

**12th Annual Working Meeting of Ministries of South Eastern Europe, November 15th,
Struga, Republic of Macedonia**

Respected Deputy Prime Ministers, Ministers, Head of Delegations, Your excellences, representatives of the European Commission, representatives of the international organizations, dear Secretary General, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my immense pleasure to welcome you all on behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy and the Government of the Republic of Macedonia in the occasion of the 12th Annual Working Meeting of Ministers of Agriculture of South Eastern Europe.

I am personally delighted to see you around this table in such a big number representing your countries on the highest possible level. It is only through this manner of cooperation that we can adopt mutual policies, which will bring realistic development in agriculture, sustainable development and prosperity in the economies of our countries.

Macedonian society, in this particular time, is going through very intensive and politically tough process where we are trying to resolve all the bilateral issues with our neighbors. The ultimate aim is our process of integration in the European Union and enabling European living for our citizens. I would like to assure you that the Government of Republic of Macedonia is fully committed to fulfil all the preconditions for the start of the negotiations between the Republic of Macedonia and the European Union.

Currently, me as a Minister and the Ministry and my associates are fully devoted toward the approximation of the European Union legislation related to the negotiation's chapters eleven, twelve and thirteen. Our section, the agriculture, is especially dedicated to this topic. High 40% of the funds that are allocated by the EU from their budget, are dedicated specifically for agriculture. These funds mean modernization of the production, better conditions and better revenues for our farmers.

In parallel with the legislative changes, we implement the institutional reforms. We improve the quality of our services by strengthening of institutional capacities in all sections that are under the competence of the Ministry of Agriculture, forestry and Water Economy.

The current situation and the processes in the country are also influencing my Ministry in the related reforms in front of us. The institution I am leading is preparing itself for the moment when the negotiations with the European Union will start.

Along with the legislative reforms, we are strongly dedicated to the institutional reforms... by creating new institutions or improving the capacities of the existing institutions in all the sectors under the authority of Ministry of Agriculture.

I have to admit that these processes are neither easy nor fast. They require the full commitment of all the Ministry staff, involved and accompanied agencies and various sectors in the Ministry.

At the same time, we, as a Ministry, together with the relevant Agencies, are actively promoting the European IPARD program and we are dedicated to improving the capacities of our staff and simplification of the administrative procedures. Our ultimate aim is to increase the utilization of these funds, which represent an enormous support for the Macedonian farmers. The efficient

utilization of the European funds would mean modern and developing agriculture that is going to be positioned hand in hand with the European agriculture.

Please allow me to inform you that only for the first call for the IPARD 2 Program, we have already signed 940 contract in the total value of 17,6 million Euro, of which 13,3 million Euro are European funds; the remaining amount is paid from the National co-financing. This amount is higher than the total paid amount for the overall program period of IPARD 1, the amount of which was 16,5 million Euro. This tempo shows that the policies that have been undertaken from our side in the part of the efficient utilization of the European funds are showing results in the direction of increase of the interest of our farmers for European funds.

With the promotion of the Euro-integration processes, the intensification of the mutual cooperation and the policies undertaken by our Government, the support from the European Union will continue to grow. Besides the financial support, our European partners offer the experience, new markets and mechanisms for establishment of a modern agriculture, competitive and recognizable products.

In relation to the regional cooperation, I would like to underline my satisfaction for the work done within our common organization, which is coordinating the regional cooperation within the Agriculture and Rural Development. The work done under the umbrella of SWG has shown that all the Ministries from the Western Balkan Countries are aware of the policy cycle requirements. This is evident from all the analytical work and studies carried out and coordinated by SWG such as Areas with Natural Constrains, Natural Resource Management and application of LEADER policy within our countries. The common denominator of all the discussions within the regional expert advisory working groups was the recognition of importance of analytical support for agricultural policy decision making and evidence-based policy.

As a country that strives to reach the foreseen outcome of the EU integration process and to efficient and evidence based agricultural policy, improvements on the organizational and operational base are more than necessary. For my country, which is preparing for the upcoming negotiation process, this joint regional analytical work is of the utmost importance.

Considering the policy topics elaborated in Agricultural Policy Forum in Jahorina a month ago, I would like to stress that recommendations related to the policy measures to enhance competitiveness of small farmers and rural business, along with the agro-environmental policy and, consequently, agrobiodiversity policy subjects, are the policy issues that our government will pursue in the upcoming period.

Therefore, my personal opinion is that all the work done in the application of area-based development, regional analytical work and other achievements and results of the work of SWG in the regional framework in my judgment are overall success of its operations.

As a country that hosts Head Quarter SWG I am grateful that we have a privilege to host this important regional initiative.

I use this opportunity to invite the European Commission, EU member states and international organizations, to further support technically and financially the regional cooperation in the sector of Agriculture and Rural Development

I am also inviting you to support the initiative presented today for trade facilitation and fast green lines at the borders for the agro-food products in South Eastern European countries.

In closing, once again I would like to thank Bosnia and Herzegovina for their successful presidency with SWG Assembly. The initiatives and recommendations that are going to be presented today, will have full attention under the Macedonian Presidency.

Dear colleagues, Ladies and Gentleman's, thank you very much for your attention.

As a chairman, I would like to personally encourage you to take active participation during the today's discussions and to openly present your positions in your plenary addresses, the proposed initiatives, as well as the assessment of our regional cooperation in our section until today's date. We will be able to build more stable partnerships and closer cooperation only through a mutual and open debate. In that manner we will contribute to development of the agriculture in the region, economy prosperity for each of our countries and better life of our citizens.

Thank you!