FAO/OIE/EC Tripartite meeting on control of Foot-and-Mouth Disease and other exotic diseases in the Southern Balkans

Plovdiv, Bulgaria
25th March 2011

Introduction

A meeting of the FAO/OIE/EC Tripartite on control of Foot-and-Mouth Disease and other exotic diseases in the southern Balkans was convened on the 25th March 2011 at Plovdiv, Bulgaria. The meeting was attended by delegates of south eastern Balkan countries of Greece, Bulgaria, and Turkey, the EC (DG-SANCO) was represented by Dr Füssel, and the OIE by Professor Nikola Belev, OIE Regional Representative for Europe, and was Chaired by the EUFMD Secretary, Keith Sumption.

The main purpose of the meeting was to review findings from FMD surveillance in domestic and wild animals in Bulgaria and Turkish Thrace, since the joint meeting (EuFMD Executive Committee) in Budapest on 2nd February 2011.

The list of participants is given in Appendix 1.

Conclusions

1. Evidence from surveillance in wild boar in Kirklareli District, Turkish Thrace, together with the index case in wild boar in Bulgaria, indicates that a FMDV has circulated in wild animals in the region, and this circulation, in wild and possibly undetected domestic animals, may explain the genetic diversity among isolates from domestic animals after apparent entry of a common ancestor virus in late 2011;
2. The 2nd wave of infection in domestic animals in Bulgaria is on the basis of genetic sequencing, not the result of spread from infected premises from the 1st wave, but probably a second introduction from wild hosts;
3. Negative results in surveillance in wild boar in Bulgaria, and in 2 other forested areas in Turkish Thrace is insufficient to rule out infection in the sampled populations, but does suggest that where the populations are part of the wider Strandzha ecosystem, may yet become infected;
4. The duration of the epidemic involving wildlife has already exceeded 3 months, and on this basis, and considering the upcoming farrowing season, the end of the epidemic is not yet in sight within 2011.
5. The Turkish participants accepted the position of the Bulgarian participants that they would enforce a cessation of any activities, particularly hunting, of wild boar/wildlife populations in the border regions, to avoid possible dispersion of infection.
**Recommendations**

1. The continued cessation of hunting, including for surveillance, in Turkish Thrace, for 2 months (to 25th May), with a review in one month (Tripartite Meeting, Rome April 26th);
2. To consider the results of the EuFMD expert meeting in Berlin on FMD in wildlife/wildboar, in drawing up surveillance plans for FMD in wildlife in the common border region, and possibly wider;
3. A study on the infection status and persistence of infection in wild boar/wildlife in Turkish Thrace, and in different risk zones of Anatolia, should be developed in order to better identify risk characteristics that may assist to identify risks of establishment in western Europe, and risks to the Turkish control program;
4. GDPC Turkey is encouraged to report the surveillance activities and their findings to the OIE, making clear that the timing of exposure of the wild population, cannot be estimated from the serology data alone.
Report of the Tripartite Meeting

Item 1. Agenda.
The Agenda was adapted without change.

Item 2. Role of wild boar in FMD epidemiology; review and perspective for further epidemic development in the Strandzha ecosystem.

Dr Khomenko, FAO, presented a review on the role of wild boar in historical FMD outbreaks, and a perspective from wild and domestic population estimations, on the need to better define infection status in the wildlife populations in regions at risk from FMD from domestic animals. The case, from historical and recent evidence, is quite strong of exposure of wildlife, but the factors determining duration can be presumed but evidence is needed to predict duration and likelihood of similar events in currently free populations.

Item 3. FMD situation in the three countries; surveillance and control

Presentations were given by
1. Dr Alexandrov (BFSA, Bulgaria), on the FMD surveillance and control operations, since 2nd February;
2. Dr Georgiev, NVL, Sofia, Bulgaria, on laboratory findings, including full genome sequence analysis of Bulgarian isolates
3. Dr Bulut, SAP Institute, Turkey, on the results of the surveillance program in domestic and wildlife in Turkish Thrace, since the start of January 2011;
4. Dr Doudounakis, Greece, on surveillance activities in Greece during the period since report of the outbreaks in Bulgaria.

The most significant new findings were
- the results of full genome sequencing, indicating separate incursions from an unknown source, presumably wildlife, for each of the first wave infected premises in Bulgaria, and also of the second wave (Kirovo);
- the negative findings in the substantial sero-survey conducted across Thrace in January, suggesting that the domestic population had not been exposed at the time of survey, (survey design followed EuFMD mission recommendations in January);
- The positive findings in wild boar shot in the Demirkoy district, from dispersed locations (5 of 26 wild boar sero-positive in Turkish Thrace, or 5 of 11 within Kirklareli District);
- No further seropositive or virological positive wild boar in Bulgaria, although sample size is low and did not include the area where the 2nd wave of domestic outbreaks had occurred;
- Negative findings in sero-surveys on risk groups in Greece (animals moved from high risk areas).

Presentations were provided to participants, and a frank and full discussion held. The willingness of each party to provide full laboratory results and epidemiology findings was appreciated by all.