

ASF – the dangers lurk everywhere!

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Invasive Alien Species (IAS) is a topic that attracts large-scale political, economic, and professional interest. The world is witnessing an exceptional natural phenomenon – the large-scale introduction (transfer) of invasive alien species (weeds, pests, pathogens). The reasons for this global movement with resurgent aggression are primarily two. On the one hand – the free movement of goods and people, and on the other, the change in the planetary climate. This large-scale transformation, increased intensity, powerful dynamics, radicalization, and provocativeness in the presence of IAS are defined as one of the leading global threats both to biodiversity in ecosystems and to agriculture, forestry, ecology, and human health.

Europe is one of the most sensitive territories, where the unprecedented invasion of alien species is constantly reactivated and gaining speed. Is it any wonder then that this multifaceted invasion, this stress test, this in many cases strange behavioral model produces fears? The fears are

entirely justified and raise many questions. Does the world have the necessary level of competence to combat this real threat to its existence? Does the world have the political will and financial resources to solve this mortally dangerous challenge? And ultimately: what are the chances of success against the terrifying danger?

If we focus our attention on the united Europe, of which Bulgaria is also a part, we will see that the EU is not in a waiting position; the EU approaches the current topic with commitment and invests powerful political, financial, and scientific potential to fight the great danger. Regulation (EU) No 1143/2014, which entered into force on 1 January 2015, whose characteristics generate resilience, multifunctionality, unlock creativity and motivation, and accumulate new energy. The document regulates three types of actions: prevention, early detection and rapid eradication, and control. The strategy provides for the compilation of a List of priority alien species. In addition to the well-known pests that are also widespread in our country – Colorado potato beetle, cotton aphid, tobacco whitefly, horse chestnut leaf miner, Japanese knotweed, etc., it is especially important to know which are the new alien species. A key point in this institutional engineering is that it defines the interrelationships between the relevant administrative institutions and key industries, as well as the ways to effectively inform the public.

In this case, it should be specifically noted that the aggression of IAS, whose metamorphoses, hyperactivity, and reproduction mark previously unknown forms and values, is a real basis for the emergence of new phytosanitary risks to plant health.

The main prerequisites for the surge in phytosanitary risks are the ongoing changes in pests, vectors, plants, and the relationships between them. In this regard, monitoring is of key importance for the precision in formulating concepts, strategies, and formats for a successful attack against IAS.

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The fight against the invasion of IAS is a mission to save the life of the planet. If we turn our gaze to our country, we will see that the responsible institutions (Bulgarian Food Safety Agency, Plant Protection Directorate, Executive Environment Agency, as well as the scientific units) are working to implement the European Regulation. This is commendable and encouraging, but let us not forget – every strategic concept requires long-term planning, coordination between the individual units, and iron discipline. The force majeure circumstances that IAS "create" incessantly can turn any concept upside down. The EU Regulation is one basic parameter, the national strategy with an identical vision is the engine, the long-term and far-sighted policy for success in this extremely complex and explosive environment.