



PPR Expert Mission to Romania EU VET Initiative

30 July - 01 August 2024

PAFF Committee, 20th September 2024



Terms of reference:

In response to PPR in Romania

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 Romania to mitigate the risk of PPR virus introduction into other territories and for early detection and quick response to eventual outbreak?*

Experts: Arnaud Bataille (Head of EURL for PPR, Team Leader), Kris De Clercq (virologist)



Places visited during the mission

Day 1.

- *Arrival in Romania*

Day 2.

- *Road trip to affected area in Tulcea*
- *Field visit to unaffected farm in area of Stejaru*
- *Field visit to infected farm in Stejaru (RO-PPR-2024-00020)*
- *Meeting with the Mayor of Stejaru*

Day 3.

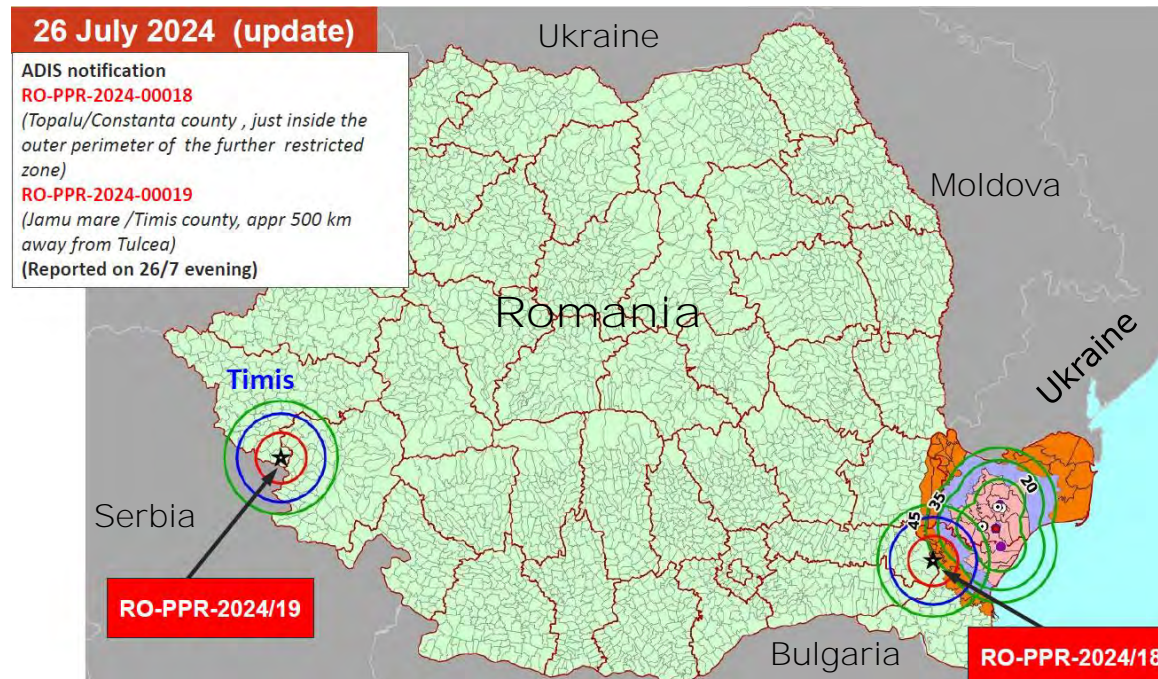
- *Meeting with Central Competent Authority and Local Authority in Tulcea*
- *Field visit to infected farm in Stejaru (RO-PPR-2024-00021)*

Day 4.

- *Meeting with the NRL-PPR in Bucarest*
- *Closing meeting at the NRL-PPR with Central Competent Authority*

Epidemiological background and situation at the time of the EuVET

- Till 19th July 2024 Romania had a free status for PPR and the diseases had never been recorded on the territory of the country.
- Between 19th July and the dates of the EUVET mission, a total of 32 outbreaks of PPR had been notified in Tulcea (29), Constanta (2) and Timis (1) regions in Romania.





Control measures

- *Any movement of animals from an infected farm since the 1st of June are investigated retrospectively (no suspicion observed via commercial connections).*
- *Enforcement of movement restrictions mainly through random search by police. Stricter measures announced by Competent Authorities during final meeting, including permanent check points in roads linking Tulcea to other regions.*
- *Grazing prohibited, although some farmers allowed in special cases to bring animals to designated grazing areas with no mingling with other animals*
- *Personnel protective equipment and shoe baths used to enter premises, but shoe protection used quickly shredded when walking inside premises.*
- *Farmers aware that strict biosecurity measures must be put in place in the affected area, but the biosecurity measures varied and did not seem always sufficient, notably concerning disinfection of trucks and persons entering the establishment.*

Visit 1 - unaffected farm in Stejaru

- *Fattening farm and collection centre within surveillance zone with 7000 sheep and 2000 goats, exporting mainly to Greece and Jordan*
- *No visits to farm after the notification of PPR in Romania. Before notification, owners of collection centres visiting each other regularly*
- *Animals mostly bought in spring and in autumn and transported by trucks going to several farms the same day*
- *Extra trucks rented to bring animals to harbour for exports*



Visit 2 - infected farm in Stejaru

- *Fattening farm with 52,000 sheep; PPR infection notified on 29/07/2024 (RO-PPR-2024-00020)*
- *Sheep usually bought at farms located in Central and N-W Romania, with last entry on 24th of June. Last arrivals kept in separate barn and among the last ones infected*
- *No grazing, feed brought by trucks*
- *Animals culled in batches of 150-200 with gas in closed trucks, then buried in a pit next to farm*
- *No clear source of introduction, noting that trucks bringing feed stop close to first barn infected*



Visit 3 – Infected farm in Stejaru

- *Fattening farm with 19,000 sheep; PPR infection notified on 29/07/2024 (RO-PPR-2024-00021)*
- *No animals were received in the last 2 months*
- *Feed bought from a local farm and unloaded outside the farm. Trucks still pass close to farm moving dust*
- *During visit, truck seen at the entry of the farm to load gas, with front tyres dipping in the Virkon pool. This entry is only 25-50m away from animal barns*
- *Swab samples taken from two trucks used for culling and from shoes of veterinarians to test possibility of virus spread through trucks or visitors*





Considerations and critical points (1)

- *Many farms in Tulcea specialised in collecting animals from breeding farms from across the country and fattening them for over 3 months before export to up to 26 different destinations. It highlights the economic importance and risk of this outbreak, and the need for swift and strict measures to rapidly control the disease.*
- *Many delays in contacting veterinary authorities because symptoms first associated to heat and bacterial infections (secondary infection associated with PPR, e.g. Pasteurella), and/or because of absence of typical set of symptoms*
- *First notifications in Baia area but most infections in Stejaru area. Investigation suggest that movement of animals from an infected farm in Stejaru at origin of infection in Baia*
- *Unwritten agreements can lead to movement of animals between farms, outside of the typical commercial trade routes*

Considerations and critical points (2)

- *In most cases, infection of farms could not be associated with animal movements (including outbreaks in Constanta and Timis), but investigation still on-going.*
- *Concentrated feed bought from local producers, and granulated feed from Bulgaria. In Stejaru, trucks rented and shared among farmers to carry feed. In some case, same team employed by small farms to shear wool of sheep in April- May*
- *Babadag area (Tulcea): First investigations because dead animals found in waste storage point. Investigation more tricky because many farmers do not want to cooperate. Involves middle men bringing animals to collection centres. Such trade may be at origin of infections in Smardan area*
- *At this point there was no clear evidence of the real source of the epidemic in Romania. Epidemiological investigations for each of the outbreaks had not been completed by the time of the EuVET due to the huge workload*

Conclusions and recommendations (1)

- *The Romanian veterinary authorities took excellent measures in the field to control the disease, with rapid confirmation from NRL*
- *First ever introduction of PPR in Romania– therefore unexpected and exceptional situation*
- *The main difficulties and challenges for eradication:*
 - ✓ *the delay detection of the outbreaks by farmers and local vets,*
 - ✓ *the high density and close proximity of farms and susceptible animals*
 - ✓ *Unwillingness of some farmers to cooperate*
 - ✓ *Difficulty to control all animal movements and complete investigations as large number of animals to cull*
- *High risk for still existing non-detected outbreaks and further spread of the disease and generates additional challenges for the prevention of spread via indirect means*

Conclusions and recommendations (2)

- *Some recommendations to reduce risks of further transmission within and out of the restricted area:*
 - *Stricter animal movement controls in affected areas and across the country (already planned at time of final meeting)*
 - *Farms still allowed to graze to be checked for symptoms regularly*
 - *Possibility of indirect transmission through trucks and persons. Farmers and vets to be engaged to implement extremely strict biosecurity measures must be ensured when entering farms within restriction zone with thorough disinfection of truck surfaces*
- *The restriction zone around each of the outbreaks detected should be established based on a risk assessment, with appropriate size and prolongation of the measures imposed till there is clear evidence for absence of virus circulation based on documented clinical examinations and laboratory surveillance.*

Conclusions and recommendations (3)

- *All previous (from 1st of June) movements of susceptible animals outside the established restrictions zones must be traced in priority and thoroughly investigated to rule out any possibility for or detect eventual other outbreak(s) as soon as possible*
- *Stamping out, combined with standstill and strict movement control should remain the basic method for control and eradication of PPR until clear evidence that all outbreaks have been controlled. For now the period between confirmation of the disease and completion of killing and disposal activities by the Romanian authorities is really very short and must be kept in the same timeline.*
- *Detailed epidemiological surveys should be finalized, as soon as possible, to investigate the time and source of infection and modes of transmission for every single outbreak*

Conclusions and recommendations (4)

- *Investigations of farms within the 3km zones for presence of clinical signs have not yet been completed, suggesting that not enough resources are available to veterinary services . Farms visit to look for clinical signs must be checked multiple times (once a week is recommended). All means possible must be seek to increase the task force.*
- *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.*
- *Clinical surveillance and passive reporting by farmers and private veterinarians is of the greatest importance for recognition of the disease and should be maintained and further enforced on the whole territory of Romania. Awareness effort should be continued and reinforced, notably concerning difficulties in clinical diagnosis*



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

The working atmosphere during the mission was excellent. The colleagues from the Romania gave all their support and assistance to facilitate a fruitful mission in a very transparent manner.

*Special thanks to Cristian Mortasivu for his greatest support **in carrying out the mission.***

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