

**Opinion of the**  
**Scientific Steering Committee**  
**on the**  
**GEOGRAPHICAL RISK OF**  
**BOVINE SPONGIFORM**  
**ENCEPHALOPATHY (GBR) in**  
**Romania**

Adopted on 11/05/2001

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**THE QUESTION**

The Scientific Steering Committee (SSC) was asked by the Commission to express its scientific opinion on the Geographical BSE-Risk (GBR), i.e. the likelihood of the presence of one or more cattle being infected with BSE, pre-clinically as well as clinically, at a given point in time, in a number of Third Countries.

This opinion addresses the GBR of Romania.

**THE BACKGROUND**

In December 1997 the SSC expressed its first opinion on Specified Risk Materials where it stated, inter alia, that the list of SRM could probably be modulated in the light of the species, the age and the geographical origin of the animals in question.

In June 2000 the European Commission adopted a Decision on SRM (2000/418/EC), prohibiting the import of SRM from all Third Countries that have not been "satisfactorily" assessed with regard to their BSE-Risk.

In July 2000 the SSC adopted its final opinion on "the Geographical Risk of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (GBR)", which described a method and a process for the assessment of the GBR and summarised the outcome of its application to 23 countries. Detailed reports on the GBR-assessment were published on the Internet for each of these countries.

In September 2000 the Commission invited Third Countries, which are authorised to export products to the EU that are listed in annex II to the above mentioned SRM-Decision, to provide a dossier for the assessment of their GBR. Until today 46 dossiers have been received, 28 are already assessed and 18 are in different states of assessment.

This opinion concerns only one country, Romania. It is recommended to read the opinion and the detailed report on the GBR of Romania in the context of the GBR-opinion of July 2000.

The Commission requested this SSC opinion on the GBR of this, and of all Third Countries that decided to provide the necessary information, as input into its Decision concerning the treatment of exports from these countries in view of BSE in general and SRM in particular.

The SSC is concerned that the available information was not confirmed by inspection missions as they are performed by the FVO in the Member States. It recommends that BSE-related aspects are included in the program of future inspection missions, as far as feasible.

## The Analysis

The external challenge that Romania was exposed to was **high** between 1980-1990 and between 1994-2000 and **moderate** between 1991-1993. About 22,000 cattle were imported from BSE-affected countries other than the UK: 8,600 from DE and IRL during 1980-1987 (mostly in 1981); 6,300 from NL, DK, DE and FR between 1988 and 1993; and 7,400 from NL, DK, DE, and IT since 1994. MBM imports from BSE affected countries amounted to 467 tonnes from the UK (in 1995) and about 10,600 tonnes from other BSE-affected countries, mostly imported before 1990 from DE and to a much smaller extent from IT and IRL. After 1990 smaller imports of MBM occurred from more countries: NL, DE, BE, IT, and DK. All in all these imports make it likely that the BSE agent entered Romania, either during the eighties or after 1994.

The BSE/cattle system of Romania was **extremely unstable** from 1980 to 1996 and **unstable** since then. The feed ban that apparently was already adopted in 1982 and the authorised feed recipes that did not include animal protein in cattle feed are not regarded as sufficient evidence that cattle could not receive animal proteins because no information was provided on enforcement. In 1997 this feed ban was reconfirmed, the production of concentrates and premixes for cattle was prohibited, and controls were introduced. This made accidental feeding of MBM to cattle much more unlikely, but again controls remained unsatisfactory. Since 1974 rendering was done at 130°C for 90 minutes (pressure not specified), and since 1997 at 130°C for 20min at 3bar. No information was provided on the enforcement of the application of the conditions prior to 1997, since then some regular controls are carried out. Rendering therefore is assessed as being able to reduce the BSE agent to some extent since 1997. A partial SRM-ban existed since 1995, when brains and spinal cord and non-edible bovine offal were withdrawn from the feed chain. Since 29 January 2001, fallen stock and SRM have to be incinerated. BSE is notifiable since 1993 and passive and some elements of active BSE surveillance exist. However, the surveillance of the domestic cattle population is assessed as insufficient to detect low levels of BSE-incidence. Cross-contamination cannot be excluded. The relatively small number of ELISA tests annually carried out since 1995 cannot prove the contrary, also because their stated sensitivity is with 0.5-2% contamination to low.

It is concluded that it is likely, but not confirmed that one or several cattle that are (pre-clinically or clinically) infected with the BSE agent are currently present in the domestic herd of Romania (**GBR- III**).

Given the unstable system and the fact that the BSE agent is likely to be already present in the country, it is assumed that the GBR is increasing.

*A summary of the reasons for the current assessment is given in annex 1 to this opinion. A detailed report on the assessment of the GBR of Romania is published separately on the Internet. It was produced by the GBR-task force of the SSC-secretariat and peer reviewed by the GBR-Peer group. The country had two opportunities to comment on different drafts of the report before the SSC took both, the report and the comments, into account for producing this opinion. The SSC appreciates the good co-operation of the country's authorities.*

ANNEX I

Romania - Summary of the GBR-Assessment, May 2001						
GBR-Level	EXTERNAL CHALLENGE		STABILITY			INTERACTION of EXTERNAL CHALLENGE and STABILITY
	1980-90: HIGH; 1991-93: MODERATE 1994-2000: HIGH.		1980-96: EXTREMELY UNSTABLE; SINCE 1997: UNSTABLE.			The system was extremely unstable until 1996. In this period it had to cope with a high (1980-90); moderate (91-93), and (since 1994) again high external challenge.  Given the extreme instability of the system, BSE infectivity that most likely entered Romania in the 80s or the mid 90s at the latest was probably recycled and amplified.
GBR-trend	Live Cattle imports	MBM imports	Feeding	Rendering	SRM-removal	
III	<p><u>UK:</u> According to Country dossier no cattle imported. EUROSTAT states 3 animals exported in 1982.</p> <p><u>Non UK:</u> In total around 22,400 animals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>80-87: 8,600 from DE, and IRL.</li> <li>88-93: 6,300 from NL, DK, DE, and FR.</li> <li>94-99: 7,400 from NL, DK, DE and IT.</li> </ul>	<p><u>UK:</u> 466 t in 1995</p> <p><u>Non UK:</u> Around 10,600 t in total:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>80-85: 4,500 t from DE, IT, IRL</li> <li>86-90: 3,800 t from DE in 1990</li> <li>91-93: 285 t from DK, BE, DE</li> <li>94-99: 1,900 t from DE, IT, BE, NL, DK.</li> </ul>	<p><b>1980-96: Not OK Since 1997 Reasonably OK.</b></p> <p>Feed ban adopted in 1982 and confirmed in 1997. Also in 1997 stop of production of concentrates and premixes for cattle. No information provided on controls before 1997 and no information on the method and results of analytical feed control that are carried out since 1997.</p>	<p><b>1980-96 Not OK, Since 1997 Reasonably OK</b></p> <p>Heat treatment until 1997 no specified pressure. Since 1997 known to reduce BSE infectivity.</p> <p>Degree of enforcement of heat treatment unclear for the time before 1997. Since then improved.</p>	<p><b>Not OK</b></p> <p>No SRM-ban before 1995.</p> <p>Between 1995 and 2001 brains and spinal cord and offal not fit for humans withdrawn from feed chain.</p> <p>Since 29 Jan. 2001 fallen stock and SRM incinerated .</p>	<p><u>BSE Surveillance:</u> BSE notifiable since 1993. Passive and active surveillance but not sufficient to detect low levels of BSE incidence.</p> <p><u>Cross-contamination:</u> Cannot be excluded to have occurred in the past and even after the 1997 feed ban.</p>
						<b>INTERNAL CHALLENGE</b>
						An internal challenge could have occurred already in the 80s and in the mid 90s at the latest. It would be growing since its first occurrence but remains still below the detection level of the existing surveillance.