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REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE THIRD REGIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE OF GF-TADS FOR EUROPE

Brussels, Belgium, 24-25 February 2010

The meeting of the 3rd Regional Steering Committee of the Global Framework for the Progressive Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases (GF-TADs) for Europe was hosted by the European Commission in Brussels, on 24 and 25 February 2010.

The list of participants and the agenda are presented as Appendices I and II respectively.

1. Opening session

Opening addresses were given by Dr Lukauskas from Lithuania who commended the activities of OIE, EC and FAO for the control of animal diseases worldwide. He mentioned the threats posed by exotic diseases and atypical diseases, the need for trained competent authorities and cooperation between countries, the importance of standardized and efficient diagnostic tools, the concerns posed by rabies, African swine fever (ASF) and Classical swine fever (CSF), and the necessity for countries to support Veterinary Services (VS).

Prof. Belev, President of the OIE Regional Commission for Europe and OIE Regional Representative for Eastern Europe, stressed the need to combine efforts to prevent and combat diseases in the region. He recalled the need to continuously dialogue at high political level to establish and maintain adequate structures and capacities of VS.

Dr de Leeuw, FAO Policy Officer, who represented Dr Lubroth, CVO of the FAO, recalled the objectives of GF-TADs and the devastating impacts of TADs. He mentioned the reality and importance of the "One World One Health" concept and the number of important diseases still present in the region needing action.

Dr Vallat, Director General of the OIE stressed the interest of the GF-TADs mechanism to facilitate and coordinate programmes based on regional priorities, which involve key stakeholders, and recalled the crucial role of VS. The need to sustainably finance existing mechanisms to tackle diseases worldwide such as the GLEWS, RAHC and OFFLU was highlighted. He mentioned the topics of discussions and expected outcomes of the meeting. He recalled the venue and dates of the next Conference of the OIE Regional Commission for Europe to be held in Astana, Kazakhstan, from 20 to 24 September 2010.

Lastly Dr Van Goethem, Animal Health and Welfare Unit Director in DG SANCO and President of the GF-TADs Europe, underlined the importance of the recommendations adopted in 2007 and significant actions taken and improvements made so far. Resources have been made available and new programmes to combat diseases are on tracks, proving the continuous involvement of the EC in animal health activities. He recalled the objectives of this SC and stressed the need for commitment of all involved authorities and organization to achieve TADs control goal.

2. Review of the recommendations of the last two Regional Steering Committees for Europe

Dr Planté presented the content of the recommendations of the two previous SC held on 13-14 October 2005 and 18 December 2007. The reports and recommendations of these SC were distributed to participants. The OIE and EC commented that great steps had been taken and progress had been achieved since 2005 and that most of the provisions in these recommendations had been addressed. They recalled that for key players such as EU and EC, FAO and OIE, recommendations adopted within the GF-TADs meetings offer useful guidance to carry out their activities.

3. Governance of Regional GF-TADs for Europe

Dr de Leeuw reminded the history of GF-TADs Agreement at global and regional levels and presented the mechanism of global governance that was consolidated during the 2nd Global Steering Committee held in July 2009. The next Global SC will be held in Paris in September 2010 while the first and second Management Committee in February (already done) and July 2010 respectively. A 5-year Action Plan addressing both global and regional activities will be elaborated. Regarding regional governance of the GF-TADs for Europe, comments and proposals were exposed, in particular how to better involve Regional Organisations, and addressed in the discussions on the Terms of Reference of the GF-TADs for Europe.

Then Dr Vallat recalled the frame of the regional level of GF-TADs which is laid down in the global GF-TADs agreement and the need to clarify in particular the situation of RSOs (Regional specialised organisations) in Europe. The draft Terms of Reference (ToR) were presented followed by a discussion point by point. Questions answered concerned were: the maximum number of Members, of FAO and OIE representatives; the mode of selection of members; the duration of membership; changes and replacements; meaning of RSOs and RSUs; the position of REMESA, the Balkan Animal Health Forum in the GF-TADs frame; possible observers; hosts of meetings.

The draft document was amended to take into consideration the outcome of discussions and presented again on day 2. No new comments were made and the document was validated. A specific recommendation was prepared to address this regional governance mechanism and presented on day 2.

4. Advantages of a RAHC for Eastern Europe

Dr de Leeuw recalled FAO and OIE initiatives to create Regional Animal Health Centres (RAHC). Presently in Europe, Regional Representations offices for OIE are based in Sofia, Bulgaria and Brussels, Belgium, while those of FAO are in Budapest, Hungary and Ankara, Turkey. He mentioned the interest to build a RAHC in Europe such as those existing in other regions. Dr Vallat reminded that the RAHC concept was first developed in regions with mainly developing countries to develop synergies and avoid gaps in activities between organisations involved (FAO and OIE at the first place). They were first set up in Mali, in Botswana, and in Lebanon and then in Tunis (Tunisia) while one centre is under preparation in Nairobi (Kenya). A "virtual" centre exists in Bangkok (Thailand). As the situation of Europe is complex and locations of regional offices are different, creating a unique RAHC would be difficult at present. This however shouldn't impede good cooperation and coordination. If a RAHC was to be set up in Europe, FAO and OIE should adopt a common position before submitting a proposal to the GF-TADs SC.

5. Review of the outcome of the last Conference of the OIE Regional Commission for Europe (Vilnius)

Dr Belev briefly recalled the technical items discussed during this Conference held in Vilnius, Lithuania, from 16 to 19 September 2008 and presented the activities to be developed in the region in respect of the recommendations adopted.

6. Status and support to GF-TADs tools (GLEWS, CMC-AH, OFFLU)

Dr de Leeuw and Dr Vallat recalled the principles and importance of common tools such as the GLEWS and OFFLU. Joint efforts aim at ensuring that more information is provided by the countries in order to improve the knowledge of and better address the sanitary situation worldwide. OFFLU was first targeting avian influenza but its mandate was expanded to all animal influenza viruses. This is a very efficient network, helping scientists to share information, expertise and virus strains. WHO is now looking closely at the work of OFFLU and follows the variability of animal strains in order to prepare human vaccines. A presentation of the Crisis Management Centre-Animal Health (CMC-AH) was presented by Dr Plee from FAO, explaining the objectives, mechanisms in place, and presenting missions carried out. Along with FAO and OIE experts, missions generally involve various specialists provided by partners, including some proposed by the EC which manages a database of experts in various fields of animal health activities. GLEWS is a common platform of the three organisations for disease information and intelligence and it is now operational.

7. State of play of PVS evaluations and Gap Analysis missions carried out in Europe

Dr Gonzalez from OIE recalled the PVS pathway (from “diagnostic” to “prescription” to “treatment” to “follow-up”) and the state of play of missions carried out in Europe regarding PVS evaluations, PVS-Gap analysis missions and legislation missions. She also presented the outcome of the PVS-feed back meeting held in December 2009, followed by the meeting of the *ad-hoc* group on evaluation of VS which considered the addition of new critical competencies (CC) such as for animal welfare and VS management and modifications of the content of few existing CC. Dr Vallat added that the reports made available to donors and partners, after official agreement of the country, were now commonly used as a basis for investment and support projects, by governments and by the World Bank in particular.

The state of play of the work initiated in the EU to compare FVO inspection missions and OIE-PVS evaluations and to assess the feasibility and opportunity to use the OIE-PVS Tool was asked. Dr Van Goethem stated that discussions of this question should resume soon between EU Member States and the EC during the next CVO meetings; a common position will be sought and might arise hopefully during the Spanish Presidency. Those discussions could include the use of ISO 17020 standard relating to the operation of bodies performing inspection as some EU Member States have also engaged in such an accreditation process for veterinary inspections.

8. On-going projects on selected TADs in Europe and discussion on follow-up actions

Situation and activities regarding priority diseases in the region were presented by the EC, FAO and the OIE. Further comments were provided by members of the SC.

- Rabies

Dr Demetriou from DG SANCO recalled the financial support of EC to EU Member States for control programmes, amounting 50% of costs incurred for carrying out laboratory tests and purchasing and distributing vaccines/baits (11 EU countries are concerned in 2010). Many EU countries are now free of the disease, but complete eradication requires action in affected neighboring countries. Programmes in Kaliningrad, borders with Ukraine, Russia, Belarus and Western Balkan using various funding mechanisms, are on tracks. Training activities are also foreseen in Ukraine and Georgia in 2010 through TAIEX and BTSF instruments.

Dr Vallat informed that during their tripartite meeting, OIE, FAO and WHO have decided to work on a global strategy for rabies control, and recognize the major role played by stray dogs in human contamination in many countries. He announced that the next global conference on rabies control at animal source will be held in Korea on 7-8-9 September 2011.

-Classical Swine Fever (CSF) and African Swine Fever (ASF)

Dr Zorko from DG SANCO presented the situation in the EU, in particular the results of sero-surveillance conducted on wild boars and domestic pigs and the financial contribution of the EC. A decline in cases is apparent in domestic pigs in affected countries since 2005 thanks to the continuous implementation of control programmes. The EC also conducts a Western Balkan 5-year project which includes rabies and CSF components and is financed through the IPA funds (total cost of around 95 million Euros); 7 countries are covered. The current situation of CSF control in these countries was presented.

Dr de Leeuw presented FAO activities with regards to CSF and ASF in the region and remarked that CSF was endemic in many of its countries and continued to be a real concern as well as ASF spread. Regarding training, workshops on ASF have recently been organised in Ukraine and Belarus in May 2009 and contribution to EFSA work on ASF was given.

Dr Planté recalled the joint missions organised by CMC-AH when the disease occurred in Caucasus countries and presented OIE data on ASF and CSF provided by countries' reports, immediate notification and follow-up reports. There is a lack of reliability and accuracy of data provided by some countries which is linked in particular to weaknesses in surveillance and reporting systems. Long-term action and support based on the results of PVS evaluations and Gap-Analysis missions carried out by the OIE in Caucasus countries in particular will be needed.

- Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR)

Dr Bonbon from DG SANCO presented the project to be carried out soon in Turkey on PPR and supported by the EC. It will include principally mass vaccination linked with identification of small ruminant holdings and animals. This 4-year programme will start in spring 2010 and will cost 44,6 million Euros altogether.

Dr Sumption presented on behalf of FAO the activities conducted on PPR. Support on all TADs -in particular PPR and FMD- was given to Central Asian countries through a regional project and Tajikistan benefited from a TCP. Based on results of sero-surveillance conducted in various countries, it appears that this disease is often underreported in affected countries. The problem posed by the use in certain countries of Rinderpest vaccines to prevent PPR was also mentioned as it impedes the country to meet requirements for freedom recognition of Rinderpest. He stated that important gaps still exist in the knowledge of PPR situation in Eastern European countries. He also mentioned the interest to work on DIVA vaccines in the frame of the EC Project in Turkey.

- Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD)

Dr Füssel from DG SANCO presented in particular the project conducted in Turkey supported by the EC (around 50 million Euros out of 65,4 million Euros) which includes mass vaccination of bovines and small ruminants, sero-surveillance activities, as well as control measures. The EC is also very involved in EUFMD activities, contributing to their projects and looking for synergies. He mentioned also the FMD vaccine bank in EU and the role of Reference laboratories.

Dr Sumption from EUFMD presented briefly the activities conducted in the 35 EUFMD Member States -only 2 not being FMD free-, and other activities in neighbouring countries and regions posing a risk to free countries. He mentioned in particular the PCP process and the situation established for West Eurasian countries with regards the PCP stages during the two meetings held in Iran and Turkey in 2008 and 2009. Specific actions will be discussed during the next Executive Committee meeting to be held in March in Sweden.

Dr Vallat mentioned the situation of Turkey with regards their dossier submitted for FMD zonal freedom recognition (Thrace zone). A specific meeting has been proposed to Turkish authorities where additional information could be provided to the Scientific Commission for analysis of the dossier. He also mentioned the ongoing work on the strategy for global FMD control and on a new approach to official FMD freedom recognition, introducing prior steps (FMD freedom pathway) that could be incorporated in the OIE Code chapter on FMD.

- Animal Disease Information System (ADIS)

Dr Vermeersch from OIE presented the project resulting from a joint OIE/EC initiative, and developed in the frame of the Community new Animal Health Strategy. This 4-year project which started in 2009 aims at developing an informatic prototype for the new ADIS (following ADNS) of the EU. It will allow EU countries (and also other non EU countries if interested) to provide in particular disease information on the same time and in a compatible way with TRACES (EC) and WAHIS (OIE), to inform stakeholders on the AH situation in the EU and to serve as a data collection system.

Discussions

The need for coordination where numerous actors and partners are involved, in particular the Balkan region, was stressed. Dr Moynagh from DG SANCO informed about a meeting to be held soon (in mid March 2010) with CVOs of the Balkan countries concerned by the rabies/CSF project. A proposal was made by Dr Van Goethem to OIE and FAO to attend the meeting. Under the regional GF-TADs for Europe umbrella, a meeting should also be organised soon by the OIE Regional Representation using the GF TADs mechanism, involving all donors and partners involved, in order to clarify activities and funding in place and to allow efficient coordination of future activities. A specific donor meeting could also be organised after.

Dr Ghorzheiev from Ukraine presented the situation of their VS, explaining their strengths (namely technical independence, direct chain of command, police powers of officers Veterinary Services, special emergency funds) and activities related to the control of rabies (vaccination carried out with success but only in 6 out of 25 regions due to financial constraints; cooperation with Poland and Russia) and classical swine fever (cases found on wild boars only for many years; focus on biosecurity measures for domestic pig farms to avoid contacts). He stated that African Swine Fever remains a major threat as outbreaks have been declared very close to the Ukrainian border.

Dr Vallat mentioned that experience in some European countries such as Portugal, Spain and Italy have shown that eradicating ASF requires important and long term efforts; therefore, emphasis will have to be put on biosecurity measures to prevent the occurrence of the disease in domestic pigs.

Dr Facelli informed that Italy could provide technical support to missions on ASF if need be.

The absence of a Russian representative was regretted as this country plays a key role in the region. Reinforcement of exchanges with Russian representatives should thus take place.

Dr Askaroglu from Turkey mentioned the importance to finance information campaigns for farmers and private veterinarians in order to enhance the efficiency of PPR control programme.

Dr Vallat supported this proposal and also further commented on the Rinderpest situation. He mentioned that communication on global eradication will have to be supported by strong arguments and that some countries still posed problems, such as those still using Rinderpest vaccines in sheeps for PPR control and others which never notified their sanitary situation such as Turkmenistan. Political activities will have to be conducted to solve this situation.

Dr Askaroglu also noted the success of the FMD project in Turkey and expressed that FMD freedom recognition for the Thrace zone would be seen as an important progress and motivating factor for VS.

Dr Füssel recalled the existence and interest of annual tripartite meetings held between Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria, and suggested to involve other neighbouring countries, such as Balkans. In response, it was proposed to wait for the Balkans' meeting outcome before expanding or creating additional discussion fora.

9. Recommendations and conclusions

The modified ToR taking into consideration discussions of day 1 were presented to the SC and approved.

On this new basis, the SC undertook the nomination of members, elected the Chair for a 4-year mandate which in turn nominated two Vice-Chairmen.

The composition of the new SC was reported in the recommendation 1.

Regarding observers, it was mentioned that France and Italy as host countries of OIE and FAO would continue to be invited as observers. The country holding the EU presidency should also be invited as observer.

The two draft recommendations on i) *Governance Mechanisms of GF-TADs for Europe*, and ii) *Enhancing prevention and control of priority diseases in Europe*; were amended to include some elements pointed out during the discussions. These amended versions were presented to the SC and approved.

Finally, it was proposed that the Secretariat would convene a meeting in margin of the next OIE General Session in May in order to start working on the regional action plan mentioned in the ToR, to analyse the results of the EC/Balkan meetings to be held in March and later and to discuss the outcome of discussions on the use of the PVS-Tool by EU CVOs and EC.