

Press release, 28.10.2024 - UPDATE

Another tragedy at the Bulgarian-Turkish border: animal transport detained for 11 days – immediate measures must be taken by the authorities

Frankfurt, 28th October 2024 – Within a very short period, another emergency situation has arisen at the Bulgarian-Turkish border of Kapitan Andreevo/Kapıkule for cattle from the EU: a truck loaded with 47 cattle from Romania has been detained by the Turkish authorities at the border of Kapıkule since Friday, 18th October 2024. The animals have not been unloaded for 11 days and are being confined on the lorry in conditions that are highly detrimental to animal welfare. The overall condition of these young heifers is extremely critical, and two animals have already died on board. The situation is worsening with every additional hour of delay.

According to available information, the reason for this emergency situation of the 47 Romanian heifers is that the animals come from a region around Constanța, which has been affected by the outbreak of the “Peste des petits ruminants” (sheep and goat plague, PPR) since July 2024. However, this decision is incomprehensible, as PPR mainly affects sheep and goats. Cattle do not transmit the PPR virus to other animals¹. It is also unclear why possible restrictions on animal consignments departing from “animal disease areas” are not better communicated between the responsible authorities on the EU and Turkish sides before approving and carrying out the transport.

It is all the more shocking that similar problems seem to be recurring within a very short period of time. Just recently, two transports with a total of 69 pregnant heifers from Germany were detained for four weeks (16.09 – 14.10.2024) inside the Turkish border of Kapıkule under the most catastrophic conditions. The reason for the refusal to import the German heifers was that they came from Brandenburg, a region in Germany that has been affected by bluetongue (BTV) since August 2024. According to the information available, all animals had been tested negative for BTV and the transport of these animals had been pre-authorized. It is hard to put into words what was done to these 69 animals during these four weeks: confined knee-deep in their own excrement on board the lorries, emaciated and exhausted, they gave birth to their calves on board. A total of 13 calves and seven heifers died on board the lorries. The survivors of this ordeal were slaughtered in a slaughterhouse in Edirne on 15 October 2024.

Unfortunately, these two cases are not isolated. In September 2023, cattle from Romania were detained under similarly catastrophic conditions. Again, despite urgent recommendations, the cattle were not unloaded. Several animals died and the surviving cattle were eventually transported on to Iraq despite their very poor state of health. Between 2010 and 2021, the animal welfare organizations Animal Welfare Foundation and Animals' Angels documented numerous similar incidents. Despite repeated complaints to the relevant authorities in the EU and Türkiye, the situation has still not improved.

¹ https://www.msdsmanual.com/generalized-conditions/peste-des-petits-ruminants/peste-des-petits-ruminants#Etiology-and-Epidemiology_v3276019

The EU and its exporting Member States share responsibility for this situation, as the animal transports should not have been approved as long as the Turkish authorities had provided import guarantees.

Immediate action must now be taken by all EU and Turkish authorities involved to prevent another tragedy like the one of the 69 German heifers.

Animal Welfare Foundation and Animals' Angels are calling on the Bulgarian authorities to do everything in their power to allow the detained animals to be returned to the EU without further delay, as required by law and by the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH) standards when a country refuses an importation. As seen for the last 14 years, and once again confirmed in a shocking way by the recent case of the 69 German heifers, the animals are refused entry and will not be unloaded, accommodated and cared for in Turkish territory, even if they die inside the lorry. Once stranded on the Turkish side of the border, the animals are left to their fate on the lorries under horrific conditions exposing them to immeasurable suffering and even death. Under all circumstances, these 47 cattle must now be prevented from suffering the same cruel fate as the German heifers. This is not only our ethical responsibility to the animals in our care, but also our legal obligation.

Short video clips on the current situation:

<https://www.animals-angels.de/romanian-heifers-stuck-at-turkish-bulgarian-border>

<https://www.animals-angels.de/romanian-heifers-stuck-at-turkish-bulgarian-border-2>

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Picture 1 and 2: Dead animals on board the detained transport, 24.10.2024