



# PPR Expert Mission to Bulgaria EU VET Initiative

18-19 December 2024

PAFF Committee, 22-23 January 2025



# Terms of reference:

In response to PPR in Bulgaria

*Providing on-the-spot assistance*

- *most suitable PPR control and eradication measures*
- *scientific, technical, managerial aspects*

*Specific questions addressed:*

- *What are the critical points and how to be addressed with the most immediate and urgent measures which need to be implemented to control the PPR epidemic?*
- *What are the measures to be taken by the competent authorities in Bulgaria to mitigate the risk of PPR virus introduction into other territories and for early detection and quick response to eventual outbreak?*

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# Places visited during the mission

*Due to security reasons, the competent authorities evaluated that the EU VET mission could not go to the field and make direct observations of the situation and of the measures implemented*

## *Day 1*

- *Arrival in Sofia, Bulgaria*

## *Day 2 – HQ of Bulgarian Food and Safety Authority*

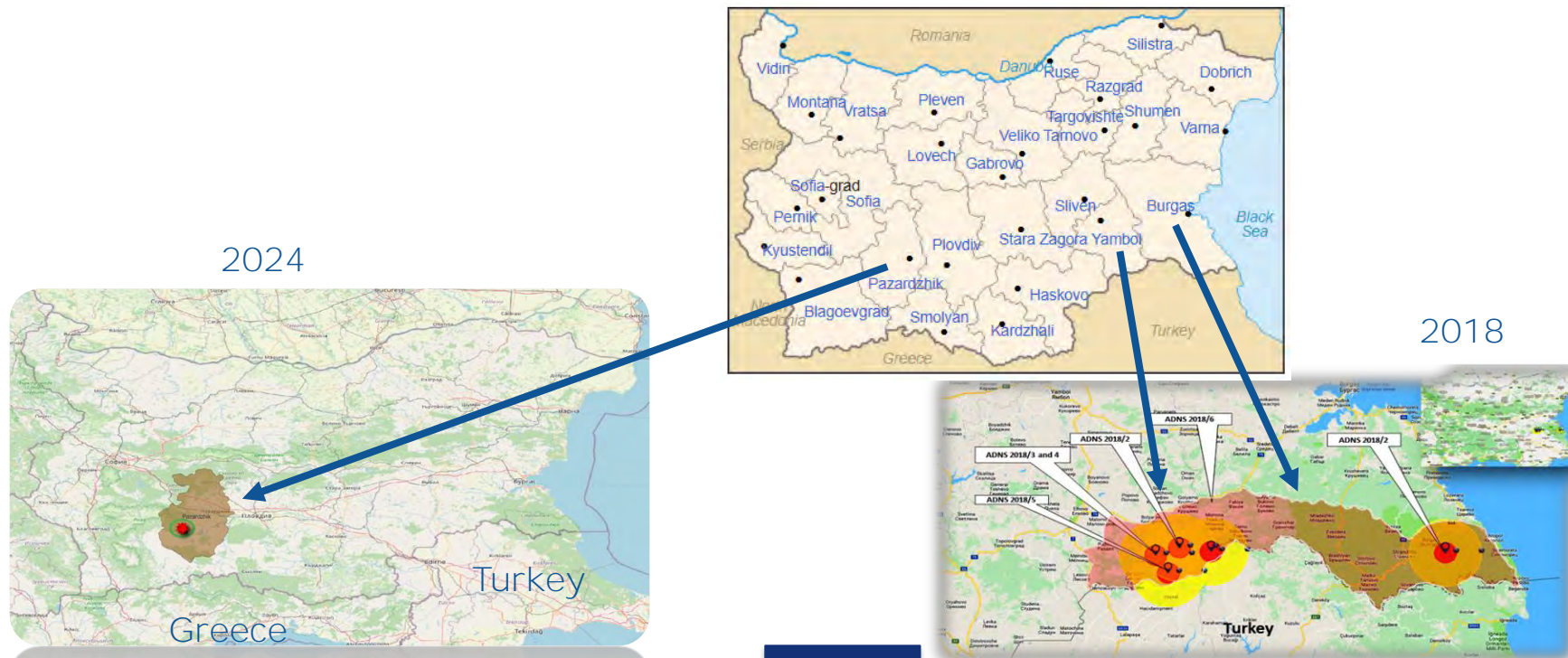
- *Meeting with BFSA and private veterinarians involved in first detection of PPR: presentation of the investigation of the PPR suspicion up to the day the official authorities were contacted*
- *Meeting with Bulgarian Minister and deputy Minister of Agriculture*
- *Meeting with BFSA, and official veterinarian in charge of applying field measures – presentation of measures applied and any additional questions*

## *Day 3 – HQ of Bulgarian Food and Safety Authority*

- *Final discussions and presentation of recommendations*

## Epidemiological background and situation at the time of the EUVET

- First incursion of PPR in Bulgaria in June 2018 in Yambol and Burgas regions (border with Turkey). Although the disease was controlled, all measures (culling) not fully implemented
- New incursion of PPR reported in Pazardzhik region on 25<sup>th</sup> of November 2024, with 5 holdings corresponding to one epidemiological unit (one same family in Velingrad) with mortality and sick animals





## Epidemiological background and situation at the time of the EUVET

### Steps leading to PPR confirmation

- Clinical signs/deaths in sheep and lambs reported to a first vet on 5<sup>th</sup> November
- Visit of farm by registered vet on 11<sup>th</sup> of November, nothing reported
- Second visit of registered vet on 20<sup>th</sup> of November, after reports of new symptoms in lambs
- Third vet consulted by phone on 20<sup>th</sup> of November, who raised the possibility of PPR based on pictures and videos
- Registered vet contacted the official vets. Samples taken on 21<sup>st</sup> of 22<sup>nd</sup> of November
- Confirmation of PPR by NRL. Official declaration on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November

Possible origin to be investigated: illegal import of animals from Greece, but no definitive evidence of source of infection

Estimation that the disease has been present in the farm since at least early October

*Absence of typical symptoms in some cases and the presence of secondary bacterial infections (e.g. pasteurellosis), have delayed the suspicion of PPR infection and report to official veterinary authorities.*



## Control measures

- *Despite the previous conclusions of the euvet missions, the diagnostic was delayed*
- *Competent authorities declared having taken the following measures:*
  - Establishment of a protection and a surveillance zone
  - Within these two zones: ban of animal movement, animal census, weekly clinical exams, disinfection of vehicles, awareness campaigns
  - Establishment of a further restricted zone with ban of movement of small ruminants and of cattle mixed with small ruminants, except in case of immediate slaughter (accepted after clinical exam and obtention of permit)
  - Reinforcement of police checks against illegal movement of animals across the country.
- *From 6/12: ban of animal movements in and out of whole region, with temporary, targeted check-points by police*



## Control measures

- *Key measures not applied because of protests and legal actions:*
  - Culling of animals in the infected holdings
  - Clinical examination, census and disinfection of vehicles in the protection zone
  - Animal sampling in the surveillance zone (clinical examination done in 57/04 holdings)
- *Protests fueled by remission of clinical signs and socio-political context*
- *Lack of trust between the veterinary authorities and the farmers and their representatives and a parliament committee in place to follow the issue*
- *EUVET team understood that biosecurity measures such as disinfection of vehicles and persons entering farms within the protection and surveillance zones are left to the responsibility of the farmers with limited oversights and information on procedures from the veterinary authorities*
- *Trucks have forced their way in protection zone to provide feed for animals, with no disinfection of vehicles at exit of the zone*



## Control measures

- *Ministry stated that the control measures are supported by all 27 small ruminant breeders associations (92% of sheep and goat breeders)*
- *Example of public support given to EUvet team: neighbouring vigilantes called the police to inform that animal keepers within the protection zone brought animal to grazing.*
- *Additional surveillance measures concerning illegal animal movements in the border regions had been implemented with the agreement of Ministry of Interior since August 2024, with no suspicious movements reported*
- *Veterinary services did not mention any specific plan for new measures to be implement in the near future in any part of the country*





## Laboratory diagnosis

- *NRL has managed to provide results for all samples without any delay*
- *Heavy workload as facing outbreaks of sheep pox and goat pox in parallel*
- *While the results of the NRL are not questions for pox viruses, their results on PPR are questioned by farmers (due to remission of clinical signs, notably)*
- *Results of the NRL have been confirmed by EURL-PPR*
- *Results of EURL-PPR used by authorities for public announcement to regain trust on veterinary authorities. Declared to have had a positive result on public opinion*
- *BFSA and the NRL have stated that they have all the support and resources needed to carry out PPR diagnostic work*

## Considerations and critical points (1)

- *Investigations in Romania and Greece pointed to a risk of spread of PPR by vehicles and persons visiting infected farms*

*Without measures in place the risk of diffusion is high and constant .*

- *This report is based solely on information collected during discussions held during the mission.*

*An additional EUVET mission could be mandated at a later date, at least to assess in the field the control measures implemented in the affected establishment as well as surrounding zones (protection, surveillance and further restricted zones)*

## Considerations and critical points (2)

*Looking at the regional, EU perspective, this emergence suggests:*

- *As in Romania and Greece, there are delays in identifying PPR. Information and warnings on PPR emergence in EU provided during PAFF meeting have not improved the capacity of field veterinarians to identify suspected PPR cases.*

*Could information from EUvet missions be better transferred down to the field across the EU?*

- *Region affected not part of regions where surveillance of TADs implemented for TAD and THRACE programmes.*

*There is maybe a need to revise the strategy for the surveillance programmes in the region (possible extension or change of focus).*

## Conclusions and recommendations (1)

- *Stamping out in the affected establishments (killing and disposal of all small ruminants, followed by cleaning and disinfection of the affected premises) and all control measures in the protection, surveillance and further restricted zones, in line with EU legislation should be immediately implemented to prevent possible further spread of the disease.*
- *Stamping out of infected herds, in line with current EU legislation, combined with standstill and strict movement control should remain the basic method for control and eradication of PPR*
- *Enough resources are available to veterinary services to proceed with clinical investigation as fast as it would need to be. Farms visit to look for clinical signs must be checked multiple times (once a week is recommended). All means possible should be used to increase the task force.*

## Conclusions and recommendations (2)

- *Ensuring that there are no other outbreaks should be a priority while the situation with the infected establishment is on-going and being resolved. Recommendations to reduce risks of further transmissions include:*
  - Implementing a stricter control of animal movement within the restricted area, and widen the restriction to the whole country for a specific period, so the possibility of suspicions of PPR can be investigated across the country
  - Immediate application of measures to disinfect vehicles and people in contact with animals within protection zone under the authority of the veterinary services immediately.
  - Increase awareness of farmers for the need to disinfect trucks entering farms
  - Communication about the risk of disease spread from the people visiting or surrounding the infected farm and biosecurity measures to be taken should also be widely communicated, with direct verification by authorities.
  - Provide more information at all levels about the specifics of symptoms observed, risks of misdiagnosis and of antibiotic treatments

## Conclusions and recommendations (3)

*The authorities should remain open for discussion with the farmers in neutral settings, but stay firm and determined on the need to apply all control measures according to EU legislation and on their trust on the results of the NRL. Transparency on actions taken is paramount to keep the support of the majority of the breeders and public.*

*Only samples meaningful for investigation should be processed by the NRL: ocular and/or nasal swabs and tissues (not EDTA blood as there is only limited presence of PPRV in blood). Diagnostic work should concentrate on samples taken from animals showing clinical signs.*

*Investigation of the origin of the outbreak of PPR in Bulgaria should continue, even if it is not the top priority for the moment.*

*Increase exchanges between competent authorities at different levels in Bulgaria, Romania and Greece, so that they can share experience and collaborate*



The EU-VET team would like to thank all colleagues from Bulgaria for their great support and help

*The working atmosphere during the mission was excellent despite the evident huge pressure associated with the situation. The colleagues from Bulgaria gave all their support and assistance to facilitate a fruitful mission in a very transparent manner.*

*We also thank the team of interpreters who undertook their task with great professionalism and efficiency during this mission.*