



Research Article

# Study Regarding Romania and the EU RASFF Notifications

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## Abstract

European integration has brought for Romania the benefits of a market with a potential of over 500 million consumers, as well as meeting the food safety requirements imposed by EU requirements. Unfortunately, Romanian food exports have been involved in unpleasant incidents, such as horse meat scandal. This paper proposes an analysis of the notifications made in Romania through the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed and to establish the correlations between the types of exported foodstuffs, the value of the exports and the level of notifications. Several food notifications have been made by Romania, but they are low compared to Poland and Hungary. Research has shown that a strict correlation between RASFF notifications to Romanian producers and the evolution of national food exports cannot be established. During the analyzed period, the number of notifications fluctuated unevenly, although there has been a slight downward trend in recent years. Chemical hazards, done by the presence of food pollutants, and microbiological hazards (*Salmonella* or *Listeria sp.*) have been frequent notified for the Romanian products, but also fraudulent issues have to be reported, especially related to the meat scandal or the presence of GMO's traces. Chemical risks; caused by the presence of food pollutants and microbiological hazards (*Salmonella* or *Listeria sp.*), have been frequently reported for Romanian products, but fraudulent issues, especially related to the meat scandal or the presence of GMOs, should also be mentioned. Romania needs to apply additional measures to increase the national food security at a level comparable to that of Western countries, and to ensure the competitiveness of domestic products for the European market.

**Key words:** food, export, RASFF, Romania

## Introduction

Food safety is a priority issue for the European Union EU. The Concern for the health of the consumer and the possibility of critical events on agro-food chain (pathogenic microorganisms, contaminants in food, frauds / adulteration) have led the European officials to develop a system of

strict legislation; one of the most restrictive in the world and to apply action mechanisms to prevent the entry of improper food / feed on the EU market.

## Materials and Methods

Research has used the information provided by statistical databases of the

National Institute of Statistics (NIS), National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority, European Commission (Eurostat, RASFF Portal), and FAO (FAOSTAT). The data collected were systematized, correlated with scientific sources, and represented graphically or tabular. The results obtained have been analyzed and interpreted.

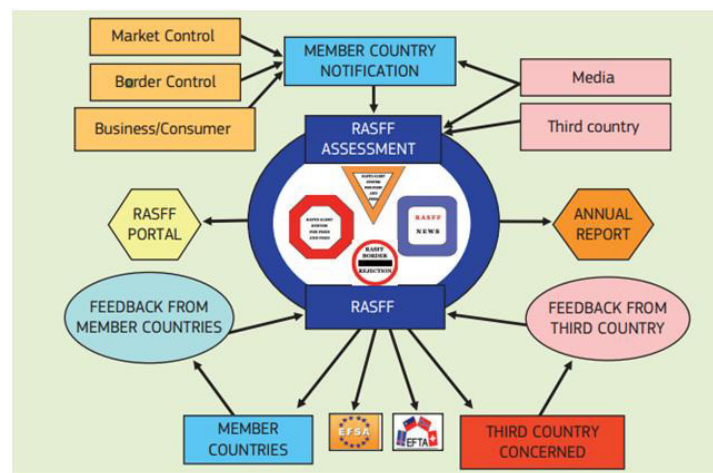
### The functionality of the EU RASFF

The Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) is an EU tool used for the efficient and rapid use of information related to food and feed safety in the event of threats to consumer safety. Dissemination of information is made between the European Commission, national authorities for food and feed control in the Member States and various European and international organizations. The system is used based on an agreement between EC members of 1979 (RAPEX), the legal basis was established by EU regulations 92/59 / EEC, 2001/95 / EC-RAPEX and 178/2002 / EC. Starting with 2002, RAPEX system was replaced with RASFF (EC, 2015). RASFF network includes National Food Safety Authorities from Member States, the European Commission, EFSA, ESA, Norway,

Liechtenstein, Iceland and Switzerland. Together with Romania's EU integration, the National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority (NSVFSA) has become a member of RASFF.

The European Commission and RASFF work out with the World Health Organization (WHO) and developed the international warning system 'International Food Safety Authorities Network' (INFOSAN), (WHO and FAO, 2013). The applied procedures are standardized (RASFF SOPs).

The criteria for RASFF notifications are set out in article 50 of Regulation (EC) N ° 178/2002. At the emergence of a potential danger, the competent authorities of the RASFF Member State shall notify the European Commission, through a standardized form, which includes elements of product identification, potential risks, measures taken and information regarding the traceability of the product. The notification shall be accompanied by an explanation of the reasons that led to the action, followed in due course by additional information (EC, 2013).



**Figure 1: Schematic representation of the information flow of the RASFF**

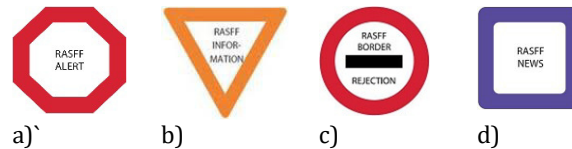
Source EC, (2015a)

The notifications are about biological hazards (microbiological and

parasitological), chemical, organoleptic changes, labelling deficiencies,

counterfeiting of the products, packaging (inappropriate or which may cause contamination of the products), radioactive radiation above allowed levels or other

hazards than those mentioned above. The network uses four types of notifications graphically coded, as shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2: Four types of RASFF notifications**

Source CE (2015b)

According to EC (2015b), the meaning of the notifications used by RASFF is the following:

*Alert Notification (a)* requires rapid action being transmitted at the detection on the market of products presenting a serious risk to public health:

- unsatisfactory products, which may have significant negative consequences on consumer health or may cause death;
- products with potential temporary negative consequences on health;
- the possibility that food can be dangerous when consumed by vulnerable consumer groups (children, pregnant women, the elderly);
- the possibility of a risk of cross contamination with other foods during storage and marketing.

The network member who triggers the alert must apply the necessary measures for reducing the risk (withdrawal/recall of product from the market). The products subjected to an alert have been withdrawn or are in the process of being withdrawn from the market. The purpose of notification is to provide information to RASFF members in order to identify the product in question and to take necessary actions. In some cases, they resort to the media to inform consumers and facilitate the disposal of products from the market.

*Information Notification (b)* does not require rapid action. Usually, information is transmitted on potential risks, the product has not arrived/is no longer on the market and the measures taken have been effective.

*Rejection at the border (c)* notifies the rejection of batches of food and feed tested and rejected at the border due to the detection of a health risk for the user. Notifications are sent to all border posts in order to strengthen controls and that the rejected product does not re-enter the EU through another border post.

*News (d)* are notifications regarding information of common interest regarding the safety of food / feed that has not been communicated as an alert or information notification, but which are important for network members. They can be made based on information gathered in the media or transmitted by competent authorities of third countries.

Notifications can be "original notification" if they relate to batches of foods / feed that have not been previously notified or 'follow-up notification', following an original notification sent. Failure to comply with the legal criteria for notification or insufficient information and notification may be rejected by the RASFF, and the notifying country is invited to provide further information. At the request of the notifying country, the information may be withdrawn if the information is

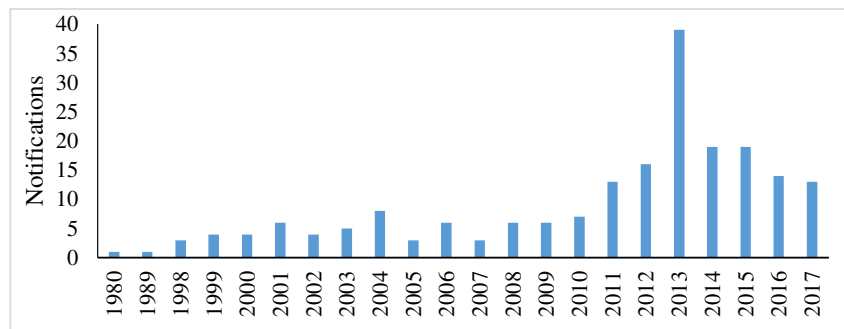
ungrounded or is wrongly transmitted (EC, 2015a)

### RASFF notifications concerning Romania

In Romania, RASFF activity is governed mainly by the Law 150/2004 regarding food safety, Art. 22, Government Decision no. 308/2004 on the organization and functioning of the National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority NSVFSA, and the Order MARD 68/2005 to

approve the Rule regarding the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed, correlated with European regulations (NSVFSA, 2009).

Since the establishment of the network, products from Romania have been registered 203 notifications, with a maximum annual record of 29 complaints in 2013 (figure 3). Foods were most often involved (136), followed by feed (59) and packaging in contact with food FCM (8). (EC, 2018).

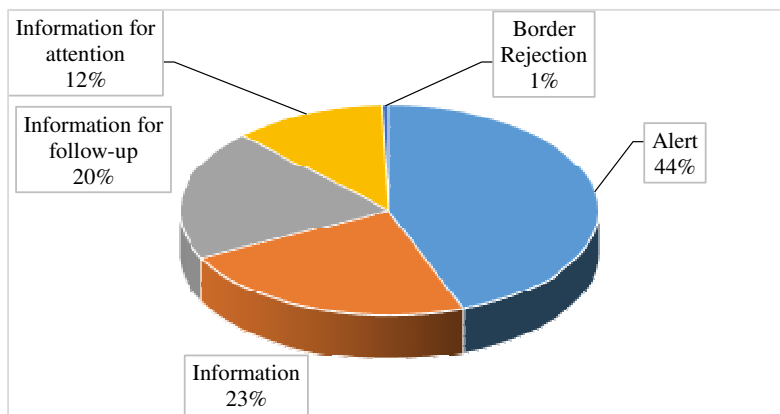


**Figure 3: Notifications regarding Romanian products**

Source Author, by using EC (2018)

In terms of countries that have sent notifications regarding the most numerous Romanian products come from Italy (27), followed by Germany (25) and Greece (8). Moldova, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Cyprus

have submitted only one notification during the analyzed period. In six cases, Romania has notified itself through the RASFF for unsatisfactory marketed products.



**Figure 4: Notifications by type**

Source: Author, by using CE, (2018c)

The analysis of notices regarding Romania on the basis of gravity criterion highlights information (121), followed by alert (90).

The only lot rejected at the border was notified by Moldova (04.11.2008- salted crisps lot having the best before date

exceeded) (Figure 4). An analysis of RASFF notifications for Romanian products in period 1990-2018 (6 months) by category

of goods and hazard is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Notifications for Romanian products by products and hazard (Source CE, 2018)**

Products		Allergens	Radioactivity	Exceeded data/ incorrect	Biologicals /microbiologica	Adulterations/ altered	GMO's	Foreign body	Chemicals
Cereals and bakery products	10	4		1	1			2	2
Cocoa, coffee and tea	4				1			3	
Confectionery	3							1	2
Dietetic foods, food supplements	5								5
Fruits and vegetables	25		9		8			3	5
Herbs and spices	2							1	1
Poultry meat and poultry meat products	30				25	1			4
Meat and meat products	38			4	14	4		4	12
Milk and milk products	13				8				5
Egg and egg products	8				1				7
Nuts, nut products and seeds	9				3		2	2	2
Fats and oil	2								2
Fish and fish products	3				3				
Prepared dishes and snacks	5			1	1	2			1
Soups, broths and sauces	1								1
Non-alcoholic beverages	1								1
Mineral water	1				1				
Mollusks	3								3
Honey and royal jelly	10								10
FCM	9								9
Feed	19				3			2	14
Pet food	1				1				
Other food	1				1				
Total	203	4	9	6	71	7	2	18	86

Source Author, by using EC (2018)

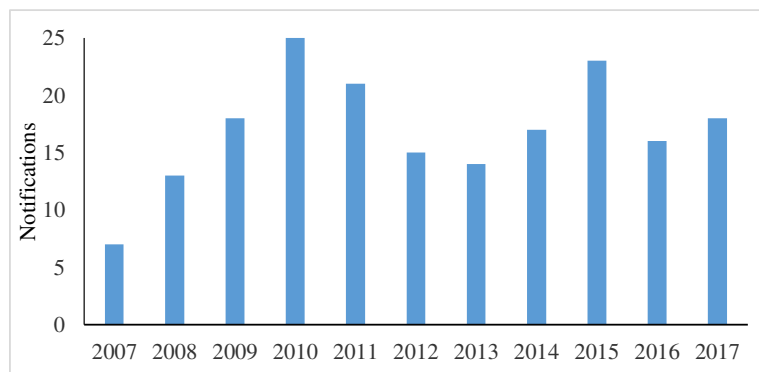
The data presented in Table 1 allow the identification of the most common deficiencies noted in Romania for food products, feed or food contact materials

(FCM) on the EU market. It thus observed a preponderance of the chemical dangers, including sulphite (86) and those of biological nature, especially contamination

with dangerous microorganisms (71). The main causes of these deficiencies can be stated as follows; noncompliance with production recipes, inadequate specifications regarding the quality of raw materials and the existence of poor hygiene conditions in the production facilities. The scandal of substituting beef with horse meat has affected not only the meat products, but also the prepared dishes and snacks category, as notifications from Belgium referred to these products, also during the crisis. The presence of products contaminated with GMO at the nuts, nut

products and seeds, is the novelty for hazards associated with local limitations. Feed presents mainly chemical (due to identification of pollutants mycotoxins) and foreign body hazards. Packaging materials (FCM) led to the notification of chemical hazards, due to the migration of components in the product structure.

As an EU member, Romania participated in RASFF activities through NASFVA and transmitted to the network 193 notifications for products distributed on national territory (Figure 5).

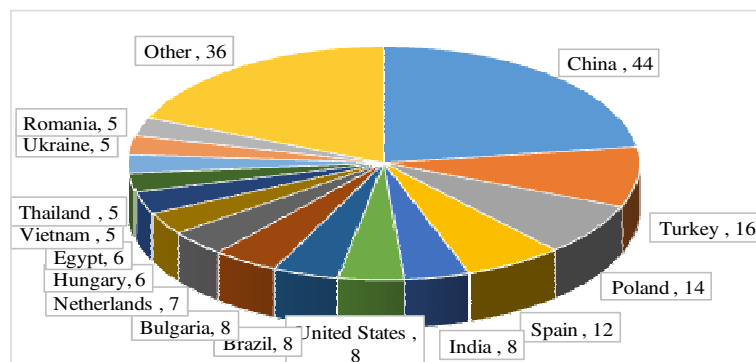


**Figure 5: Notifications made by Romania**

Source Author, by using CE, (2018)

The number of notifications varies between 7 and 25/year, the maximum record was registered in 2010. In the first 8 months of 2018, 6 lots of food product were notified, for chemicals (1) and microbiological (5) risk. Figure 6 presents RASFF notifications

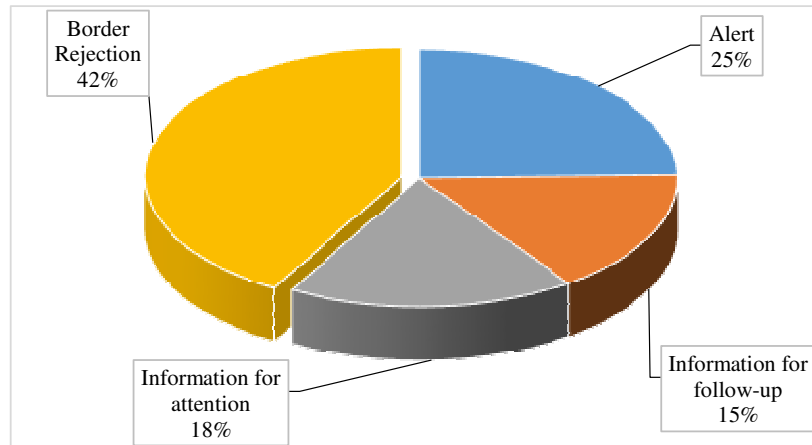
by country of origin of the products made by Romania. With 44 notifications (23% of total), China ranks first position in the top of notifications, followed by Turkey (16) and Poland (14).



**Figure 6: Country of origin products notified by Romania**

According to the RASFF (2018), in 2017, 3749 notifications were transmitted through the RASFF with distribution by category as shown in Figure 7. The data presented graphically shows a predominance of border rejection and

alerts for non-compliant products, together totaling over 77% of the total. Original information has led to the 583 follow-up notifications, completed by 678 information for attention submitted to members.



**Figure 7: RASFF notifications (2017)**

Source Author, by using CE, (2018)

A relevant analysis of RASFF notifications by country required a correlation between notifications and imports. A distribution of

food and drink exports at the EU level (SITC06) is shown in table 2.

**Table 2: Notifications /100 million import, by country**

No.	Country	Notifications	Imports (mil. of euro)	Coef.
1.	Austria	48	11264.9	0.43
2.	Belgium	199	31224.4	0.64
3.	Bulgaria	109	2771.2	3.93
4.	Switzerland	60	9989	0.60
5.	Cyprus	41	1086.2	3.77
6.	Czech Republic	78	7746	1.01
7.	Germany	384	78137.4	0.49
8.	Denmark	130	11185	1.16
9.	Estonia	28	1435.6	1.95
10.	Spain	235	30923.9	0.76
11.	Finland	65	4604.7	1.41
12.	France	254	50257.9	0.51
13.	UK	372	51923.5	0.72
14.	Greece	88	6302.8	1.40
15.	Croatia	49	2719.4	1.80
16.	Hungary	29	5010.2	0.58
17.	Ireland	68	8074.7	0.84
18.	Iceland	1	561	0.18

19.	Italy	541	37160	1.46
20.	Lithuania	36	3344.6	1.08
21.	Luxemburg	7	2210.1	0.32
22.	Latvia	32	2437.3	1.31
23.	Malta	39	677.8	5.75
24.	Netherlands	487	49516.1	0.98
25.	Poland	87	16675.6	0.52
26.	Portugal	28	8995.3	0.31
27.	Romania	19	6595.9	0.29
28.	Sweden	105	14219.4	0.74
29.	Slovenia	30	2520.5	1.19
30.	Slovakia	50	3932	1.27

Source Authors, own calculation

Malta (5.75), Bulgaria (3.73) and Cyprus (3.77) are the countries that have recorded the highest values of the coefficients; the last positions are occupied by Portugal (0.31), Romania (0.29), and Iceland (0.18).

### Conclusions

Romania does not perform in evaluating the quality of imported products. Romanian imports are made especially in the Eurozone, as well as from Bulgaria or Hungary. The Romanian market is unlikely to be the destination of the best imported food, although our neighbors have lower quality products. The difference is even more apparent if a comparison is performed with advanced western countries. It is very likely that the Romanian system for assessing the quality of imported products will be deficient, allowing for easy access to the domestic market.

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