



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY

Directorate G – Crisis preparedness in food, animals and plants
Director

Brussels,
SANTE.G2/ZI/sc(2022)8317322

Dear Dr Bociu,

I am writing to you as a follow up to the recent letters of the Commission on African swine fever (ASF) to your services (ref. Ares(2021)6132457 and Ares(2022)2054018) and your reply of 4 June 2022 (ref. 26359).

First, let me acknowledge the efforts of the Romanian competent authorities to manage the ASF situation in the country. A significant decrease of ASF outbreaks in kept pigs in 2022¹ in Romania could indeed be considered as a step in the right direction to prevent, control and eradicate ASF within the Romanian pig sector in the long term.

However, apart from the challenging ASF epidemiological situation in backyards in Romania since years, the continuous occurrence of ASF outbreaks² (with an increasing pattern in the last few years) in large commercial pig farms in Romania raise concerns and deserve a particular and urgent attention. Such unfavourable epidemiological situation of the disease suggests that biosecurity measures and other ASF prevention and control measures are not properly implemented in the commercial pig sector in Romania.

The most recent Commission audit in Romania on ASF³ confirmed that the central element of the Romanian action plan to previous Commission recommendations – the adoption of a new “pig law” providing for an empowerment to enforce compliance with European Union animal identification and registration rules and national biosecurity requirements within the non-commercial pig sector – had not been yet approved. Once again, I urge you to implement the necessary steps to ensure that your services can enforce these basic EU requirements in all pig farms.

¹ 1472 ASF outbreaks in domestic pigs from 1 January 2021 until 26 October 2021 in Romania and 267 ASF outbreaks in domestic pigs from 1 January until 26 October 2022 (source: Animal disease information system, ADIS).

² Since 1 January 2021 up to date, at least 27 ASF outbreaks have been confirmed in Romania in the farms with more than 10 000 pigs (12 outbreaks in the farms with more than 10000 to 20000 pigs and 15 outbreaks in farms with more than 21000 to 54912 pigs) (source: ADIS).

³ DG(SANTE) 2021-7501 (<https://ec.europa.eu/food/audits-analysis/audit-report/details/4490>).

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Moreover, that audit has also revealed important weaknesses in relation to the overall system ensuring prevention, control and eradication of ASF in the commercial pig sector, for example:

- *the audit revealed important weak points in the biosecurity measures implemented by commercial operators that the official veterinary controls do not detect;*
- *many of the epidemiological enquiries conducted following outbreaks were superficial and failed to investigate possible links to outbreaks among related establishments;*
- *in most cases, the likely origin of the disease was not established. The epidemiological evidence reviewed during the audit shows that a significant proportion of the outbreaks on large establishments are likely to be the result of disease spread from neighbouring or commercially linked establishments.*

In this regard, I would like to remind you of the following legal obligations for the competent authorities in the Member States as laid down in the EU legislation related to animal health:

- Regulation (EU) 2016/429⁴ requires that the confirmation of a category A disease (such as ASF) is the starting point for the competent authority to carry out further investigations;
- Article 57 of Regulation (EU) 2016/429 requires the competent authority to carry out an epidemiological enquiry in the event of the confirmation of a category A diseases aiming, among other, to identify the likely origin of the listed disease in question and the means of its spread;
- Article 64(2) of that Regulation (EU) 2016/429 obliges the competent authorities to continuously assess and review the disease situation and, when appropriate in order to prevent the spread of category A diseases, adapt the boundaries of the restricted zone and establish additional restricted zones;
- in accordance with Article 65 of Regulation (EU) 2016/429, the competent authorities must ensure that relevant disease control measures (such as visits to establishments, imposition of conditions for the movements of persons, animals, products, etc., biosecurity requirements, other necessary risk-mitigating measures to minimise the risk of the spread of that listed disease, etc.) are taken in the restricted zone concerned and that the necessary obligations on operators are imposed in order to prevent the further spread of the listed disease in question.

Based on the above, I would kindly ask you to provide to the Commission without delay a detailed report on the epidemiological enquiry related to ASF outbreaks in commercial pig farms in Romania since 2021 indicating the likely origin of the disease and the means of its spread and the action plan addressing relevant disease control measures in the sector in the short, medium and long term.

In addition, let me also remind you of an ongoing revision of Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/605⁵ (hereinafter - ASF Regulation) that is currently being

⁴ Regulation (EU) 2016/429 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2016 on transmissible animal diseases and amending and repealing certain acts in the area of animal health ('Animal Health Law'), OJ L 84, 31.3.2016, p. 1.

⁵ Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/605 of 7 April 2021 laying down special control measures for African swine fever, OJ L 129, 15.4.2021, p. 1.

discussed with the Member States within the Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed⁶. Some new provisions (in particular those aiming to ensure safe movements of kept pigs also within the restricted zones I, II and III), if adopted, might require additional efforts from the competent authorities of the Member States concerned to ensure enforcement of EU legislation relating to ASF. Therefore, an efficient official control system targeting the pig farming sector in Romania remains crucial to ensure a high level of ASF prevention, control and eradication in your country.

Continuous ASF outbreaks in commercial pig farms and lack of implementation of the commonly agreed EU legislation on animal health would not only seriously undermine the efforts of Romania to control ASF, but might put in danger the animal health status of the Union as a whole as well as the credibility of the EU zoning policy, thus putting at risk EU exports. Therefore, based on Article 71(3), points (a) and (b), of Regulation (EU) 2016/429, further special disease control measures relating to the unfavourable ASF epidemiological situation in Romania might be considered by the Commission.

Finally, let me also assure you again of our willingness to support Romanian competent veterinary authorities in the fight against ASF and our readiness to organise a technical meeting to address this subject, if requested by your side.

The Commission is always at your disposal to provide additional support and technical assistance, via for instance EUVET⁷ or any other available instrument.

Yours sincerely,

[e-signed]

Bernard Van Goethem

C.c.: Mr Adrian Ardelean, Permanent Representation of Romania
C. Bury, P. Lamotte, M. P. Aguar Fernandez, A. Ramirez Vela, J. Lettens, K. Van Dyck, F. Reviriego Gordejo, B. Logar, M. Klemm, Z. Ilevicius, S. Forcella (DG SANTE)

⁶ https://food.ec.europa.eu/horizontal-topics/committees/paff-committees_en

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/animal-diseases/veterinary-emergency-team_en