

Conclusions of the Ministerial Meeting
of the Ministers/ Heads of Delegations responsible for agriculture and rural development in South
Eastern Europe
Convened in Jahorina, Bosnia and Herzegovina
November 17th, 2017

The Ministers of Agriculture from South Eastern Europe (SEE) and the Heads of Delegations, gathered on 17th of November 2017 in Jahorina at the 11th Annual Working Meeting organized under the joint auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in South-Eastern Europe. Grounded on the initiative of founding a regional platform and convening an Annual Ministerial Meeting, the representing delegations reviewed the achievement of the objectives set during the last meeting in November 2016 and recommitted themselves to the pursuit of a more sustainable development pathway in the field of agriculture and rural development.

The participating delegations deliberated on enhancement of EU integration process, which reflects common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capacities, in the light of national circumstances. Accordingly, regional cooperation is essential to achieve collective goals of sustainable development and transformation.

The cooperation of the Ministries of Agriculture from SEE remains evident through successful implementation of regional activities and initiatives instigated within the SWG, as an intergovernmental platform for regional cooperation and networking.

CONCLUSIONS OF 11th ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MINISTERS OF AGRICULTURE OF SOUTH
EASTERN EUROPE

We, the Ministers of Agriculture and Heads of Delegations of South Eastern European countries:

GATHERED in Jahorina, Bosnia and Herzegovina on 17th of November 2017 to review the regional cooperation process in the field of agriculture and rural development in SEE region and discuss the future developments.

REITERATE the value of the European Union (EU) integration process for the Western Balkans, principally the reformative path of agriculture and rural development, and implication of successful enlargement policy that abides by the Copenhagen criteria and the conditionality of the Stabilization and Association Process. We emphasize the importance of its impact on sustainable development of agriculture sector and rural development to achieve economic prosperity of rural communities in the Western Balkans.

REMAIN devoted to the efforts in aligning our agricultural and rural development policies with the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). We reiterate our commitment to the reform and development agendas in the agriculture and rural development sector under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) 2014-2020.

RECALL the dedication on crafting rural development programs and managing funds through the implementation of the IPARD instrument in the pre-accession period, predominantly on resourcing the operating structures and resolving national obstacles for IPARD implementation. We highlight the potential benefit of this instrument for investments, especially for developing effective delivery systems for smallholders, as a predominant part of the sector, which will consequently increase absorption capacity for IPARD.

STRESS the need to actively pursue harmonization of trade policies and marketing standards to facilitate regional business cooperation, product development and improvement of the value chains of the agri-food sectors in the SEE countries. We reconfirm our determination and willingness to fully implement the provisions of CEFTA.

WELCOME the recommendations outlined in the Agricultural Policy Forum (APF) – Podgorica Agenda 2017. We especially underscore the importance of the matters deliberated, in specific:

- To improve competitiveness of small rural businesses, by investments as well as increasing their level of knowledge and skills in managing their businesses and forming partnerships or other types of cooperation, thus improving their ability to integrate in short value chains;
- To streamline policy instruments and management of natural resources, along with creating synergies for multi-functional use of land and ecosystem services as innovative approaches towards new levels of business development. These elements contribute to the development of sustainable income generating activities in the rural areas;
- To strengthen the cooperation and enhance the exchange of experience on the implementation of IPARD in the pre-accession period, concentrate on policies improving the competitiveness of agriculture sector and to facilitate access to markets, both domestic and foreign;
- To accelerate harmonization of the relevant regulation of the Western Balkan countries/territories with the EU legislation to overcome trade barriers; To conclude regional/bilateral agreement/s about mutual recognition of certificates in order to avoid lengthy and costly double certification procedures and enable efficient movement of agri-food products across Western Balkan;
- To put more effort in setting up the required legislative and administrative procedures for making the LEADER approach operational under the National Rural Development Programmes and/or IPARD;

HIGHLIGHT the efforts for strengthening the cooperation of Area Based Development (ABD) framework for streamlining the planning of financial support towards economic development of cross-border areas.

UNDERScore the importance of the Berlin Process to stipulate a new impulse towards regional cooperation to consolidate and keep the dynamics in European Union (EU) integration process in SEE. We commit to the progress and debates on regional cooperation, increased coherence and deepen economic integration. Likewise, we stress the need of addressing agriculture and rural development as an important topic for economic development on the upcoming Summit 2018 in UK.

ENDORSE the report of the Secretary General on the results of the SWG work for the year of 2017 and the achievements made in the frame of its operations. We underline the determination of this organization in safeguarding regional ownership and its efforts of introducing new paradigms for cooperation towards the association and accession of the Western Balkans into EU. We reconfirm our commitment to regional cooperation under the SWG umbrella with improved technical and financial care for achieving the set operational measures of the organization.

RECONFIRM the role of SWG as an implementing agency for development programs and projects in the field of agriculture and rural development as wells other cross-cutting topics under the responsibilities of Ministries of Agriculture in SEE. We invite international partner organizations, institutions and Governments (EC, GIZ, UN FAO, ADA and etc.), as well as the Visegrad Group of countries, to cooperate more widely with SWG, in order to implement their regional agenda and to create synergies for sustainable agriculture and rural development in SEE countries.



BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN TRADE AND
ECONOMIC RELATIONS



XI MINISTERIAL MEETING
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CONGRATULATE the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Montenegro for successfully holding the Presidency of the SWG Assembly during the year 2017.

The SWG Presidency and the duties for the year of 2018 have been handed over from the current Presidency – the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Montenegro to the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The 18th Agricultural Policy Forum in South Eastern Europe will be held in Bosnia and Herzegovina in autumn 2018.

APPRECIATE the support provided by all participating Governments, members and observers of the SWG. We value the positive contribution by partner organizations and institutions in their work to promote healthy, diverse and productive environment in SEE, in particularly:

the line Ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development, the European Commission (DG AGRI, DG NEAR, DG JRC), the German Federal Government (BMZ and BMEL), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and Regional Cooperation Council (RCC).

EXPRESS our gratitude for the warm hospitality provided by the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Recurrently, we have defined key steps to enhance the impact of regional cooperation. The SWG remains to act as an essential structure which contributes to the economic integration and rural development in the SEE region as one of the means to create opportunities for the necessary inclusive growth and job creation.



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Present representatives of institutions during the meeting

SWG MEMBERS INSTITUTIONS

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Republic of Albania

Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations, Bosnia and Herzegovina

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

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

Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Rural Development, Kosovo*

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy, Republic of Macedonia

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Montenegro

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, Republic of Serbia

SWG OBSERVER INSTITUTIONS

Ministry of Agriculture, Republic of Croatia

Ministry of Agriculture, Hungary

The Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, Republic of Austria

Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Federal Republic of Germany

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

European Commission (EC)

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), commissioned by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany (BMZ)

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

Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)

* *"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."*