



# EU AND SERBIA AT WORK

## FACT SHEET

### SUPPORT TO ERADICATION OF RABIES AND SWINE FLU IN SERBIA

Rabies remains a health hazard across the Western Balkans. In Serbia, approximately 200 cases of rabies in animals were confirmed each year between 2000 and 2010, mostly among the red fox population, but also among other animals, including domestic ones such as cats and dogs. A multi-year program initiated by the European Commission's Directorate General for Health and Consumers (DG SANCO) has the objective to eradicate rabies from the wildlife in all Western Balkans countries and, in that way, eliminate the risk this dangerous disease presents for the health humans.

In Serbia, the programme started in 2011 and already brought the rabies virus in the wildlife close to eradication with only 3 cases of rabies in animals confirmed in 2014. The programme is simultaneously implemented in other countries of the region as well since rabies is a trans-boundary disease.

*By eradicating rabies, Serbia will join the family of rabies free European countries!*

The programme foresees at least five year duration in order to orally vaccinate every fox in the country against rabies. To achieve this goal, the Ministry of Agriculture is working alongside European donors and veterinary institutes in Kraljevo, Novi Sad and Belgrade. The vaccination is done by distributing the vaccines enclosed in baits which entice the mammals, in particular foxes. Most of these baits are being dropped by small airplanes. Campaigns for aerial distribution of vaccine baits cover the entire territory of Serbia apart from settlements, rivers, and lakes. The campaigns are conducted twice a year, in spring and autumn. The EU has also funded scientific equipment, disease-surveillance systems, and a dozen cooling vehicles for the task. Already, 9 national campaigns of aerial distribution of rabies vaccine baits were completed, while the 10<sup>th</sup> one will take place in spring of 2015.

The project Beneficiary is the Veterinary Directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment Protection, while the area covered encompasses the territory of Serbia.

The value of the EU funded programme for eradication of animal diseases including rabies since 2008 reached €20 million.

The programme has already yielded a significant progress and resulted in sharp reduction of the confirmed rabies cases in animals from about 200 before it started to only 3 in 2014. Serbia will be formally considered a rabies free country two years after the last confirmed case of rabies. It is expected that this will be achieved in the coming years. The rabies free status of Serbia will mark a significant improvement in protection of public health.

*A WORD OF A USER: "With this donation, we created a laboratory for rabies, which is modernly equipped and we have participated in the training of employees. This equipment is important for the better quality of work of the Institute and the work on the eradication of rabies," said Zoran Debeljak, Director of the Specialized Veterinary Institute "Kraljevo" (2013).*

With the EU donations, centers for highly dangerous infectious diseases of animals in all veterinary institutes in Kraljevo, Belgrade, Novi Sad and Nis have been equipped. The centers serve for rapid response in case some infectious disease appears in the territory of Serbia. *"With a programme of continuous training, the readiness level was raised so as to be able to react at most within six hours from the time of receiving the order," said Debeljak.*





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According to Dr. Slobodan Stanojevic, technical director of the Institute of Veterinary Medicine of Serbia in Belgrade, the Institute has received substantial equipment and supplies through the EU-funded program *“Equipping the Institute is significant for several reasons. It is a national reference laboratory and with the additional equipment we have significantly increased the diagnostic capabilities of our laboratories and increased the level of safety in our laboratories. Now we can implement diagnostic procedures more quickly and efficiently, we have achieved greater confidence in the accuracy of test results, we have introduced novelties in research and we document the results and examination flow with more ease,”* considers Dr. Stanojevic.

## CONTACT

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