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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	AOB item for the meeting of the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council on 28 and 29 September 2026: The need for urgent action in the sheep and goat sector in view of the challenges arising from disease outbreaks <i>- Information from Romania, on behalf of Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece and Romania</i>

In recent years, outbreaks of **Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR)**, **Sheep and Goat Pox (SGP)** and **Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD)** have posed significant challenges to the livestock sector. These outbreaks have had substantial economic and social consequences for rural communities and the wider ecosystem linked to livestock production.

The affected Member States have mobilised considerable human and financial resources to implement disease eradication, surveillance and control measures. At the same time, ongoing restrictions on the movement and marketing of animals have had serious economic consequences.

The adverse impact of these disease outbreaks has been further exacerbated by European Commission implementing decisions to restrict intra-EU trade and exports to third countries from these Member States. Animals intended for marketing or export have remained on their original holdings without the possibility to graze or in assembly centers. This has resulted in higher feeding and maintenance costs, additional animal welfare costs, and significant income losses for farmers.

These difficulties have been further aggravated by reduced feed availability due to adverse weather conditions, as well as by the approaching lambing and kidding season. This will lead to an increase in livestock numbers, resulting in greater feed requirements and putting additional pressure on the housing capacity of holdings, since these animals cannot be used immediately for restocking purposes.

The economic impact is significant. For Romania, taking the June–December period as an example, exports of live animals amounted to approximately **1,22 million head in 2023**, whereas in 2026 they have fallen to zero as a result of export restrictions, resulting in estimated losses of more than **150 million euro**. Euro. In Cyprus, the control and eradication of FMD have generated estimated losses of more than 40 million euro. At the same time, as part of the measures taken to eradicate PPR and SGP outbreaks, more than **235.000 animals** have been culled in Romania, more than **600.000** in Greece, more than **4.000** in Bulgaria, and for FMD, more than 80.000 animals so far, in Cyprus and Greece respectively. In Bulgaria alone, 39 outbreaks of SGP have been registered since the beginning of 2026. One of the most serious challenges is SGP, since its- re-emergence and spread confirm the persistent cross-border risk for sheep and goat farming.

The extensive and prolonged restrictions on the movement, trade and placing on the market of live animals and animal products have affected not only farms with confirmed outbreaks, but also farms with healthy animals in the restricted and neighbouring areas, which have suffered income losses and extra costs as a result. They have hindered the sale of animals, milk and products, increased the cumulative costs of feed and continuous breeding and created difficulties in the implementation of contracts and requirements under support schemes. Substantial losses have also been incurred by the dairy production sector, as restrictions have disrupted normal production and marketing channels. Furthermore, the prolonged application of movement and placing-on-the-market restrictions has resulted in a significant surplus of live animals on the market, for which available domestic market outlets are increasingly limited, creating additional economic pressure on farmers and the wider livestock sector. National *de minimis* aid compensates only part of these losses. An additional challenge for South-East Europe is the need for constant enhanced control at the EU external border due to the spread of SGP, PPR and FMD in the region and the permanent risk of illegal movement of animals and animal products. These consequences affect a total population of **more than 20 million sheep and goats in the region**, according to official national statistics.

We therefore strongly call on the European Commission to:

1. **Allow greater flexibility for movements in areas affected by outbreaks** from unaffected holdings, on the basis of regionalization, risk-based movement arrangements, enhanced official veterinary controls at the place of departure and negative official laboratory results, in line with the epidemiological situation and with appropriate animal health and biosecurity guarantees.
2. **Ensure rapid and adequate compensation for affected farmers**, covering income losses and additional costs resulting from movement restrictions, prolonged keeping of animals on holdings and lost marketing and export opportunities. In this respect, we call on the EC to identify EU budget funding possibilities that would allow adequate support to be provided to affected farmers and primary producers. Any restrictive measure imposed should be accompanied by adequate financial resources, covering both crisis management and the economic recovery of the sector to pre-crisis levels.
3. **Review and update the EU legislative framework**, namely Regulation (EU) 2016/429 (*Animal Health Law*) and the acts adopted pursuant to it, in particular Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/687, in light of lessons learned, field-based epidemiological evidence from outbreak investigations, surveillance, diagnostics and control measures, as well as the experience of Member States and of other countries and World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) standards, to ensure a more proportionate application of disease-control measures and their better adaptation to different epidemiological situations. In particular, the measures in further restricted zones, should be proportionate and risk-based, and give competent authorities sufficient flexibility to allow at least the movement of animals directly to slaughter under official control.

4. **Strengthen the role of vaccination in the control of Category A diseases.** Vaccinated animals that test seropositive for SGP, PPR, and NSP seropositive for FMD virus¹ but show no clinical signs are currently culled; a weighted, risk-based approach is needed, including further virological investigation to establish whether the virus is present and the actual risk of spread. Scientific and policy discussions on preventive or emergency vaccination as a complementary tool under clearly defined conditions, including market disruption and the availability of European Medicines Agency -authorized vaccines, are also needed.
5. **Facilitate the movement within the EU of vaccinated animals and derived products,** and the continuation of exports to third countries where appropriate animal health guarantees are in place and the conditions agreed with importing countries are met, always taking into account the need for regionalization of free areas.
6. **Request EFSA to urgently carry out a renewed scientific assessment of PPR and SGP,** taking into account the latest epidemiological evidence and covering the disease profile and impact, the likelihood and patterns of spread, the effectiveness and proportionality of control measures and the underlying uncertainty. The assessment should also address two specific questions: (i) whether there is evidence that meat, milk and other products obtained from infected or exposed animals can transmit either disease; and (ii) which set of laboratory tests on meat would allow it to be placed on the market for human consumption when results are negative. The assessment should be weighted by a robust analysis of the economic impact and the management experience accumulated by Member States in the current outbreaks, providing a basis for determining whether the current categorisation of PPR as a Category A disease and the corresponding level of control measures remain justified, for adapting the EU framework where appropriate, and for safeguarding the competitiveness of Member States' livestock sectors.

¹ NSP ELISA (Non-Structural Protein Enzyme-Linked Immunosorbent Assay) for FMD (Foot and Mouth Disease)

In this context, **Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus and Greece** invite the **European Commission** to explore ways of ensuring a more flexible and proportionate implementation of disease-control measures, taking into account the epidemiological situation, to identify appropriate solutions to mitigate the economic impact on affected farmers and to draw on the experience gained in managing recent outbreaks with a view to adapting the existing Union animal health legislation.
