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1 Editorial

The first miscellaneous article covers the recent development of the rabies situation in Greece. It is an excerpt of an article previously published in Eurosurveillance. The authors state that besides a number of reported rabies cases in foxes and dogs, a total of 104 human exposures occurred which prompted post exposure prophylaxis. Already in December 2011, the Greek authorities were informed that rabies was detected in foxes in FYROM, very close to the borders with Greece. The spread of the disease within Greece is not unexpected, given that oral rabies vaccination programmes have not yet started, thus causing an ever increasing area to be covered and subsequently more costs. An immediately accessible emergency fund by the EU would have saved time and money. It is only to be hoped that oral rabies vaccination in Greece and in the other neighbouring countries will soon eliminate rabies on the Balkan Peninsula.

Recently, following the retirement of Dr. Francois-Xavier Meslin, Dr Bernadette Abela-Ridder has taken on the role of team leader for neglected zoonotic diseases in the Department for the Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases of the World Health Organization. She is introduced in the second article. The third article announces the publication of the WHO Expert Consultation on Rabies. This new version replaces the previous WHO Technical Report Series, No. 931. Also, after a long period of rabies-freedom rabies cases were reported from the Slovak Republic. Prof. Bires has kindly provided an update on the situation. Also, the rabies data for the 1st quarter of 2013 is presented in tables and a map. The total number reported in Europe reached 1677 cases, including three human cases in Russia and Georgia, and a bat rabies case in Germany. Notably, we present rabies surveillance data for Georgia for the first time. It is envisaged that the other trans-Caucasian countries will soon follow.

Conrad Freuling
Thomas Müller
## 2 Summary of Rabies Cases in Europe

### RABIES CASES 1st QUARTER 2013 01.01.13 - 31.03.13

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**TOTAL**                      |      | 1677  | 895      | 778              | 1    | 3     |

*Wildlife: excluding bats no data*
### 3 Miscellaneous Articles

#### 3.1 Rabies in northern Greece


**Introduction**

The last animal rabies case in Greece, dates back to 1987 while the last human case was reported in 1970 [1]. Here we describe the re-emergence of rabies in both wild and domestic animals during October 2012 to end March 2013 in northern and central Greece that was associated with human exposure. We discuss significant public health implications of the situation.

**Rabid fox**

On 15 October 2012, a red fox (Vulpes vulpes) exhibited aggressive behavior during daytime, threatening inhabitants of a west Macedonian village in the area of Kozani. The animal was destroyed and transported to the National Reference Laboratory (NRL) for Animal Rabies at the Centre of Athens Veterinary Institutions Virus Department, of the Ministry of Rural Development and Food as part of a wild animal surveillance program for rabies organised and implemented by the Ministry of Rural Development since April 2012 because of documented presence of lyssavirus in neighboring Balkan countries. Four days later on 19 October, the brain samples tested positive for lyssavirus by fluorescence antibody test (FAT) and molecular techniques i.e. real-time RT-PCR and RT-PCR followed by sequencing.

**Rabid shepherd dog and exposure of humans and domestic animals**

On 10 November 2012, in west Macedonia, near the Greek-Albanian border in the area of Ieropigi, Kastoria, a shepherd dog, belonging to a herdsman, bit the thigh of a passing-by hunter unprovoked. Two days later, on 12 November, the dog developed an aggressive behaviour attacking other dogs and sheep of the herd. It was consequently destroyed and brain tissue samples investigated at the NRL in Athens were positive for lyssavirus both by FAT and molecular techniques on 16 November.

**Tracing of exposed humans and animals and first control measures**

An epidemiological investigation was initiated on 16 November by the Emergency Response Center of the Hellenic Centre for Diseases Control and Prevention (KEELPNO), Athens, in order to identify all individuals who had had contact with the dog and possible exposure to the lyssavirus. Seven people possibly exposed were interviewed. Besides the hunter and the shepherd, three relatives of the latter reported close exposure according to the World Health Organization exposure category III, i.e. dog bite and/or mucous membrane exposure to the...
rabid dog. All five including the veterinarian that had sampled the animal received human rabies immunoglobulin along with rabies immunization series. None of the exposed individuals has developed any symptoms of human rabies so far. Two further possible contacts did not fulfill the WHO criteria for post-exposure prophylaxis. Testing of brain samples from one exposed dog gave negative results. Hunting was prohibited in the affected area within a radius of 5km for 15 days and all shepherd dogs (approximately 800) were vaccinated against rabies during the next 15 days.

![Map of Greece showing rabies cases](image)

**Fig. 1 Rabies cases in Greece (from 2012 – 1st quarter 2013, derived from the WHO Rabies Bulletin Europe website).** Cases in red fox (circle), dog (square) and cat (triangle) are indicated.

**Results from regular rabies surveillance November to March 2013**

In addition to the two animal cases described, and through the enhanced surveillance instituted by the veterinarian authorities, since November 2012 until end March 2013 we have identified additional 13 red foxes, one shepherd dog (20 December 2012) and one domestic cat (28 February 2013) with laboratory confirmed rabies (Figure). No dead wild or domestic animals were found except for the aforementioned domestic cat that was free to circulate outside the owner’s house and was found dead. One other domestic animal (shepherd dog) suspected of infection due to aggressive behavior was destroyed and found positive for rabies. In total 104 human exposures (category I: 1; 1%; category II: 21; 20; category III: 75; 72% and 7;7% unknown) have been reported to KEELPNO resulting in the administration of post-exposure prophylaxis according to the WHO criteria [2].
All but 14 (six for each domestic rabid dog and two for the rabid cat) were exposures to potentially rabid animals and occurred in areas/prefectures within 50km radius of a confirmed rabies case in a wild or domestic animal. Sixty-six per cent (68 of 104) of the exposures were reported in males and the mean age of the exposed persons was 34 years (range 6-83 years). In 82 incidents dogs were involved, in five incidents cats, in one a weasel and in one the animal was not identified by the exposed individual. In the dog incidents, stray dogs represented the majority (n=63; 77%) followed by domestic dogs (n=15; 18%) and shepherd dogs (n=4; 5%). In each incident a mean of 1.2 persons were exposed (range 1-6 individuals).

**Rabies situation in the Balkans countries**

Although Greece was declared rabies-free in 1987, reports of rabies in wild and domestic animals exist for the neighboring countries. In fact rabies appears to be prevalent in a number of reservoir species in southeastern Europe and in countries north and east of Greece. Recent phylogenetic analyses have shown a westward movement of rabies from Bulgaria to other Balkan countries suggesting that this is a local event unrelated to viral strains in Turkey. In addition, studies showed southward movement of rabies from Hungary, Serbia and Romania into Bulgaria. Generally, wildlife movement is implicated as being responsible for the transmission of rabies across the region.

### 3.2 Bernadette Abela-Ridder now responsible for rabies at WHO

**WHO RBE editorial team**

Following the retirement of Dr. Francois-Xavier Meslin, Dr Bernadette Abela-Ridder has recently taken on the role of team leader for neglected zoonotic diseases in the Department for the Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases of the World Health Organization. Previously, Bernadette worked in the Department of Food Safety and Zoonoses of WHO leading a capacity building network, the Global Foodborne Infections Network (GFN) and was the WHO focal point for the FAO, OIE, WHO Global Early Warning System for transboundary animal diseases, including zoonoses (GLEWS). She also managed the study to estimate the global burden of leptospirosis in humans. She is closely involved in advancing common areas of work of the FAO, OIE and WHO with regard to zoonotic, food safety and other risks emerging at the human-animal-ecosystem interface.

Bernadette has also worked for the Food and Agriculture Organization of the U.N., for l’Institut de recherche pour le développement (IRD) in Cameroon on emergence of simian immunodeficiency viruses from non-human primates including bushmeat, the US Food and Drug Administration and clinical veterinary practice.

Bernadette received her veterinary medicine and PhD degrees from the Veterinary University of Vienna, Austria and her masters in epidemiology and tropical veterinary medicine from the University of Edinburgh, UK.
3.3 WHO Expert Consultation on Rabies – Second report available

WHO RBE editorial team

This report of the World Health Organization (WHO) Expert Consultation on Rabies held in Geneva, Switzerland, on 18–20 September 2012 covers essential up-to-date information for rabies prevention and control throughout the world. The disease continues to occur mainly in poor communities, where measures that could prevent it in humans by controlling dog rabies are not implemented, even though a resolution adopted by the Third World Health Assembly in 1950 already mentioned the need for prevention of rabies in humans and its control in dogs. Advances have been made in the field of rabies, particularly in the production and use of human and animal biologicals, but the disease is still neglected, and no new WHO resolutions on rabies have been proposed to address human rabies transmitted by dogs.

Since the first WHO Expert Consultation on Rabies, in 2004, WHO and its network of collaborating centres on rabies, specialized national institutions, members of the WHO Expert Advisory Panel on Rabies and partners such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Global Alliance for Rabies Control (GARC) and the Partners for Rabies Prevention (PrP), have been advocating the feasibility of rabies elimination regionally and globally, and promoting research into strategies. Those joint efforts have begun to break the cycle of rabies neglect, and rabies is becoming recognized as a priority for investment.

World Health Organization
WHO Expert Consultation on Rabies
Second report
WHO Technical Report Series, No. 982
ISBN 978 92 4 120982 3
3.4 Rabies cases detected in Slovak Republic

Prof. Jozef Bires, CVO
State Veterinary Administration of the Slovak Republic
Botanická No 17, 842 13 Bratislava /Slovak Republic

The rabies is the most dangerous occurring zoonosis. Therefore, the State Veterinary and Food Administration of the Slovak Republic has realized since the year 2000 the programme of rabies eradication, within which it regularly performs the oral vaccination of foxes by the air distribution. In June 2009, the Slovak Republic was declared at the SCOFCAH meeting in Brussels as a rabies free country, because it fulfilled and observed the requirements for the declaration as a free country according to the „OIE-Terrestrial Animal Health Code“. Until 2013, the Slovak Republic was a rabies free country and the last case of rabies in the Slovak Republic was confirmed in August 2006 in a red fox in Bratislava region. The last positive case in a wild animal, excluding a fox, was recorded in December 2005 in Košice region, in a dog the case was recorded in May 2005 in Nitra region and in a domestic animal, excluding a dog, the case was recorded in January 2005 in Bratislava region in a cat. With regard to an unfavourable epizootological situation in the Republic of Poland and in Ukraine, the State Veterinary and Food Administration of the Slovak Republic decided to continue in application of the National Programme of Rabies Eradication also after the year 2009. The vaccination area was defined in such a way as to take into the account to the greatest extent the risks connected with rabies, the observation of which is an inevitable assumption for a successful realization of rabies eradication and its control. Nevertheless, in January 2013, the case of rabies in a dead fox was again confirmed after 7 years near borders with Poland on the territory of district Bardejov. By the end of May 2013 further 6 cases were confirmed.

Overview of rabies occurrence

**Case No 1** – the dead fox found in the village Petrová, district Bardejov, rabies confirmed by the laboratory, the SVFI Dolný Kubín on 7.1.2013, the confirmatory examination by the National reference laboratory, the SVI Zvolen on 8.1.2013, the outbreak lifted on 17.4.2013

**Case No 2** – the dead fox found in the cadastral territory of the village Kružlov, district Bardejov, rabies confirmed by the laboratory, the SVFI Dolný Kubín on 8.3.2013, the confirmatory examination by the National reference laboratory, the SVI Zvolen on 11.3.2013, the outbreak lifted on 19.6.2013

**Case No 3** – the dead fox found in the village Stebník, district Bardejov, rabies confirmed by the laboratory, the SVFI Dolný Kubín on 15.3.2013, the confirmatory examination by the National reference laboratory, the SVI Zvolen on 18.3.2013, the outbreak lifted on 25.6.2013

**Case No 4** – the fox shot in the cadastral territory of the village Rokytov, district Bardejov within the extraordinary monitoring, rabies confirmed by the laboratory, the SVFI Dolný Kubín on 20.4.2013, the confirmatory examination by the National reference laboratory, the SVI Zvolen on 23.4.2013, the outbreak lifted on 29.7.2013
Case No 5 – the marten killed in the town Bardejov, the urban area Tehelňa, rabies confirmed by the laboratory, the SVFI Dolný Kubín on 6.5.2013, the confirmatory examination by the National reference laboratory, the SVI Zvolen on 7.5.2013, the outbreak lifted on 14.8.2013

Case No 6 – the dog destroyed in the town Bardejov, the urban area Tehelňa, rabies confirmed by the laboratory, the SVFI Dolný Kubín on 6.5.2013, the confirmatory examination by the National reference laboratory, the SVI Zvolen on 7.5.2013, the outbreak lifted on 14.8.2013

Case No 7 – the dog destroyed in the village Richvald, district Bardejov, rabies laboratory confirmed by the National reference laboratory, the SVI Zvolen on 13.5.2013, the outbreak lifted on 22.8.2013

Owing to a properly defined vaccination area, appropriate eradication programme and effective vaccination, the Slovak Republic managed to get under the control newly arisen rabies outbreaks, which occurred near borders with Poland in the 1st half-year 2013 and thus to prevent the spreading of rabies into the inland.

Fig. 1: Rabies cases in the Slovak Republic and adjacent Poland in the first and second quarter 2013.
# Distribution of Rabies in Europe

## 4.1 Country summaries of rabies cases, 1st quarter 2013

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# Rabies cases per country and administrative units, 1st quarter 2013

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| TOTAL                   |                  |          | 9     |

## Germany

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## Greece

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| TOTAL    |                  |          | 10    |

## Lithuania

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| TOTAL    |                  |          | 33    |

## Other

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| TOTAL                  |                  |          | 125   |

**PER CENT**

- Domestic animals: 11.2%, 13.6%, 5.6%, 0.8%, 0.0%, 1.6%, 0.0%, 32.8%, 53.6%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 1.6%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 3.2%, 2.4%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 1.6%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 67.2%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 100%
- Wildlife: 0.0%, 11.1%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 11.1%, 0.0%, 88.9%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 88.9%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 100%
- Other: 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%, 100%
### 4.2 Rabies cases per country and administrative units, 1st quarter 2013 (continued) 01.01.13 - 31.03.13

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### 4.2 Rabies cases per country and administrative units, 1st quarter 2013 (continued) 01.01.13 - 31.03.13

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01.01.13 - 31.03.13
### 4.2 Rabies cases per country and administrative units, 1st quarter 2013 (continued)

#### Location

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01.01.13 - 31.03.13
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17/26
## 5 Trend tables

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RABIES CASES IN EUROPE
1st QUARTER 2013
1677 CASES REPORTED
1 BAT RABIES CASE INCLUDED
3 HUMAN RABIES CASES INCLUDED