



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

### **Sixteenth meeting (SGE ASF16)** **23 November 2020 - Teleconference**

#### **REPORT**

##### **Summary**

Due to the sanitary situation of the COVID-19, the sixteenth meeting of the standing group of experts on African Swine Fever (SGE ASF16), initially planned in Hungary, took place as a teleconference on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2020. 28 countries of Europe participated, as well as the GF TAD President of the Americas for a total of over 70 participants.

The participating member countries of the SGE-ASF for Europe briefly presented their national epidemiological situation regarding ASF, focussing on the changes since the last online meeting in May 2020. Some also provided the SGE and the Secretariat an idea of the impact the COVID 19 situation had on their ASF surveillance.

The Secretariat took the opportunity to present to the participants an overview of the ASF around the world. The OIE, the European Commission and FAO respectively completed the picture with the Americas, European, the Asian and the Balkans situations of ASF. Serbia and Germany gave an overview of the insight of the disease management, EFSA highlighted the activities currently being carried out in accordance with their mandate

A mission of the SGE experts will be organized as soon as the sanitary situation enables in Germany and Slovakia.

The SGE ASF16 were shown a set of recommendations. Amongst these, it was highlighted that preparedness, passive surveillance, early detection and prompt reaction are essential when ASF is detected for the first time in wild boar or in the domestic pig population. In case of first detection of ASF in a wild boar population a 'core zone' should be delineated and immediate actions should be taken to avoid further spread; the importance of involving many actors and stakeholders (like the Belgian did as part of their success story) in obtaining a successful and overall clearer picture of the situation. The SGE ASF 17 hopefully will take place in Hungary in April 2021, if the regional sanitary situation enables it.

A very large number of participants (71) attended this 16<sup>th</sup> meeting of the SGE ASF for Europe. Greece could not be present but provided its presentation to be published on the OIE webpage but the president of the Europe GFTAD explained the dynamics They represented the 14 members of the SGE ASF for Europe, 19 observer countries, and representatives from: the European Commission, the FAO and the OIE. The invitation has been extended to the Presidents of GF-TADs America and Asia. The former actively participated in the discussion

### **Introduction and objectives of the meeting**

The President of GF-TADs for Europe, Bernard Van Goethem, welcomed the participants and thanked the Delegate of Hungary Lajos Bognar, for the preparation of the physical unfortunately cancelled meeting. The topics and format of the meeting have been adapted to the situation. He invited the speakers to focus their presentation on updating the participants with progress of the ASF situation in their country, with information on the way the COVID crisis impacts on the ASF control.

### **Updates from the member countries of the SGE ASF**

All the detailed figures are available in the country presentations.

#### **Belarus**(Anna Sandul)

No change in the epizootic situation. The country declared still to be free from ASF and state veterinary service makes all possible efforts to keep on this state of play. All the major activities are established by the Republican Headquarter on ASF. Two main approaches are applied: active depopulation of wild boars (WB) and biosecurity measures at public swine holdings and private backyards farms. Active and passive surveillances are in place, covering WB and domestic pigs (DP) of public and private sectors according to a public decree. COVID did not impact surveillance.

#### **Belgium** (Myriam Logeot)

No active circulation and no virus found for the last year. Country submitted its freedom dossier to the OIE which is being evaluated. PCR positivity has been detected in bones. The clinical suspicions were negative.

COVID-19, no impact on the surveillance activities in domestic pigs. Slightly reduced in the wild boar population

#### **Bulgaria** (Anna Zdravkova)

Since the beginning of the last hunting season, the control measures seem to work well, without seropositive found in WB.

There were 3 outbreaks in domestic pigs of which one in EBP; positivity resulted in of each respectively.

COVID-19: No much impact on the country surveillance on ASF.

#### **Estonia** (Maarja Kristian)

In the zones considered free, all found and hunted WB tested were negative.

No suspicions in DP. Among those tested, all were negatives, showing the quality of the passive surveillance in DP.

Declaration of Estonia to the OIE, claiming to be free in domestic and captive feral pigs from September 2017.

COVID-19: all control programmes were maintained.

**Greece**

Not present; GFTAD President explained the only outbreak is under control after the mission took place

**Germany** (Christina Hartmann)

Cases are primarily concentrated in the eastern border and in wild boar. Buffer zones were immediately created together with passive surveillance infected areas. A substantially high PCR positivity is present in dead wild boars, much lower in the hunted ones. Domestic pigs surveillance data was provided showing the intensity of the controls.

**Hungary** (Lajos Bognar)

A large proportion of WB found are still PCR positive, while very few of them reveal seropositivity.

No outbreak in DP. Few Suspicions in the Backyard population.

COVID-19: all control programmes were slightly delayed.

**Latvia** (Edvins Olsevkins)

The presentation focused on the fact that, in DP, three of the four suspected cases were all positive, whereas the WB surveillance provided 0% seropositivity among the WB found dead.

In the hunted WB, out of over, 0,35% were PCR positive, 1.2% seropositive.

During COVID-19 everything is normal, risk-based inspections were carried out.

**Lithuania** (Darius Remeika)

- The data seems to be stable and promising, as no positivity in wild boars non affected zones was found and that in the already affected ones. PCR positivity amounts to 0,1% whereas seropositivity is limited to 1.6%. In DP in the free zone the only suspicion was negative and only two backyard farms resulted positive. However due to COVID, During the lockdown the biosecurity inspections in backyard farms were suspended; inspections were carried out only in order not to exclude the commercial farms from the trade; passive surveillance was in place in backyard farms and in commercial farms, samples were taken all time

**Moldova** (Maxim Sirbu)

The situation is stable; only PCR positivity in few of the wild boar hunted in the affected zones; in the Domestic population, 2 outbreaks were confirmed in backyard farms. One in the affected zone and one in a free zone.

In relation to COVID 19, the restrictions have led to the removal of predisposing factors and determinants of the ASF spread. Furthermore, the population has become much more aware and receptive to the calls of the authorities.

**Poland** (Krzysztof Jazdzewski)

The situation is still complicated. While for in the free zones the situation is stable, new positivity in wild boars in free zones has been detected. Much more complicated is the problem in the affected areas and in free zones for DP as new outbreaks have been confirmed (over 100).

COVID increased and therefore controls due to human situation, have suffered.

**Romania** (Ioan Bogolin )

The whole area of Rumania is affected, and no area is included in part one of Decision 2014/709/EU. While for the wild boars even if high PCR positivity and relatively high Seropositivity exists, a high number of new outbreaks in the DP (commercial and Bayard) is present and therefore very worrying. COVID-19 consequences: Control measures are difficult to implement, due to confinement and quarantine of pig owners. Stakeholders require lighter conditions to better contribute to the disease control.

**Russian Federation** (Nikita Lebedev)

Unfortunately, the situation is still hard, especially close to the border with China and in the small western area where the disease has become endemic is not reporting outbreaks in the WB population, does not help Russia. Regionalization map was presented. Outbreaks are therefore being notified in both wild and domestic population.

COVID-19 has impacted daily controls, population in particular is not collaborating due to the virus fear.

### **Serbia** (Boban Duric)

The situation in Serbia is fluid . while for the wild boar is not worrying (only 1 outbreak) complicated, as the maps provided show. The problems are not only present in the eastern bordering part, but also towards the centre where a buffer zone has been created. Having a second presentation Serbia provided details on how they managed to contain problems in the domestic population, expecting problems in the backyard industry especially on the border with Bulgaria but not in commercial farms.

Despite the problems and the budgetary issues created by COVID-19, Serbia can proudly show a huge commitment in controlling the disease.

### **Slovakia** (Jozef Bires)

With regards to this country, the positive note is that no outbreaks have been reported in the domestic population over the last 2 months. On the other hand, the situation concerning WB continues to remain unstable as positivity has been reported in both dead and hunted WB. This applies to free zones and to zones where ASF was previously detected.

ASF surveillance activities during COVID-19 have not been stopped. Several actions targeting all stakeholders involved were presented in the slide.

### **Ukraine** (Anna Shevchenko)

The country situation is quite stable. The outbreaks in the formerly free zones did not provide positivity in WB, both hunted and dead ones.

Different is the situation in the case of the domestic population, as positivity has been detected in previously free zones in backyard farms and also in commercial and backyard farm in areas which were previously affected.

COVID did not affect controls

### **Discussion**

President expressed his surprise in consideration of the situation in Belarus. He also asked Estonia figures on wild boar density. Estonia confirmed that density has reduced significantly although it is increasing in some regions therefore, the Competent Authority spoke to hunters' association reminding to continue their activity.

### **ASF in the America: situation and standing group of experts under the umbrella of the GF-TADs for Americas**

#### **(L. Barcos, OIE Regional Representative for the Americas)**

The RSC - GF-TADS -2019- agreed on the TORs for the creation of the SGE-ASF. The SGE-ASF priority activities were defined as: Border Control, Laboratory Diagnostics, Risk Communication and Emergency Preparedness, Wildlife and Biosecurity and business continuity. In Summer 2019, to verify the Region preparedness, a survey of all countries in the Americas was conducted to assess key elements including legal authority, human resources, infrastructure, and preparedness planning. It highlighted variability between and within sub-regions. Preparedness planning measures such as response planning, training and exercises was the main area requiring strengthening. Two GFTADs meetings were held, focusing on Border Controls and Risk introductions and pathways.

The Region also invested in capacity building activities organizing OIE National Focal Points for laboratories and epidemiologist, OIE National Focal Points for Communication, in collaboration with

FAO, an online course on ASF preparedness delivered to Latin America and Caribbean countries. Furthermore, several national and sub-regional trainings. The presentation focused on the challenges such as strengthening preventing measures and also the verification process of the implementation of the activities. Finally, the presentation provided details on the future activities.

Europe GF TADS President congratulated the Americas for the activities offering support.

## **African swine fever in Asia and the Pacific & SGE-ASF for Asia**

### **(Y. OH- Regional Project Coordinator FAO RAP)**

The presentation provided the status of the situation in the region in which to date 13 countries reported ASF. At least 8 million pigs dead/culled; real figure is likely much higher. The map provided showed a very complicated and dynamic situation in the affected countries. In certain countries, pork production declined well over 10 increasing leading to an increase demand on pork supply; the estimated economic losses are between 55-130 billion USD since introduction of ASF into the region (Asian Development blog) the commercial and small holder pig farming industry has dramatically changed in Asia since the introduction of ASF. There has been a huge impact but also some positive improvements in biosecurity and hygiene practices. There is still much work to be done on solutions to adapt the swine industry to be sustainable with the presence of ASF. Further work needs to be done to better understand the dynamics of wild/native pigs in the region. Because over 60% of the world pigs 'population is concentrated in the region and that there are 2 huge problems such as poor bio security heavily impacted on food loss, food security and economy. The presentation also gave an overview of the GFTAD activities in the region which has the objective to strengthen regional cooperation and regional dialogue on ASF control through regular exchange of information on ASF situation and control, collaboration of laboratory diagnostics and basic research, collaboration on awareness raising campaigns, collaboration on border control measures, coordination of disease control policies and building a coordinated science –based regional control strategy. Several priority topics are present. He presenter also stressed that FAO & OIE plays important role to ensure overall coordination of ASF-related activities and greater understanding of the different situations and needs across a very diverse region under the GF-TADs platform. (information gathering, series of webinars, trainings, meetings and workshops). Last but not least, news on awareness and information campaigns were provided.

### **Discussions**

The president thanked FAO for the work and the clear explanations; he offered full support to the Region from the EU side. He also reminded that missions from the Emergency EU teams have been carried out but that as soon as the situation allows it, GFTADs experts will visit Slovakia and Germany. Dr Barcos from OIE America, expressed the request of support from the EU to motivate and make aware not the large but particularly the small countries in the region. DR Van Goethem accepted the request, stating that political involvement at high level is needed; this provided positive results in Europe. Dr Komal, GFTAD President of the Americas, thanked the organisers. The Political momentum is a priority. Challenges are also due to the changes of CVO in certain countries

## **Summary of the ASF situation in the European Union (European Commission) (Simona Forcella, DG Sante, European Commission)**

The presentation focused on the current situation in Europe, the EU commission initiatives and provided key messages for the audience. Since 2014, the situation evolved a lot in

Europe and around, applying regionalisation based on risk assessment. The Commission supported member states through various initiatives in the latest months. Furthermore, data on recent notification was provided, stressing the importance of the latest developments in Germany but also the recent success stories of Belgium and Czech Republic. The speaker reminded of the current legal framework based on the OIE standards, the way the colour system to identify zoning for part I to IV of the Commission decision. Zoning also provides business continuity because the negative impact of ASF is reduced (safe trade from non-restricted areas, safe derogations for affected areas, etc.). Dr Forcella reminded that the EU regionalisation **for ASF** ensures that stringent control measures are implemented to contain ASF in the affected areas, safe trade can continue to take place from the non-affected areas or for a number of products, under well-defined and safe risk mitigating conditions, the EU legislation foresees strict measures to apply regionalization as it is based on science and fully in line with the OIE international standards.

She concluded

Providing key messages on global cooperation, transparency and trust, awareness, recognition of international principles of regionalisation(zoning),early reaction an implementation of specific key control measures

### **FAO activities on ASF in the Europe**

**(Daniel Beltran Alcrudo, FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia)**

FAO activities on ASF to increase prevention and preparedness in the countries focus in the Balkans, but support is also provided to other countries. These include, training( live and online) for vet services, laboratories, to train the trainers. Of great relevance also the technical workshops prepared and to be delivered focusing on biosecurity.

Dr Beltran Alcrudo gave an overview of the seven modules for ASF preparedness online course, the breakdown of participants and countries; The course feedback was overall positive, and the knowledge base has significantly improved. He explained that potential improvements were identified for future courses (timing, video material, more webinars) and that a second online course could be organized in 2021; he informed about the [iMammalia application](#) for wildlife spotting adapted for the reporting of wild boar carcasses . Regarding the ongoing and upcoming activities, many were mentioned and include educational videos, pigs' sector surveys, face to face and standalone trainings, the assessment of hunting grounds biosecurity, cost benefits analysis and simulation exercises.

### **ASF Serbian experience: EARLY REACTION AND CONTROL MEASURES IN DOMESTIC PIGS**

**( S Ostolich)**

The speaker gave a detailed overview of the pig industry in Serbia, the pigs population which primarily concentrated in the northern part, number of farms and density for both domestic and wild boar population. He included a very detailed explanation of how veterinary services are organised, the fact that there is a crisis centre and how this was important to manage the outbreaks from the beginning( 2019). The way the disease was well managed is clear, as rigorous measures were applied from the beginning. Stamping out was immediately applied. Legal Bases were adopted to carry out activities, to establish protection and surveillance zones were issued. The emergency headquarters (Regional/Local Crisis Centers were established and enforced. Missions from the EU and GFTAD experts were carried out to establish the robustness of the actions taken, the establishment of testing with active and passive surveillance. The target group for testing on African swine fever virus included dead or sick

domestic pigs older than 2 months, or any other category in case no pigs older than 2 months are present at the farms/households.

Serbia then explained in detail, how they intend to implement surveillance and testing. For the perfect implementation of the plan, the surveillance results are to be provided and confirmed upon the end of every quarter period and finally at the end of the year. Serbia was expecting that domestic population would be heavily involved and therefore considering the source of infection, the preventive depopulation of domestic pigs in the narrowly infected area in wild pigs in Pirot and Bor districts delayed and slowed the spread of the disease, but it could not prevent the virus to be entered due to its continuous presence in the environment. The consequent occurrence of ASF in domestic pigs was subsequently confirmed in a wider area with a higher density of small farms, but the disease did not spread to commercial farms or outside the areas affected by ASF in wild boars.

Serbia is facing many challenges, but they are convinced of the positive results achieved as for example, no commercial farm has been affected; they will continue the control and surveillance in wild boars, cooperation and coordination with the local authorities and public institutions, awareness campaigns, financial and legal support, regional cooperation are the instruments to achieve results.

The President congratulated Serbia, and guaranteed support!

### **Germany: Some basic considerations regarding ASF control in domestic pigs and wild boar**

#### **(K Dnepr)**

The speakers provided a number of considerations characteristics such as that contrary to, for example FMD, it has low contagiousness, slow spread, few secondary infections, that the involvement of wildlife creates a complex, obscure and dynamic situation due to the fact that parameters such as density of wild boars change and therefore everything seems to change. It is of crucial important early detection as if this does not work and the disease is not early detected it will be too late and more complicated to act. Differently from other diseases, the spread requires contact and therefore, in DP, this is classifiable as “stable disease” whereas in wildboars it is more habitat disease and to implement the strategy, the forest could be considered a sort of stable. Carcass removal is a key factor: If carcasses will NOT be removed, exposure opportunity will increase -> more contacts. Germany has adopted the successful method used in Belgium (white zone). Germany used also the carcass search and testing approach to verify virus presence. There must be indicators therefore estimation of carcasses probably found naturally dead and by testing you will get this verification.

Biosecurity is a pillar for disease controlling but the most important thing is not the amount of money spent to build fences, but the methodology applied to run it. Of course it looks normal in D but can be implemented for wild boar control and in this case it requires a lot of awareness and education covering all stakeholders: hunters, farmers, travellers, long-distance drivers, hunting tourists, caregivers and nursing staff, veterinarians. Germany has focused a lot on hunters.

The Speaker concluded reminding the figures found since the first outbreak and the measures in place in the infected area.



Both GF Tad Presidents( AMERICA and EUROPE) thanked the speaker for the detailed presentation inviting him to deliver the talk for the SGE in the America

### **EFSA On-going risk assessments on African swine fever ( S. Dhollander)**

The presenter gave an overview of the current work on ASF and in particular on the 5 mandates on which EFSA is working, the expected timelines for delivering this work being requested by the EU Commission.

The first will be published at the beginning of 2021 and will focus on the exit strategy, EFSA should define pathway(s) to ASF freedom in relevant areas in accordance with the Strategic approach to the management of African Swine Fever for the EU and recommend criteria for defining an area as free from ASF in wild boar.

In this task, EFSA should take into account the results of wild boar testing (in particular, antibody detection and virus identification) and the results in relation to the identification of wild boar carcasses (with differing time since death. The main objectives are the identification of different patterns of serological surveillance results given different scenarios associated with persistence of infection at low prevalence and the prediction of patterns of surveillance results (virological, serological, combined) that could occur at the tail of the given a range of different epidemiological scenarios; the second mandate covers the EPI 5 Report finalised to Analyse the epidemiological data on ASF from MS and non-EU countries affected by ASFV Genotype II; the work on Outdoor Farming, takes in consideration that European Commission (EC) Strategic approach provides for a general recommendation for a prohibition of outdoor keeping of pigs at least in the areas covered by Decision 2014/709/EU (=affected by ASF); for this reason, EU Member States proposed to derogate from ban and to set biosecurity criteria to allow for derogations and EFSA is studying the infection risks associated with keeping of pigs outdoors in ASF-affected areas.

The GAP Research ( 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> mandate) evaluate the studies needed to understand: the role of arthropod vectors in ASF transmission (biological and mechanical), the ASF survival and transmission from contaminated environment and the residual infectivity of buried wild boar carcasses. These studies aim at identifying the **patterns of seasonality** in wild boar and domestic pigs and identify main factors that determinate these patterns, to provide recommendations in particular in relation to risk mitigation options to address these factors, where relevant.

The speaker concluded with an overview of the STOP ASF Campaign focused in the Balkan area.

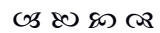
DR Van Goethem thanked the speaker and congratulated for the presentation.

### **Presentation, discussion and adoption of SGE ASF16 recommendations**

The draft recommendations of the SGE ASF15 were presented by the President and agreed by the SGE ASF16 participants.

### **Closing REMARKS - Future steps**

The President thanked the big number of participants coming different. Russia proposed to include ASF in the list of disease to receive zone freedom for the Region. They will send the letter to the GFTAD President. The discussion will continue.



We would like to sincerely thank the European Union and the OIE for kindly supporting the organisation of the SGE ASF16 teleconference.

All presentations are available on the GF-TADs page of the OIE of the Europe website.