



**Standing Group of Experts on African swine fever
in the Baltic and Eastern Europe region**
under the GF-TADs umbrella

Third meeting (SGE3)
Final Report

<i>Location</i>	Moscow, Russia
<i>Date</i>	15-16 March 2016
<i>Present</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Countries: BY, EE, LT, LV, PL, RF; UA attended partially via Skype• Organisations: European Commission (EC) ; FAO ; OIE• Experts: S. Bellini (IZSLER¹); K. Depner (FLI²); V. Guberti (ISPRA³); K. Gruzdev (FGBI ARRIAH⁴)
<i>Objectives</i>	To present, discuss and adopt the results of the country ASF SGE missions conducted in all 7 countries from March to October 2015
<i>Next meeting (SGE4)</i>	May 2016 (in the margins of the OIE 84 th General Session (to be confirmed))

The third meeting of the **Standing Group of Experts on African swine fever in the Baltic and Eastern Europe region** (SGE3) took place in Moscow, Russia, on 15-16 March 2016. The SGE Secretariat sincerely thanks Dr Nepoklonov and his Team for hosting and preparing the SGE3 meeting.

All seven countries part of the initiative attended the meeting, except Ukraine which attended part of the meeting via Skype. Dr B. Van Goethem, in his capacity as President of the GF-TADs for Europe Steering Committee, chaired the meeting. The list of participants is available in [Annex 1](#).

In their opening remarks, Dr Van Goethem and Dr Nepoklonov commended the remarkable role played by the SGE initiative in progressing current ASF control efforts in the region, by notably facilitating contact among countries, encouraging full transparency about national situations and providing convincing technically-sound solutions. The GF-TADs format was mentioned as one of the most efficient mechanisms to address ASF and may be considered for other diseases prevailing in the region in the near future.

The main purpose of the SGE3 meeting was to present and discuss the findings of the ASF SGE missions conducted from March to October 2015 by independent experts (the mission time table with involved experts is available in [Annex 2](#)), and hear participants' views on the proposed recommendations to address the identified gaps. Other important objectives of the SGE3 included the identification (i) of regional gaps and needs, in order to possibly design tailored capacity building activities for the region; and (ii) of national best practices that could be relevant / useful to neighbouring countries.

¹ IZSLER: Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale della Lombardia e dell'Emilia Romagna (www.izsler.it)

² FLI: Friedrich Loeffler Institute (www.fli.de)

³ ISPRA : Istituto Superiore per la Protezione e la Ricerca Ambientale (www.isprambiente.gouv.it)

⁴ FGBI ARRIAH : Federal Governmental Budgetary Institution – Federal Centre for Animal Health (www.arriah.ru)

Meeting summary

The Experts (the mission Team Leaders in most cases) presented in details the outcomes of each mission, which provided a good basis for plenary discussion. Several practices, notably in terms of surveillance and sampling, were pointed out and questioned.

Poland received well-deserved attention in light of the best practices implemented concerning carcass disposal, guidelines for hunters, rapid response to limit secondary outbreaks and the set-up of dedicated group of people at each level (even at municipal level) to address ASF. Countries are therefore encouraged to contact Dr Jazdzewski to learn more about Polish practices.

Several differences were noted in the way countries control ASF but the management of ASF is specific to each country and there is no one size fits all recipe but a range of possible responses depending notably on the country's prevalent type of pig production system, presence of wild and free ranging pigs, and ASF situation in neighbouring countries.

Gaps common to several countries in terms of prevention, early detection and rapid response were identified and should be addressed through sets of national and capacity building activities. These gaps include: (i) risk analysis; (ii) surveillance (passive and active); (iii) eradication (investigations, tracing and control activities during outbreaks); (iv) biosecurity; and (v) awareness / training.

The importance to set up an independent National Group of Experts – composed of epidemiologists, risk assessors, laboratory experts and wild life experts - was strongly underlined to assist the central and local Veterinary authorities to propose appropriate and proportionate surveillance and control measures, a sound sampling scheme and testing options for clinical and laboratory examinations.

The role of wild boar in the epidemiology of ASF was again a main topic of the SGE3 discussions. While scientific data are still incomplete, it seems most likely that ASF is not a truly density dependant infection (depending also on the season). A major ASF transmission risk is rather inherent to contaminated wild boar carcasses, and the strategy is thus to remove as many carcasses from the field as possible (an EFSA 2015 Scientific Opinion indicated that only 10% of carcasses are actually removed). Wild boar movements, population size estimates and dynamics, surveillance and biosecurity during hunting are also key to sustainably address ASF in wild boar. Improving the dialogue between the veterinarians and the hunters / forest managers was also presented as part of the long term solution.

The role of human practices in ASF transmission were also highlighted, whether linked to the trade of raw meat and/or insufficient biosecurity measures during wild boar hunting and pig breeding.

Main conclusions

- All countries congratulated the work of the SGE Experts and agreed with the results they presented. The national Reports are therefore considered as validated and will be posted online on the dedicated GF-TADs webpage, in full transparency;
- Some countries indicated they had already started implementing recommendations provided during the mission;
- Given the current situation in the region, it is important to raise greater awareness about the potential risks of ASF spread in not yet-affected but at-risk neighbouring countries, to understand which measures they are currently implementing and get them better prepared if needed. Therefore, it is proposed that in the first instance, Moldova and Romania join the ASF SGE initiative. Other countries may also benefit from regional capacity building on ASF (see below);
- It was proposed that all countries implementing successful measures should notify them to the GF-TADs Secretariat so that they can be shared with and benefit neighbouring countries;
- Carcass disposal – as the 'last queue of infection' – will be the subject of the next ASF SGE (full) meeting, together with depopulation/stamping out procedures and disinfection of holdings.

- A list of recommendations was agreed and is available in [Annex 3](#).

Next steps

It was agreed to prepare a comprehensive capacity building programme that will enable to address the gaps identified during the ASF SGE missions.

The European Commission therefore offered to provide support by providing Better Training for Safer Food (BTSF) trainings under the GF-TADs umbrella in the following formats:

- 2 workshops of 3 days each, with 30 participants on the following important topics: OIE regionalisation, surveillance, wildlife management, biosecurity;
- 2 Sustained Training Missions of one day each in Ukraine;
- 1 Sustained Training Mission targeting national veterinary officials, private veterinarians, forest management and hunters in each SGE participating country (BY, EE, LV, LT, PL, RF, UA,) but it will also cover some additional countries from Europe (FI, HU, MD, RO, SK).

A letter to the CVO/Delegate of Ukraine offering a GF-TADs support mission will be sent out shortly by the GF-TADs Secretariat.

Dr Van Goethem also indicated that the European Commission is ready to financially support ad hoc expert missions to the seven SGE countries upon their request, whenever needed and notably to validate revised control measures in place. Countries are therefore encouraged to make use of this tool.

The OIE will also contribute to addressing the regional ASF gaps by including a specific exercise in the agenda of the next OIE regional Focal Point seminar on wildlife (scheduled 5-7 July 2016 in Minsk, Belarus). The exercise will aim at designing a surveillance plan on ASF in wild boar and will be run by Dr Klaus Depner, ASF SGE expert.

The next ASF SGE meeting (full format) is proposed to take place in Lithuania. However, any other opportunities to meet should be explored, such as in the margins of the OIE General Session in May 2016 (Paris) and the 27th Conference of the regional Commission for Europe in September 2016 (Lisbon).

The ASF SGE Mission Reports and the SGE3 documents (including expert presentations) are available at:
http://web.oie.int/RR-Europe/eng/Regprog/en_GF_TADS%20-%20Standing%20Group%20ASF.htm

Annex 1 – List of participants

Country / organisations	First / last names	Email address
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Interpreters	31. Vladimir Burdenkov 32. Konstantin Korzh	vl.burd@gmail.com konstantin.korzh@gmail.com

Annex 2 – Time Table of the ASF SGE missions (including experts)

Countries	Dates (2015)	Experts
Lithuania	30 March - 3 April	Dr S. Bellini*; Dr V. Guberti; Dr K. Gruzdev
Belarus	12 – 17 April	Dr Klaus Depner*; Dr S. Bellini; Dr K; Gruzdev
Latvia	18-21 May	Dr S. Bellini*; Dr K. Depner; Dr K; Gruzdev; Dr V. Guberti; Dr S. Khomenko
Russia	13-17 July	Dr Klaus Depner*; Dr S. Bellini; Dr K; Gruzdev; Dr V. Guberti
Ukraine	14-18 September	Dr Klaus Depner*; Dr S. Bellini; Dr S. Khomenko; Dr V. Guberti
Estonia	28 September – 2 October	Dr K. Depner*; Dr K; Gruzdev; Dr V. Guberti; Dr S. Khomenko
Poland	12 – 16 October	Dr S. Bellini*; Dr K; Gruzdev; Dr S. Khomenko

* Mission Team Leader



SGE3 Recommendations (final)

The Standing Group of Experts applauds the quality of the work accomplished by the ASF SGE Experts in the seven countries and recommends that:

General conclusions and recommendations:

- The standing Group of Experts on ASF for Eastern Europe and Baltic region continue to support affected countries, using CVO/OIE Delegate level meetings, expert missions and tailored capacity building activities at national and regional level; one key underlying principle for success be the provision of fully transparent information by countries and the fulfillment of their reporting obligations to the OIE;
- The recommendations of the Standing Group of Experts continue to be implemented by the countries concerned, notably (i) the SGE1 and SGE2 recommendations, respectively on 'ASF situation in wild boar and related prevention and control measures' and 'Biosecurity measures in the different pig production systems'; (ii) the ASF SGE Country mission recommendations;
- The ASF SGE country mission Reports (and subsequent Recommendations) be validated and be made publicly available to all (on the GF-TADs for Europe webpage);
- The next 'full' SGE meeting be organised in Lithuania; the proposed topics be (i) status of implementation of the ASF SGE country mission Recommendations; and (ii) 'depopulation/stamping out procedures as a prevention and control measure; practical aspects related to carcass disposal and disinfection of holdings';
- The possibility to have an ad hoc SGE meeting in the margins of the 84th OIE General Session (Paris / France, 22-27 May 2016) and 27th OIE regional Conference for Europe (Porto / Portugal, first week of October 2016) be explored;
- Moldova and Romania be invited to participate in future SGE meetings and activities, given the risk of introduction of ASF from Ukraine following the recent outbreaks very close to the Moldavian border, with a view to enhancing their preparedness;
- Countries make sure to share any new ASF control tools or methodology with other countries through the GF-TADs Regional Secretariat.

Technical recommendations:

- Surveillance
- Passive surveillance is clearly the most effective way of detecting the presence of the disease and has a key role in early detection of ASF. Incentives or obstacles to reporting be explored and awareness campaigns be carried out to motivate and promote disease notification;

- Public-private partnership be improved for strengthening awareness, surveillance, biosecurity, timely and fair compensation of farmers' losses;
- In view of defining surveillance strategy, a risk assessment be carried out including the identification of:
 - o Risk areas in the country,
 - o Risk production sector (domestic pigs / wild boar),
 - o Risk areas in the adjacent territories;
- Surveillance aimed at early detecting the presence of the disease should not be based on serology, and it be addressed to domestic pigs and wild boar;
- Surveillance strategy be tailored to the epidemiological situation (level of risk) and local drivers of infection;
- A methodology to assess the efficiency of passive surveillance be developed and aimed to forecast the minimum number of suspected cases to be expected in the at risk population in both free and infected areas;
- National independent Expert Groups advising the Veterinary Services on ASF policy, wild boar management and surveillance strategies be in place and regularly meet to update their recommendations;
- Marketing, trade of pork and pigs (including illegal) as well as pig breeding at military and prison farms be adequately reflected in risk-based surveillance programmes.

➤ Wild boar management

- Wild boar management is a sophisticated necessary collective activity that has to be adapted to local conditions and practices and that cannot be left only to hunters (or any other player) to decide and Veterinary Services have to be involved at several stages;
- Biosecurity during hunting in infected areas is of paramount importance for protecting both wild boar and domestic pigs; specific measures be developed and implemented;
- Wild boar population reduction can facilitate ASF eradication even though a threshold density for wild boar allowing the fading out of the disease has not been identified yet;
- Wild boar population reduction should be considered, in combination with other control measures, within the framework of a wild boar management strategy aimed at reducing ASF virus contamination of the environment;
- Carcass removal and safe disposal is an efficient disease management option in addition to population control efforts carried out under appropriate biosecurity measures;
- Wild boar population density estimates are not standardised across the SGE countries and comparing this data could be misleading.

➤ Training and awareness campaign

- Joint trainings be provided to veterinarians and other relevant professionals in order to sustainably address surveillance, biosecurity and wild boar management practices (including hunting, carcass utilisation and disposal of offal). Such national workshops gathering the hunting community, forestry and environment agencies and Veterinary Services (public and private components) be organised with the support of experts as soon as possible, to ensure that common disease prevention and eradication goals are understood and shared;
- The potential of online information and teaching tools, mobile data collection and epidemiological decision support systems to facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration and training of professionals and stakeholders at the local, national and international levels be promoted.