

Speech of Minister Rumen Porodzanov

November 15, 2018

YOUR EXCELLENCIES,

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

First of all, allow me to thank our hosts for the outstanding organization of the Twelfth Annual Working Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from South Eastern Europe.

I would like to start off by reiterating how important 2018 has been for the Republic of Bulgaria. 11 (Eleven) years after joining the European Union, Bulgaria took over the Rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU on January 1 of this year. While this has been a great honor, it has also been a challenging responsibility. One of the main priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency was fostering, and to that effect, expanding cooperation with Western Balkan countries.

In March 2017, EU leaders confirmed their support for having a European perspective for the Western Balkans. The European Council welcomed the country progress in the Region.

On February 6, 2018 the European Commission adopted the Western Balkans Strategy which clearly outlines the European perspective for the Region and the reforms that have to be undertaken to strengthen the EU's support for changing the Western Balkans.

On May 17, 2018, the EU-Western Balkans Summit took place in Sofia with the sole goal of reconfirming the EU's commitment towards its partners from the Western Balkans and highlighting the region's belonging to the European family as a whole.

Values such as security, stability and solidarity have always been a priority for the Republic of Bulgaria – not only at the European level, but also globally, especially in the context of the challenges which we are all currently facing. I am convinced that identifying solutions mutually is of key importance both regionally and globally, and also individually for each country.

Agricultural and Rural development in the region of South Eastern Europe is an important priority. The region has longstanding traditions in agriculture having unique geographic and climatic conditions to ensure the future development of the sector.

The goal could be achieved through a platform for sharing experience, exchange of information and know-how in the field of agricultural and rural development policies.

The Standing Working Group on Regional Rural Development (SWG) offers this exact opportunity – to work in sync in order to achieve competitive and sustainable agriculture.

The meeting today corroborates the readiness and willingness of our countries to intensify interstate relations and to transform the already established good cooperation into concrete results. I believe that the discussion today will be converted into a forum where existing open perspectives for enhancing cooperation in the region would successfully find their way into mutually beneficial commitments.

In order to use the opportunities available to expand cooperation, it is necessary to step up the dialogue between the state institutions of our countries, to expand contacts between business representatives and to identify specific areas and projects of mutual interest.

Agriculture occupies a specific place in the socio-economic life of Bulgaria. The presence of fertile soils and very good climatic and geographic features, determines the development of the sector, including organic farming. Traditions in the production of cereals, vegetables, fruits and animal husbandry are key factors in its development.

The agrarian sector provides employment for about 7% of the population and accounts for about 5% of the total Gross Value Added (GVA) of the country. Its important role will remain in the future, especially given its importance in strengthening rural economies. Agricultural activities will remain an important source of income for a large part of the population and an interaction point between people and the environment.

Bulgarian agriculture maintains stable macro indicators - a growth in gross value added, entrepreneurial income and investment aimed at modernizing farms is observed. Trade and exports of agricultural commodities increase annually, accounting for about 13% and 15% of the total for the country.

For years the Bulgarian agrarian sector has formed a positive foreign balance of trade. This defines it as a viable industry capable of contributing to the acceleration of economic growth and the realization of significant social and economic goals.

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has become a major factor in the development of agriculture in Bulgaria since the beginning of 2007 when Bulgaria joined the European Union. European legislation and funding in the field of agriculture are important aspects of the activity of the Bulgarian agricultural producer.

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is a link between the expectations of European Union (EU) citizens about agriculture and the needs of European farmers facing a number of economic and environmental challenges. This policy is an investment of the EU in a sector that is strategic for food safety and ensuring food security, environmental protection and economic growth in rural areas.

Rural development is largely linked to cross-border cooperation and development among other countries in the Southeast European region. Bulgaria is ready to share its experience gained in the pre-accession period and to support the efforts of the countries in the region. I am convinced that the discussions at the 12th Session of Southeastern Europe Agriculture Ministers will contribute to the development of regional cooperation.

I would like to assure you that as a member of the European Union Bulgaria is a correct, reliable and predictable partner. The Bulgarian Government will support and encourage all initiatives that are in the interest of strengthening mutually beneficial cooperation between our countries.

Therefore, my desire is within this initiative to be able to draw the best of the national characteristics of our countries, which provide us with a number of opportunities for working together.

Thank you for your attention!