

Kick-off Meeting of the Regional Expert Advisory Working Group (REAWG) on Agri-Environment Policy (AEP)



13 – 14 March 2018

Tirana, Albania

1. INTRODUCTION

In August 2017 the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development approved the realization of the project entitled “Rural development through integrated forest and water resource management in Southeast-Europe: Rural perspectives: qualification, reintegration and (self) employment”, jointly implemented by SWG and GIZ.

The project's focus is placed on institutional and individual capacities development for regional and inter- sectoral coordination processes and finding EU compliant solutions (policy, development and implementation). It operates at three levels: transnational straddling the countries/territories Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia in the Western Balkans; national and local, in cross-border pilot regions.

One of the main objectives is to create preconditions for evidence-based and EU-compliant policy design regarding environmental objectives in rural development and agriculture. Thereby, one of the tasks is to assess the agri-environment policies in the countries/territories of the SEE, and to propose policy framework for implementation of sustainable agricultural practices in line with EU policies. The Regional Expert Advisory Working Group (REAWG) on Agri-Environment Policy (AEP) is engaged to conduct that task.

The kick-off meeting of the REAWG on AEP gathered national and regional experts, as well as representatives from the rural development authorities (full list of participants in **Annex 1**). The main objective of the meeting was to define the methodology that will be used to conduct the assessment, divide roles and responsibilities, and determine the activity plan until the completion of the assignment, envisaged for the end of June (program of the meeting in **Annex 2**).

2. TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REAWG ON AEP

Mr. Boban Ilic, SWG Secretary General, presented the ToR of the REAWG on AEP. The major outputs of the assignment are:

- Regional methodology and approach for the assessment of agri-environment policies in the countries/territories of the SEE;
- Evaluation of the relevant policy frameworks in place and provision of recommendations for their improvement and alignment with EU policies;

* *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*

- Regional report on the status, gaps and constraints regarding the agri-environmental policies and the provision of recommendations for an alignment of regional / national priorities with EU policies.

REAWG on AEP is comprised of national agri-environment experts (NEs) from each of the countries/territories of the Western Balkans, with focus on 3 different fields: crop production, soil and water, and animal husbandry. Their assessment work is coordinated by a regional expert (RE) and supported by an international expert (IE). The REAWG is almost completed, with one expert still missing for Serbia, Kosovo* and Albania. The full presentation is given in **Annex 3**.

3. OVERVIEW OF THE AGRI-ENVIRONMENT POLICIES IN THE SEE

Experts from each involved country/territory gave a short overview on the agri-environment policies, as a starting point for conducting the assessment (Mr. Kristaq Kume – Albania, Mr. Mihajlo Markovic, Mr. Afrim Sharku – Kosovo*, Mr. Ordan Cukaliev – Macedonia, Ms. Bozidarka Markovic – Montenegro, Mr. Jovica Vasin – Serbia).



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The conclusion for all presenters was that agri-environment policies exist in the different countries/territories to a different extent. What is in common for all is the low level (or even absence) of implementation. The presentations given by each of the countries/territories are available in **Annex 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9**).



4. METHODOLOGY FOR ASSESSMENT OF THE AGRI-ENVIRONMENT POLICIES IN THE SEE

Professor Ordan Cukaliev, in his role of a regional expert for the assessment, presented how agriculture and environment are covered by the EU policies, which should be taken in consideration in adopting the methodology for the assessment of the policies in SEE. The methodology he proposed was comprised of desk research of already published and/or adopted



national programming and strategic documents, national reports to various convention (UNFCCC, UNLDD, UNBD), research papers, reports, studies etc. from public authorities, from academia and from international donors and organizations, relevant databases, as well as primary research conducted through interviews with relevant representatives of the ministries of agriculture, environment, other relevant governmental bodies etc. The full presentation is provided in **Annex 10**.

5. ACTIVITY PLAN FOR COMPLETION OF THE ASSIGNMENT

Ms. Dori Pavloska Gjorgjieska from the SWG Secretariat presented the draft activity plan, which was completed and confirmed by the present REAWG experts, as follows:

Activity	Timeframe/Deadline in 2018	Responsible
Development of methodology for assessment of the agri-environment policies and relevant frameworks	12 March	RE supported by IE
Participation at the Kick-off Meeting	13 – 14 March	All
Development of country assessment outline (provided to national experts)	13 – 14 March	RE supported by IE
Collecting, processing and elaborating national data/information on agri-environment policies, in line with the agreed reporting outline	31 March	NEs
Draft country assessment and recommendations for next steps	16 April	NEs
Feedback on the first draft country reports	8 May	RE supported by IE
Interim Meeting, Podgorica, Montenegro	14 - 15 May	All
Revision of the country assessment taking into consideration the comments provided by the Regional Expert	31 May	NEs
Regional synthesis report	30 June	RE supported by IE
Final Meeting, Mavrovo, Macedonia	3 – 4 July	All

Legend:

NEs – National Experts

RE – Regional Expert

IE – International Expert

In addition, one expert from each country/territory was assigned as a national contact point with the following responsibilities:

- Compile the inputs of the 3 different national experts in one national report
- Ensure uniformity of the report (in terms of formatting and content)
- Submit the national report to the regional expert within the specified deadline in the activity plan.

The list of the appointed national contact points is the following:

- Albania: Mr. Kristaq Kume
- BiH: Mr. Tihomir Predic
- Kosovo*: Mr. Afrim Sharku
- Macedonia: Mr. Ordan Cukaliev
- Montenegro: Ms. Bozidarka Markovic
- Serbia: Ms. Dragana Vidojevic

6. OUTLINE OF THE NATIONAL REPORT

In order to ensure uniformity of all national reports the Regional Expert presented a draft outline, provided in **Annex 11**. The international expert from the Environment Agency Austria (UBA), Mr. Andreas Bartel, who followed parts of the meeting via Skype, agreed to further discuss the details of the outline with the regional expert, and adjust it to its final version, which should then be distributed to the national experts.

7. GROUP DISCUSSION ON THE OUTLINE, METHODOLOGY AND WORKPLAN, PER COUNTRY/TERRITORY

The participants divided in groups per countries/territories to discuss the feasibility of completing the national report as per the provided draft outline. Very important advantage was the presence of relevant ministries' representatives in the meeting, which expressed their dedication and readiness to provide available data and information to the national experts in the process of the assessment. All of the groups concluded that Chapter 4 will be the most challenging one to complete, but with mutual cooperation, and cooperation with the relevant institutions it will be feasible to complete it.