

Report

Thirty-Ninth Session of the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) of SEE Countries

Date: 13th – 14th September 2017
Location: Zagreb, Croatia
Organizer: SWG Head Office/Secretariat

Report Prepared by: SWG Head Office/Secretariat



September 2017

I. Purpose of the session:

The 39th session of the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in SEE was organized under the joint auspices of the SWG and the Ministry of Agriculture of Croatia and was held in the period 12th – 14th September 2017 in Zagreb, Croatia.

The aim of the session was to discuss the retrospective of the accomplishments in the period April - September 2017, major upcoming events for 2017 as per the operational plan, the financial framework and SWG internal operational structures. The future possible initiatives and progress related to the cooperation with SWG partner institutions was also discussed.

All SWG delegates from the eight SWG member institutions, and the eight SWG observer institutions were officially invited to participate on the 39th SWG session.

Representatives from five out of eight SWG member institutions, participated on the session, discussed and gave recommendations listed below. Representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Hungary, Ministry of Agriculture of Croatia participated on the session as observers.

Representatives from the SWG partner institutions and international organizations – German International Cooperation (GIZ), European Commission- Directorate General for Agriculture, DG Agri, Regional Experts on Assessment of the application on LEADER approach in the Western Balkan countries, Donau Soja Association and external experts also participated on the session.

The SWG Assembly, assembled on the 39th SWG Assembly Session had qualified quorum.

II. MINUTES OF THE SESSION:

SWG Delegates/ Ministry representatives present from:

- Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations - Bosnia and Herzegovina (Mr. Dusan Neskovic, Mr. Hamdija Civic);
- Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development – Kosovo* (Mr. Bekim Hoxha, Ms. Jehona Shyti);
- Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy – Republic of Macedonia (Mr. Tomo Mojsovski, Ms. Daniela Gidalova);
- Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development – Montenegro (Mr. Darko Konjevic);
- Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection – Republic of Serbia (Mr. Zoran Janjatovic);

Ministry representatives of the SWG observer institutions present from:

- Ministry of Agriculture – Croatia (Mr. Tugomir Majdak, Ms. Petra Badovinac, Mr. Marin Fak, Ms. Mihaela Bajkovic, Ms. Irena Georgievski, Ms. Željka Gudelj-Velaga);
- Ministry of Agriculture - Hungary (Ms. Gabriella Grüner)

Other representatives present at the session were:

- European Commission- Directorate General for Agriculture, DG Agri (Mr. Marius Lazdinis)
- German International Cooperation GIZ (Mr. Benjamin Mohr, Ms. Irena Djimrevska, Ms. Anica Palazzo, Ms. Janine Laepple);
- Regional Experts on Assessment of the application on LEADER approach in the Western Balkan countries (Ms. Natalija Bogdanov, Mr. Petar Gjorgievski);

- Donau Soja Association (Ms. Marija Kalentic)

**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.*

List of Participants from the meeting - Annex I.

III. Topics discussed at the 39th SWG Assembly Session:

The main topics of the session which were discussed are the following:

I. SWG Assembly Session with participation of SWG partner institutions and organizations

- Rural Development Program of Croatia for the period 2014 – 2020;
- Elaboration and update on the cooperation with European Commission;
- Update and progress in relation to the cooperation with JRC and DG Agri;
- Elaboration and update on the cooperation with GIZ;
- Regionally harmonized NON-GMO standard and control system – chance for agri-food sector in SEE, Donau Soja;

II. Internal SWG Assembly Session

- Discussions related to the future proposals and initiatives in the upcoming period;
- Discussions on the SWG ongoing and upcoming major activities for the year 2017
- Preparations for the Agricultural Policy Forum 2017;
- Preparations for the 11th Annual Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from SEE;
- Discussions and decisions regarding the future functioning of the SWG Operational structures;

Meeting programme is presented in Annex II.

DISCUSSIONS:

Mr. Darko Konjevic, SWG President welcomed the participants and moderate the 39th SWG Assembly Session.

On behalf of the host institution the State Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture of Croatia Mr. Tugomir Majdak welcomed the SWG Assembly and expressed the gratitude for the involvement of the Croatian Ministry in such regional framework and congratulated on the fruitful work achieved in the past period on behalf of the SWG. Mr. Majdak underlined the importance of agriculture and rural development and the regional cooperation for the SEE countries in the process of EU integration, including the countries from the EU. In this regard, exchange of experience and knowledge with EU member states is crucial and Croatia would support the countries via the SWG in providing the necessary information and knowledge transfer systems for the agriculture and rural development sectors. It was announced that the Croatian Ministry of Agriculture will increase the cooperation with SWG through various forms of cooperation and will consider changing its status as a full fletch member into the SWG in the coming period ahead.

The 39th Session of the SWG Assembly has been co-chaired by the President of the SWG Assembly and Mr. Boban Ilic, SWG Secretary General.

III.1 SWG Session (Open Meeting)

The 39th SWG Assembly Session begun as an open meeting.

III.1.1 Rural Development Program of Croatia for the period 2014 – 2020

Ms. Željka Gudelj-Velaga, Head of Sector for Implementation of Rural Development Program, Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Croatia presented the Rural Development Program of Croatia for the period 2014-2020. Ms. Gudelj-Velaga presented the measures under the Croatian RDP 2014–2020 to the SWG Assembly.

Detailed information on the Rural Development Program of Croatia can be found in Annex III.

III.1.2 Elaboration and update on the cooperation with European Commission

Mr. Ilic presented the projects being implemented in close cooperation with European Commission. The developments and results of the project SWG – EC: “Fostering regional cooperation and balanced territorial development of Western Balkan countries in the process towards EU integration - Support to the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in South-East Europe” can be downloaded from the following link: https://prezi.com/cacogn39tvc-/final_fostering-regional-cooperation-and-balanced-territorial-development-of-western-balkan-countries-in-the-process-towards-eu-integration/

The grant scheme being implemented via the LEIWW Programme but through the existing ABDA structures have been also presented. In the reporting period, six projects i.e. nine applicants which were on a waiting list have been contracted in three cross-border regions and the agreement contracts have been signed with the applicants. More details could be found in Annex IV.

Ms. Pavloska - Gjorgjieska presented the updates and achievements of the project SWG – JRC: “National Policy Instruments and EU Approximation and EU approximation process: Effects on farm holdings in the Western Balkan Countries (EUEWB)”. The way forward related to the cooperation with JRC connected to two JRC tender invitations on: “Agricultural Policy Developments and EU Approximation Process in the Western Balkan Countries (APDAP-WB) and “Land Market development and Small Farms’ Access to Land in the Pre-Accession Countries (LMSF-AC)” have been also elaborated and can be found in Annex V.

III.1.3 Elaboration and update on the cooperation with GIZ

Mr. Benjamin Mohr, Team Leader of the Programme for Rural Development through Integrated Forest and Water Resources Management in Southeast Europe (LEIWW) provided short update and review the progress of the Programme LEIWW. An overview of the activities on the evidence-based policy in respect to rural development and sustainable resource management of Natural Resources, Areas with Natural Constraints, Application on LEADER approach in the Western Balkan countries and Mainstreaming Biodiversity in the Agricultural and Land Management Policies, Plans and Programmes of the SEE countries was elaborated. In addition, Mr. Mohr briefly presented the project evaluation summary report related to the project implemented on: “Rural Development through Integrated Forest and Water Management in South Eastern Europe” and the key recommendations for the follow up phase. It was announced that based on the report the formulation of the proposal for the future phase II is in a process of development for the period June 2018 – May 2021. More details in Annex VI.

The report on the assessment of Natural Resource Management was completed and published. Ms. Pavloska - Gjorgjievska presented the key regional policy recommendations from the assessment and the way forward of the REAWG to the SWG Assembly. Related to the assessment of the Areas with Natural Constraints the publications have been translated into the local three languages of the region and disseminated. More details in Annex VII.

Link to the publications:

<http://seerural.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/Areas-with-Natural-Constraints-in-SEE-Assessment-and-Policy-Recommendations.pdf>

For the running assessment on the Application on LEADER approach in the Western Balkan countries, Ms. Leveska Gjorshoska briefed the Assembly that is in the final stage. The national country reports and contribution to the development of the regional synthesis report have been completed. The final approval of the national reports by the regional experts have been completed and the regional synthesis report has been drafted. General policy recommendations and conclusions of the regional synthesis report have been presented by the regional expert Mr. Petar Gjorgjievski. More details related to the assessment on LEADER in Annex VIII.

Ms. Djimrevska presented the activities related to the assessment of the Mainstreaming Biodiversity in the Agricultural and Land Management Policies, Plans and Programmes of the SEE countries. In the reporting period, the national and regional experts have been selected and engaged. The Regional Expert Advisory Working Group on Agro – Biodiversity have been established. In the upcoming period, the working group will focus on assessing and evaluating the relevant policy and institutional frameworks as well as provision of policy recommendations for conservation and sustainable use of agro-biodiversity in SEE countries. Identification of gaps and necessary reform priorities for the harmonization of policies in line with the EU member country practices; identification of key challenges requiring policy interventions; positive examples, lessons learned and practices from conservation and sustainable use of plant and animal genetic resources will be focus of the REAWG on Agro – Biodiversity in the future ahead. Time frame for accomplishment of this assessment is May 2018. Details on the assessment on Agro – Biodiversity can be found in Annex IX.

III.1.4 Regionally harmonized NON-GMO standard and control system – chance for agri-food sector in SEE

Ms. Marija Kalentic, gave a short overview of the operations of Donau Soja organization. It was emphasized the importance of GMO free agriculture within the European and global context and its effects in rural development. The initiative for regional harmonized labelling and control standards for GMO free products have been presented since its initiation. Some of the SWG countries have already taken their own national approaches for GMO free labelling and control in place. In this regards Donau Soja and SWG are discussing ways of cooperation on joint approach in order to support the harmonized implementation of the GMO-free labelling and control in the Danube region and Western Balkan countries. More details could be find in Annex X.

Field trip visit on Local Action Groups (LAGs) in Croatia

The SWG Assembly visited the Croatian Local Action Group – LAG “Zarinska Gora - Turopolje” and few of supported projects such as family farm Kovac which has an organic production of pumpkins, cereals and walnuts and family farm Culig which was another great example of family living from the agriculture combined with tourism. The SWG participants had the opportunity to hear about the functional and operational structure of the LAG, financing and division of grants. In general, the LAGs have been supported with small grants, focusing on traditional and cultural activities and agricultural production. The LAG “Zarinska Gora - Turopolje” have been presented

via power point presentation. The SWG Assembly had the opportunity on spot to meet and hear one of the beneficiaries – startup business of young farmers, individual agricultural producer of strawberries and blackberries, project supported through Rural Development Program 2014 – 2020.

LAG members are providing technical support and guidelines to the possible applicants, and related to the administrative and application procedures the regional development agencies are providing advice and support through all the application process.



III.2 Closed SWG Assembly Session – for SWG Delegates only

- Internal discussions - for SWG Delegates only