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Quarterly e-mail service of the European SAVE Foundation
(Safeguard for Agricultural Varieties in Europe)



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SAVE Balkan Workshop Dimitrovgrad

From 22nd to 24th of September 2004, SAVE Foundation carried out a first meeting within the frame of the project "Balkans Network" in Dimitrovgrad (Serbia). In four workshops, the situation of rare livestock breeds in the individual countries was recorded. More than 30 participants from 8 Balkan countries participated and thus, expectations were by far exceeded.

In the Balkans, old livestock breeds are strongly endangered, and until today, hardly any conservation measures have been carried out. Subsidies are very limited and often paid irregularly. In the workshops, the situation was recorded for each breed of all species concerned. The following measures have to be taken urgently:

- A comprehensive monitoring for numerous breed groups such as steppe cattle, water buffalo (Mediterranean type), Tsigai sheep and primeval pigs
- urgent conservation measures for individual particularly endangered breeds
- search tours to find missing breeds
- standardisation for goats, donkeys, and possibly mountain horses.



Dimitrovgrad is a small town situated only few kilometres away from the Bulgarian border. A first gene conservation centre, however, seems to develop here. The workshop was consciously combined with the 2nd Regional Fair "Balkan Agrobiodiversity and Rural Heritage in Dimitrovgrad, where 20 autochthonous breeds from the Balkans could be presented. Furthermore, the Serbian NGO "Natura Balkanika" opened a first "interactive show-farm" in the neighbouring Lukavica. The co-operation between REC Office Pirot, Natura Balkanika and SAVE Foundation with Monitoring Institute proved its worth.

In the first three days, numerous contacts were made. All participants discussed lively and an active exchange of experiences took place. Contacts shall be cultivated in the future, and an online information platform for the Balkans is being elaborated. The participants of the workshop have agreed to join the Balkans-network for agrobiodiversity. This project is financed by Sonnenwiese Foundation, Vaduz, and SBB Foundation, Stuttgart.

Annual Conference of SAVE Foundation and SAVE Network



From 2nd to 4th September, the SAVE Annual Conference 2004 was held in Bled, Slovenia. A co-ordination meeting for Bovska sheep took place before the actual meeting, which was combined with the annual conference of the EAAP (European Association for Animal Production). Thus, further contacts to the animal sector could be made or deepened.

This year, too, the interest in the SAVE Annual Conference was enjoyably high. 26 participants from 10 countries took part in the meeting. The Board of Directors decided that Staf van den Bergh remains chairman during the period 2005-2006, too. As reaction to the survey made amongst SAVE partners and SAVE committees before the meeting in Bled, the annual conference will in future focus more strongly on information and knowledge exchange of the partners, and it is going to be complemented by working groups/ workshops. The next annual meeting shall take place in Nitra/ Slovakia, within the frame of a congress on plants.

Last year all SAVE committees discussed about a better presentation of the topic of agrobiodiversity in the public together with their partner organisation. It was agreed now in Bled to introduce a "Day of Agrobiodiversity". On this occasion, the partner organisations are going to publish articles on the topic "agrobiodiversity" in journals etc. in each country. SAVE Foundation will prepare a thematic frame or article on a certain main topic.

The field trips in the frame programme provided a surprisingly unconventional activity between meetings: on Thursday, a private arboretum in Kamnik with 500 fruit varieties was visited, and in the following, participants were captured by the mystical world of a healing garden with holy springs. Other field trips led to villages in the Triglav National Park and a tasting of traditional sausage and cheese specialities. Autochthonous Slovenian breeds could be seen in a show accompanying the EAAP-conference.

Altogether, the enormous motivation of all partners and participants could be felt during the SAVE Annual Conference in Bled to keep on with conservation work despite economic stagnation and empty accounts. Common grounds, possibilities and limits could be assessed. The motivation to work together was strengthened and enhanced.

First Co-ordination Meeting Bovska Sheep

The Bovska sheep (Plezzana, Bovec, Krainer Steinschaf) occurs internationally in Slovenia, Italy, Austria and Germany. Its ancestor is the Zaupel sheep. Within the frame of the SAVE Annual Meeting the first co-ordination meeting took place on 2nd September 2004 with representatives from all four countries under the patronage of SAVE. The meeting was very informative for all participants, as it was the first opportunity to discuss the situation and development of this Alpine sheep breed together. The population data recorded by SAVE every second year were subject to lively discussion.

The importance of governmental support for the conservation of a breed became particularly clear: in Italy, the situation of keepers and thus of the herds is very uncertain; overageing of keepers and missing governmental support threaten the last stocks – the breed is not approved as pure-bred and thus not entitled to subsidies. International support from neighbouring countries is particularly welcome now in order to be able to act on public authorities to motivate animal keepers and to co-ordinate production and breeding objectives.

Contrastingly, the situation in Slovenia is relaxing as the government pays subsidies since 2003. The Bovec sheep in Slovenia is named after the village Bovec in the upper Soflorina valley close to the Italian border. A conservation programme is carried out since 1994. In Austria, the breed is called “Krainer Steinschaf”. Until 2005, a LEADER programme for the production of Alpine cheese is running.



Governmental subsidies are paid for keeping the breed as it is rated as endangered in Austria.

In Germany, genetic testing on scrapie resistance is carried out at present. There is the danger that entire bloodlines are going to disappear as they do not comply with the genotype required by the EU and can thus no longer be used for breeding. Breeders with animals of Type 1 (approved genotype) are not interested in an exchange with not typified animals.

After this first meeting, everybody agrees: co-ordination and discussion across national borders is so important that other meetings should follow. Further contacts, co-ordination and meetings are planned.

Blood Refreshment for Valachian Sheep

In Slovakia and Eastern parts of the Czech Republic, small populations of original Valachian sheep have survived until most recent times. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, they lost, however, their economic niche and threatened to become extinct. The German GEH transferred the animals as gene reserve to Germany and the Swiss Foundation Pro Specie Rara set up a survival project in East Moravia. In both countries, populations were, however, too small to avoid inbreeding.



SAVE Foundation was therefore assigned by Pro Specie Rara to carry out a blood refreshment with animals of a rest population from Slovakia. Unfortunately, this was not possible. Really pure-bred animals could not be found any more in Slovakia. It was thus agreed to exchange animals between Moravia and Germany. The project had to be postponed several times. Firstly, the foot-and-mouth disease prevented transport, then, a rest population was reduced by a stable fire. At the end of

the year 2003, preparations could be started and the project has been completed in autumn 2004. The EU-membership of the Czech Republic facilitated the exchange of animals considerably, which was, however, again threatened by EU regulations concerning scrapie resistance. The efforts of SAVE project director Halka Rzasa, the German GEH and the meanwhile founded Czech breeding association were finally successful on the 2/3 October 2004, when altogether 46 Valachian sheep could be transferred internationally. The project was mainly financed by Pro Specie Rara.

Newsflash

- **European Wool Group**

The European Wool Group (EWG) organised from 7th to 10th October 2004 in Oslavou near Brno (CZ) a conference "Wool of Europe – East and West". More than 70 participants from 13 countries discussed the situation of sheep breeding, wool production and processing, exchanged experiences and prepared joint projects across borders. For more information see: <http://perso.wanadoo.fr/atelier.laine/eurowoolgr.htm>.

- **Training programme of the IAC Wageningen**

The „International Agricultural Centre“ Wageningen (NL) will run a training programme on "agrobiodiversity, biotechnology, plant breeding and seed sector development" from 25 April till 1 July 2005. Requirements for admission: MSc degree (or at least BSc), three years' professional experience, be actively involved in/committed to the course subject matter, be competent in the English language. Website: <http://www.iac.wur.nl>.

Important dates (extract)

2004

3-4 December: Berlin Conference on the Human Dimensions of Global Environmental Change: Greening of Policies – Interlinkages and Policy Integration. Berlin, Germany. Contact: BC2004@zedat.fu-berlin.de

2005

22-23 January: European Conference on GMO free Regions, Biodiversity and Rural Development; Berlin, Germany. Contact: conference@zs-l.de, Website: <http://www.zs-l.de/conference>

24-28 January: International Conference on Biodiversity "Today's choice for tomorrow's life", at UNESCO, Paris, France. Contact: biodiv2005paris@recherche.gouv.fr, Web: <http://www.recherche.gouv.fr/biodiv2005paris>

30 March - 2 April: Meeting "Plant genetic resources of geographical and "other" islands. Conservation, evaluation and use for plant breeding", Castelsardo (Sardinia), Italy. Contact: bullitta@cspm.ss.cnr.it, Web: <http://www.areapuntocom.com/eucarpia/>

18-19 May: Internat. Conference "Multifunctionality of Landscapes - Analysis, Evaluation and Decision Support, Giessen, Germany. Web: <http://www.sfb299.de/conference/>

9 - 11 June: International Symposium "Introduction and Spread of Invasive Species" at Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany. Contact: DPG-BCPC@dpg.phytomedizin.org, Web: http://www.bcpc.org/Invasive/Invasive_homepage.htm

26 June - 1 July: XX International Grassland Congress: "Grasslands - a Global Resource" at University College Dublin, Ireland. Web: <http://www.igc2005.com/index.htm>

5-9 September: "Potato 2005 – trade show, field demonstrations and congress", at Emmeloord, the Netherlands. Contact: svanbeek@agriprojects.nl

7-9 September: Colloquium: "Vegetables, a heritage to hand on and to value", Angers, France. Web: <http://www.brg.prd.fr>

10-12 September: provisional date for the Annual Meeting of SAVE Foundation and the SAVE Network at Nitra, Slovakia. Contact: office@save-foundation.net

25-27 September: International Symposium "Comparative Advantages for Typical Animal Products from the Mediterranean Areas", at Vale de Santarém, Portugal. Website: <http://horta.0catch.com/medsymp/>