



REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA



Ministry of Agriculture and Food



Conclusions

The 8th Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from South Eastern Europe held in Sofia, Bulgaria November 12th, 2014

Ministers of Agriculture and Head of Delegations from South Eastern European countries gathered in Sofia, Bulgaria on 12th of November 2014 at the 8th Annual Working Meeting organized under the joint auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food of Republic of Bulgaria and the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in South Eastern Europe.

As an expressed commitment of the participating countries and based on the established institute of having an Annual Ministerial Meetings of the Ministers of Agriculture of the South Eastern Europe (SEE) Countries, the Ministers and Heads of Delegations had an open discussion about the common interests of the countries in the SEE region and to reconcile differing issues and views.

CONCLUSIONS OF 8th ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MINISTERS OF AGRICULTURE OF SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

1. We, the Ministers and Heads of Delegations of the Ministries of Agriculture from South Eastern Europe, have gathered in Sofia, Bulgaria to discuss the future developments for agriculture and rural development sector in SEE region and review the progress of the regional cooperation in this field. We reconfirm our commitment to the shared vision and mutual regional cooperation ethics endorsed on the previous Meetings of the Ministers of Agriculture in SEE.

2. We would like to recall the importance of staying committed to the European Union (EU) integration process of the Western Balkans countries for coherent implementation of enlargement criteria and conditionalities in becoming EU members. Representatives of the EU member states present at the meeting, welcome the unequivocal commitment towards enlargement and with the efforts of the candidate and potential candidate member states strive for achieving a successful enlargement policy; particularly under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) 2014 – 2020 by amalgamating the reform and development agendas in the agriculture and rural development sector.

3. We, the representatives of EU candidate and potential candidate countries, reaffirm our commitment in aligning our agricultural and rural development policies with the new developments under the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). In order to modernize and

improve the competitiveness of our agricultural and rural development sector, we strive towards full utilization of the measures under the Instrument for Pre-Accession for Rural Development IPARD 2014-2020.

4. We welcome the recommendations outlined in the Kopaonik Agenda 2014. We especially underscore the importance of the topics discussed (streamlining of agricultural and rural development policies, trade with agricultural products among CEFTA countries and economic development of SEE rural cross-border areas implementing the Area Based Development Approach):

In particular:

- We welcome the report on "Agricultural Policy and Integration in SEE" which provides an prospect to explore the opportunities for monitoring of policies and fine-tuning these policies where necessary. We support the recommendations that means should be found to continue the collaboration between governments and faculties within the framework of SWG, with the help of international experts and support of Rural Development Networks.

- We express the importance of clarifying issues and policies related to small-farming communities, with special attention to those in Less Favored Areas.

- We stress the need for harmonisation of national procedures, operations and documents with the EU acquis, and other international conventions, standards and practices contributing most effectively to facilitation of regional trade. Particularly, for identification of opportunities to strengthen regional supply chain and improvement of business cooperation by exchange of information and enhanced promotion of traditional and organic production.

- We appreciate that the Area Based Development (ABD) approach has closely met the needs of local stakeholders, who in the past four years were empowered to define development needs of their regions in a way that other approaches have not been able to achieve. We recognize the need of exploring the options for inclusion of the ABD principles in national rural development policies. In that respect, we encourage the EU Commission to provide further support to the implementation of ABD approach in the SEE countries based on the formulations of the IPA Multi-Country Strategy 2014-2020.

5. We express our deep concern of the SEE region being threatened by constant risk of torrential floods in almost the entire territory, particularly on the destruction which has occurred due to torrential flooding in 2014. Once again, we stress the necessity for "horizontal" coordination between the relevant Ministries and institutions, in order to achieve the linking of organizational units in the fields of water management, forestry and agriculture and thus ensure adequate treatment of watersheds in the SEE region. Therefore, we urge the developed countries and international partner organizations to join the efforts of the SEE countries in addressing the key issues for which action is needed, and providing support for future steps on water and forest management.

6. We endorse the report of the Secretary General on the achievements and results of the SWG work for the year of 2014. We express our gratitude for the responsibilities and an equitable and appropriate contribution to the regional effort that SWG strives to tackle on agriculture and rural development issues in SEE region. We stress the importance of this organization in ensuring ownership in the regional cooperation and the regional integration efforts, based on common interests, in view of the association and accession of the SEE countries into EU.

7. We welcome the recommendations to establish stable relations and to build up effective coordination among the forest administrations in order to foster the development of the forest sector among the SEE countries. We express the need for strengthening the dialogue related to forest policies, sustainable management and development of forestry and forest administrations of the Balkan countries via the Forum "Balkan Forests".

8. We support the joint efforts of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and the SWG in addressing the measures of the South Eastern European Strategy 2020 regarding free trade area, competitiveness, environment and natural resources management of the rural areas.

9. We congratulate the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Serbia for successfully holding the Presidency of the SWG Assembly during the year 2014.

The SWG Presidency and the duties for the year of 2015 have been handed over from the current Presidency – the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Serbia to the Ministry of Agriculture and Food of the Republic of Bulgaria.

The 15th Agricultural Policy Forum in South Eastern Europe will be held in Bulgaria in autumn 2015.

10. We highly appreciate the support provided by the convening organizations and institutions:

the European Commission (DG AGRI, DG ELARG, JRC/IPTS), Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), commissioned by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

11. We express our appreciation for the kind hospitality provided to us by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food of the Republic of Bulgaria. At this meeting in Sofia, we have once again reviewed and defined the course for regional cooperation for the years ahead. In this context, the SWG will remain an essential tool for advocating policy dialogue and regional cooperation, with continues support to the agriculture and rural development sector of SEE countries during the EU integration process.

Present representatives of institutions during the meeting

SWG MEMBERS INSTITUTIONS

Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration, Albania

Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Bulgaria

Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Rural Development, Kosovo*

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Montenegro

Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection, Serbia

SWG OBSERVER INSTITUTIONS

Ministry of Agriculture, Hungary

Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry Policies, Italy

SWG NON-MEMBERS INSTITUTIONS

Embassy of Czech Republic in Sofia, Bulgaria

Embassy of Poland in Sofia, Bulgaria

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Slovak Republic

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), commissioned by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (UN FAO)

Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)

Kosovo "This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence"*