed maps from different parts of the country.
- Dr Tatjana KARAČIĆ from Croatia demonstrated the maps with ASF cases and outbreaks, the number of positive WB found dead and hunted and 6 confirmed outbreaks in domestic pigs with 277 animals.
- Dr Sasa Ostojić presented current situation in Serbia and indicated that only in 2024 ASF was confirmed on 259 holdings, on the territory of 21 municipalities and 10 districts, 533 pigs died, and 4,907 pigs were euthanized with safe removal of the

carcasses and disinfection of the infected holdings. As for WB, until 13.09.2024. ASF was confirmed in 291 wild boars in 19 hunting grounds on the territory of 13 municipalities in 9 administrative districts. He also indicated the problems faced e.g. huge number of backyards (unknown or unregistered) with low biosecurity, late report of suspicion, illegal movement and trade and so on.

- Dr Mihaela Spiridon from Romania informed on the number of WB found dead (238) and hunted (14435) with confirmed ASF (26% and 0.42% PCR positive correspondingly), suspected (12/336) and confirmed outbreaks (11/270) in domestic pigs both in commercial farms and backyards and the maps with distribution of cases and outbreaks throughout the country.
- Dr Zsuzsanna IRHAZI from Hungary provided the data on surveillance in WB and domestic pigs, highlighting that there were no cases in commercial farms and backyards for the reporting period.
- Dr Martin Chuddy from Slovakia demonstrated the maps with passive and active surveillance in WB with the number of positive cases and indicated that only 1 outbreak in domestic pigs was confirmed at commercial farm and no in backyards. He also provided geographical distribution of samples taken for ASF virus detection in Slovakia in 2024.
- Dr Christina Haarmann from Germany showed surveillance data for WB with high number of found dead and hunted and new introduction to Hesse in June 2024 by jump, hotspot in nature reserve, affected border triangle to Rhineland-Palatinate and Baden-Wuerttemberg, last infected area in Eastern Germany and singular cases within or east the „ASF protection corridor“. She highlighted special measures such as implementation of core areas, frequent active search for carcasses with dog teams, drones and humans, and strategic fencing (white zones and ASF protection corridors). Regarding outbreaks in domestic pigs there were confirmed cases in both commercial farms (4) and backyards (4).
- Dr Maria CEDERSMYG from Sweden described a relatively small outbreak in WB that happened in 2023, and it was well concentrated in both time and space. She highlighted that there was no virus circulation since end of Sept 2023 and the risk of new cases deemed negligible. She also informed that Sweden was free from ASF in wild boar after only one year from the first notification. ASF was never notified in domestic pigs.
- Dr Katarzyna WAWRZAK demonstrated the current situation with ASF in Poland. In the entire territory of the country 5072 animals were found dead with 23.4 % PCR positive and 55748 animals hunted with 0.21% PCR positive. Regarding domestic pigs surveillance the outbreaks were confirmed in both commercial farms (33) and backyards (3).
- Dr Paulius Bušauskas from Lithuania showed surveillance in WB in the zones of the country already considered affected at the beginning of the period 803 (74.97% PCR positive) found dead and 20341 (1.35% PCR positive) hunted. As for domestic pigs surveillance - 6 outbreaks in backyards were confirmed.
- Dr Edvins Olsevskis from Latvia presenting the data highlighted that in Latvia there was the highest percentage of PCR positive from the pigs found dead and that only 3 animals (samples) are tested in a case of large group of found dead animals (same location). pooling of 3 samples is performed and result is applied to the group. In total, 6 ASF outbreaks were confirmed in areas where ASFV is confirmed in wild boar

population: 2 outbreaks in small commercial farms (24-527 pigs) and 4 outbreaks in backyard farms (1-2 pigs).

- Dr Helen PROMMIK demonstrated the current situation for ASF in Estonia. Positive cases were only in wild boars and no in domestic pigs.
- Dr Cristina Sirbu from Moldova informed that 6 WB were found dead and all of them were PCR positive. All cases were on the border. Regarding domestic pigs there were outbreaks in backyards and commercial farms in previously free and considered as affected zones.
- Dr Svitlana Shlapatska from Ukraine indicated that surveillance in WB was only from those found dead with PCR positive results more than 80%. In domestic pigs' outbreaks took place in both commercial farms and backyards. In 2024 the number of outbreaks increased in comparison with 2023.
- Dr Aleksei Igolkin from Russia indicated outbreaks in domestic pigs and wild boars and highlighted the detection of recombinant ASF virus of genotypes I and II in Primorski Krai (East of Russia). Molecular genetic analysis (full-genome sequencing) showed 99.9% identity level with recombinant isolates from China. The circulation of recombinant variants of the ASF virus in Eurasia and the inability to limit economic and economic ties between countries confirm the need for molecular genetic monitoring by sequencing new isolates to timely identify mutations and study their properties.

Dr Bernard Van Goethem expressed his concern on recombinant virus and the development of the vaccines against ASF due to this new challenge.

Projects and missions to the countries

- Dr Toni Kirandjiski, presented ADEWBII project. This project includes biosecurity, surveillance (capacity building in Western Balkan countries), horizontal actions including WB CVO forum for communication and cooperation. In particular, there has been good progress with the surveillance program for ASF and policy protocols.
- Dr Edvins Olsevskis (from Latvia) presented the SGE expert mission in Albania. The challenges were implementation of surveillance program and biosecurity. Also, surveillance in wild boar was not conducted as hunting of all species has been prohibited since 2015. Experts recommended to enhance equipment required for killing of pigs and training/ identification and movement control/ biosecurity requirements/ urgent passive surveillance (both domestic and wild)/ training for farmers, veterinarians and hunters/ awareness campaign/ cross-border collaboration.
- Dr Carmina Gallardo, ASF-EURL, introduced the duties of ASF-EURL and current activities focusing on the Western Balkan region (hands-on support including training and the provision of biological materials etc.). She emphasised that cooperation between Western Balkan countries and the EURL has improved their capacity for ASF diagnosis.
- Dr Ivancho Naletoski from International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), shared activities on ASF mainly related to technical cooperation (TCP) and coordinated research projects (CRP). IAEA showed how many Emergency Diagnostic Packages were

delivered and events organised through Animal production and Health programs and demonstrated iVetNet Information Platform – One Stop Shop for Information Sharing.

Cross-border cooperation

Dr Van Goethem invited representatives from France, Albania and Latvia to give presentations on cross-border cooperation:

- Dr Guillaume Gerbier presented cross border cooperation in 2018-2020 among Belgium, Luxemburg and France. Based on their experiences, he highlighted that establishment of political framework in peace time, management measure cooperation (fencing, awareness raising of hunters), sharing information/experience and scientific collaborations are keys to combat ASF.
- Dr Era Llazani (from Albania) briefed cross border cooperation between Albania and Kosovo, including harmonisation of animal health certificates, border inspection, collaboration with ASF hunter association.
- Dr Maris Balodis from Latvia demonstrated the effectiveness of cooperation at different levels, namely:
 - Cooperation at CVO level – Baltic countries + Poland (Baltic Council of CVOs): annual meetings, discussions on actual topics and hot issues, exchange of experiences, best practices, intention to reach common agreements / position. He indicated that strategic fencing is one of the most effective tool for ASF control in wild boar.
 - Cooperation at expert level: Regular contacts – phone calls, Whats app, Viber, Quick solutions of sudden issues, quick advice, coordination of positions, contact distribution. He stressed the importance of cross-borders simulation exercises.
 - Cooperation in Nordic-Baltic region: meetings, seminars, simulation exercises, trainings. Objectives: to improve cooperation, communication and exchange of information and experiences between the veterinary authorities within the Nordic-Baltic region, in the context of contingency planning and during animal diseases crises and to increase awareness among professionals and stakeholders within the region regarding animal health threats and emerging disease.
- One of the highlights of the event was a presentation by Dr Klaus Depner, the expert from the Friedrich-Loeffler-Institute (Germany) who is also an expert of the EU Veterinary Team (EUVET). Dr Depner discussed the challenges of managing wild boar populations in cross-border areas. This presentation generated significant interest, as it addressed the practical difficulties of wildlife management in the context of ASF control.

Presentation, discussion and adoption of the SGE ASF23 recommendations

Following the discussions, after reviewing the reports on the current epidemiological situation from the SGE Members¹²,

² Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Kosovo*, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Sweden, Ukraine

The SGE ASF 23 recommends that:

1. Cross-border³ cooperation (see Annex) is essential for preventing, controlling, and eradicating transboundary animal diseases such as African Swine Fever (ASF). All countries should enhance cross-border **interdisciplinary** cooperation and coordination for effective management of ASF sharing resources, aligning policies, and communicating in a transparent way.
2. All countries should collaborate on strategies to monitor and manage wild boar populations including cross-border coordinated hunting and culling, habitat management, and strategic fencing in selected at risk border areas.
3. Field missions by GF-TADs experts should continue in recently affected or at-risk countries to rapidly provide support and science-based expert advice to the veterinary authorities. Interested countries should contact the SGE ASF secretariat.
4. All countries should implement previous SGE ASF recommendations to prevent, control and eradicate ASF.
5. The twenty-fourth meeting (SGE ASF24) of the Standing Group of Experts on African Swine Fever in Europe under the GF-TADs umbrella should be held in face-to-face format in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in April 2024.

Closing Remarks

The organizers of the SGE thanked all participants and stressed the importance of collaboration and coordination, including cross-border coordination in the struggle against ASF, all while following science and experience / best practice in the development of our strategies for the eradication of ASF.

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We would like to sincerely thank North Macedonia, the European Commission, FAO and WOAHP for kindly supporting the organisation of the SGE ASF23 conference.

All presentations are available on the GF-TADs page of WOAHP of the Europe website:

[23st Standing Group of Experts on African Swine Fever in Europe \(SGE-ASF23\) - WOAHP – Europe](#)

Annex 1 – Cross-border cooperation for ASF prevention in free areas and management in affected areas

1. The drafting of joint contingency planning between bordering countries should be encouraged in **peace time**. Countries should develop and update transboundary disease preparedness and response plans, including clear roles and responsibilities for national and local authorities, and identifying liaison officers. A political framework
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should also be set to grant **political** and **financial support** and engagement in time of crisis.

2. Cross-border simulation exercises should be organised and implemented.
3. Regular **meetings** should be organised, in peace time and in crisis time, between the competent authorities. **Technical** knowledges, data and information should be shared to keep **communication open, transparent** and to build mutual trust between bordering countries.
4. Countries should establish cross-border public awareness campaigns targeting farmers, transporters, hunters and the general-public on biosecurity practices, early disease reporting, and control measures. Awareness material should be provided in multiple languages to reach diverse populations, particularly in areas with significant cross-border movement.
5. The **identification of border areas at higher risk** based on wild boar ecology, behaviour, and natural habitat, should be promoted to prioritise the allocation of resources and limit the spread of ASF through the cross-border movement of wild boar.
6. As many detected ASF viruses as possible should be sequenced by all affected countries. The results of **genetic characterisation** of ASF viruses should be **shared** between neighbouring countries, other countries in the region and relevant regional or global reference laboratories to facilitate tracking of ASF virus evolution, transmission routes, outbreak origins and coordinated transboundary efforts.