



## Report

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

**Date:** 09<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> September, 2015  
**Location:** Milocer, Montenegro  
**Organizer:** SWG Head Office/Secretariat

**Report Prepared by:** SWG Head Office/Secretariat



September 2015

## **I. Purpose of the session:**

The 33<sup>rd</sup> session of the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in SEE was held in the period 09<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2015 in Milocer, Montenegro.

The aim of the session was to discuss and update on the realized activities in the period May – September, the upcoming SWG activities for the year 2015, planning of major up-coming activities as well as to decide on future initiatives, projects and cooperation with SWG partner organizations and institutions.

All SWG delegates from the nine SWG member institutions, and the seven SWG observer institutions were officially invited to participate on the 33<sup>rd</sup> SWG session.

Representatives of eight out of nine SWG member institutions, participated on the session, discussed, gave recommendations and have taken the decisions listed below.

Representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Hungary as well as representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture from Croatia participated on the session as observers.

Representatives from the SWG partner institutions and international organizations i.e. Delegation of European Union in Montenegro and German International Cooperation (GIZ) also participated on the session.

## **II. MINUTES OF THE SESSION:**

### **SWG Delegates/ Ministry representatives present from:**

- Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration – Republic of Albania (Mr. Grigor Gjeci);
- Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations - Bosnia and Herzegovina (Mr. Dusan Neskovic, Mr. Hamdija Civic);
- Ministry Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management – Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Hercegovina (Mr. Marko Srdic, Mr. Ostoja Sinik);
- Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Republic of Bulgaria (Mr. Vassil Groudev, Ms. Bozhura Fidanska, Ms. Petya Steliyanova, Ms. Plamena Grozeva)
- Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development – Kosovo\* (Mr. Bekim Hoxha);
- Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy – Republic of Macedonia (Mr. Gjorgji Bozinov; Mr. Ljubo Penov);
- Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development – Montenegro (Mr. Darko Konjevic; Mr. Blagota Radulovic);
- Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection – Republic of Serbia (Mr. Aleksandar Bogunovic);

### **Ministry representatives of the SWG observer institutions present from:**

- Ministry of Agriculture – Croatia (Ms. Davorka Hajdukovic, Ms. Nada Trgovcevic-Letica)
- Ministry of Agriculture - Hungary (Mr. Balint Illes).

### **Other representatives present at the session were:**

- Delegation of European Union in Montenegro (Mr. Benoit Esmanne)
- German International Cooperation GIZ (Mr. Benjamin Mohr);
- KFM Consulting (Mr. Kaj Mortensen)

*List of Participants from the meeting - Annex I.*

**III. Topics discussed at the 33<sup>rd</sup> SWG Assembly Session:**

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

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

- Realized activities in the period May – September 2015;
- Planning of major up-coming activities: Agricultural Policy Forum 2015, Annual Meeting of the Ministers from SEE 2015 and 34<sup>th</sup> SWG Assembly Session;
- Up-date on the cooperation with other international organizations and institutions;
- Discussions on the ongoing and upcoming SWG activities for the year 2015/updates based on the Operational Plan;

**II. Internal Session of the SWG Assembly**

- Update on developments of agriculture and RD in the SWG member countries;
- Discussions on the SWG Membership and SWG Financial Planning for 2016;
- Discussion on SWG Strategic approach for the period 2016-2020;
- Discussion and decision about the secondment procedure of expert in SWG;
- Up-date on the process of accreditation of the SWG in the WB countries;
- Discussion and planning regarding the Forestry and Water Management Project with GIZ;

*Meeting programme is presented in Annex II.*

**DISCUSSIONS:**

On behalf of the Presidency of the SWG Assembly - Ministry of Agriculture and Food of Bulgaria Mr. Vassil Groudev opened and moderated the 33<sup>rd</sup> SWG Assembly Session.

The SWG Assembly, assembled on the 33<sup>rd</sup> SWG Session had qualified quorum.

*\*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.*

### **III.1 SWG Session (Open Meeting)**

The 33rd SWG Assembly Session begun as an open meeting. SWG observers and partner organizations/institutions participated at the meeting.

Topics discussed, conclusions and decisions are presented below.

#### **III.1.1 Brief outline on the realized activities within the SWG in the period May - September 2015**

The SWG Secretary General, Mr. Boban Ilic presented the executed activities in the period May - September 2015 based on the set operational plan of the SWG RRD.

Based on the agreed and adopted operational plan for 2015 by the SWG Assembly all of the activities have been executed by the SWG Secretariat. Set activities have been elaborated and postponed with agreement of the SWG Assembly.

*The activities executed in the period May - September 2015 based on the operational plan for 2015 can be found as Annex III.*

#### **III.1.2 Planning of major up-coming activities: Agricultural Policy Forum 2015, Annual Meeting of the Ministers from SEE 2015 and 34<sup>th</sup> SWG Assembly Session 2015**

The SWG Secretary General presented the content and the topics to be discussed at the Agricultural Policy Forum 2015 and 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Working Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from SEE to the SWG Assembly:

- **Agricultural Policy Forum 2015 (APF)**
  - The APF 2015 will be held in the period 13<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> October 2015 in Pravetz, Bulgaria
  - During the Assembly Session the Delegates discussed the content of the Forum. The concept for the Forum has been agreed and approved.
  - There will be three thematic Working Groups:
    - a) Integrated economic development in rural cross-border areas;
    - b) Rural development via Natural resource management;
    - c) Analysis of agriculture and rural development policies in Western Balkans;

Invitations for APF 2015 have been sent by the SWG Head Office/Secretariat.

Deadline for submission of the applications - September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

SWG Delegates should ensure the participation of the respective representatives from the Ministries which are going to attend the thematic working groups.

*APF programme is presented in Annex IV.*

- **9<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from SEE**
  - 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Ministers from SEE will be held in the period 11<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> November 2015 in Tirana, Albania.
  - Official Invitations for the meeting sent by Ministry of Agriculture of Albania;
  - Topics to be covered:

- a) EU approximation of the candidate and potential candidate countries from SEE in agriculture and rural development;
- b) Regional Cooperation and way forward in the region;
- c) Possibility for establishment of Technical Working Group within the SWG related to agri-business, food trade in cooperation with CEFTA and Regional Cooperation Council;
- d) Results and the Agenda from the Agricultural Policy Forum 2015.

Deadline for confirmation of attendance – October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015. SWG delegates need to ensure the participation of the Ministers at this important gathering in order to discuss the future steps on regional cooperation and EU integration in the SEE region.

- **34<sup>th</sup> SWG Annual Assembly Session**

It has been discussed and agreed that the 34<sup>th</sup> SWG Assembly Session will be held in Bari, Italy. CIHEAM Institute in Bari will host the 34<sup>th</sup> SWG Assembly in the period 2<sup>nd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> December 2015. Invitations to the SWG Delegates will be sent in the course of October.

### **III.1.3. Up-date on the cooperation with European Commission**

Ms. Irena Dzimrevska presented the new phase of ABDA Project: “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” which started as of 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 2015.

Focus of the Project on: fostering regional cooperation among institutions and stakeholders in the agriculture and food sector, as well as to facilitation of the process of balanced territorial development (CBC) of the Western Balkan countries in the progression towards EU integration.

*Time-frame for implementation of the Project is: June 2015 - May 2017.*

Related to the activities and analysis of agriculture and RD policies, Ms. Dzimrevska presented the process and the achievements in respect to the EU funded project: "Analysis of the agricultural and rural development policies in Western Balkan countries" funded by EU JRC IPTS.

Focus of the Project on: up to date analysis of the characteristics of the agriculture policy instruments applied in Western Balkan (WB) countries and highlight the possible effects of agriculture and rural development policies harmonization of the WB countries with the CAP 2014-2020 on food and farming sector in the rural areas.

*Time-frame for implementation of the project is: January 2015 - October 2015.*

Ms. Dzimrevska informed the SWG Assembly that SWG is in a process of negotiation for EU funded project: “National policy instruments and EU approximation process: Effects on farm holdings in the Western Balkan countries”. Tender procedure has been opened by JRC Institute and proposal has been prepared based on tender specification. SWG Secretariat will be part of consortium with LEI Wageningen and responsible for implementation of the project.

Focus of the Project on: monitoring and collection of information on agricultural policy developments in the WB countries, as well as exploring the application of appropriate analytical tools for different farm types according to their importance on national agriculture and data availability in particular WB countries. It is proposed the possible start of project to be March 2016.

*Time-frame for implementation of the Project: 20 months.*

In respect to the Cooperation with DG NEAR – TAIEX Unit, the status of the approved applications, as well as applications to be submitted and proposed topics for further organization of TAIEX multi-country events have been also presented. Regarding the application on Organic Agriculture Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture expressed the interest to mobilizing an expert and assisting in drafting the application. Representatives of Macedonian Ministry of Agriculture expressed the readiness to assist in respect to the issue on definition of areas with natural constraints.

Representatives of the Hungarian, Croatian and Bulgarian Ministries of Agriculture expressed readiness and interest to provide a list of experts which could be engaged within the SWG activities as an EU Experts.

*Details regarding cooperation with EC can be found in Annex V, Annex VI and Annex VII and Annex VIII.*

### **III.1.4 Discussions and update on the cooperation with GIZ**

Ms. Katerina Spasovska and Ms. Bogdanka Gjorshoska presented the current projects being implemented in cooperation with SWG and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ) and the follow up for the 2015.

- *Project on Solid Waste Management in cross-border rural areas of South Eastern European region*

Focuses on two designated pilot cross-border areas, "Sharra mountain" covering rural municipalities among Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo\* and the cross-border regions across the Drina delta ("Drina-Sava" cross-border region among Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia and "Drina-Tara" cross-border region among Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia).

Grant Agreement for implementation of the Project has been signed by SWG and GIZ in June 2015. Information and presentation of the Project on Solid Waste Management to the stakeholders in the pilot areas has been presented in the course of June 2015. Kick-off meeting between the stakeholders and project partners has been held in the period 24<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> of August in Shkoder, Albania. During the meeting project aim, roles and responsibilities of each team, activities, foreseen outcomes and financial management have been introduced to the stakeholders and project partners. Furthermore, the SWG delegates were requested to be involved in the selection of focus points/representatives from the Ministries of Environment.

Time-frame for implementation of the project is: June 2015 – June 2016

*Details regarding the Project can be found in Annex IX.*

- *Rural Development through Management of Water and Forest Resource Management in South East Europe*

SWG is currently in negotiation with GIZ for development and implementation of project on: "Rural Development through Management of Water and Forest Resource Management in South East Europe". The project focuses on improvement of the regional capacities for sustainable management of forest and water resources within the framework of developing rural areas. The orientation phase for the project implementation should last (4 months) until January 2016. It is expected the implementation of the project activities to start as of January 2016.

Discussions and details regarding the proposal made on the program for water and forest management in SEE region were held during the closed SWG Assembly Session.

Time-frame for implementation of the project is: 2 Years.

*Details regarding the Project can be found in Annex X.*

- *Support of core functions of SWG Secretariat*

The implementation of the currently running project on "Support to the core functions of the SWG - Networking and Dialogue" are in line with the foreseen operational framework and indicators. The outcomes of the implemented activities have been presented as well as the activities planned to be executed in the forthcoming period by the end of Year 2015.

*More details can be found in Annex XI.*

### **III.1.5 Discussions on the up-dates on SWG Operational Plan 2015**

The SWG operational plan for 2015 was also open for discussion. The operational plan set for the year of 2015 contained activities related to the SWG core functions and projects implemented in cooperation with GIZ, EC and other partner organizations.

Within the planned actions the SWG Assembly has agreed that the meeting of the Expert Advisory Working Group on Managing Authorities and Paying Agencies to be done the date after the Annual Ministers Meeting on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November 2013 in Tirana, Albania, taking into account that it is a technical meeting and to ensure the participation of the WB countries. This issue should be communicated by the SWG Head Office/Secretariat with the European Commission first in order to ensure their availability for the planned meeting.

Following the general conclusions of the Expert Advisory Working Group on Wine the planning of the next meeting of the EAG on Wine was also discussed. It has been agreed the meeting to be organized first or second week of December 2015 either in Kosovo\* or Macedonia. This subject matter is to be put on the agenda for the Ministers Meeting 2015.

Further topic for discussion in respect to future activities was related to Areas with Natural Constraints (ANC) i.e. Less Favored Areas (LFA) mapping and analysis. SWG Secretary General informed the SWG Assembly for the preliminary discussions with JRC Institute Ispra and CIHEAM Institute in June 2015. The idea was elaborated in line with setting up the appropriate national legislation related to the mapping of ANC in accordance with the EU legislation.

First meeting of the involved institutions/organizations for preparation of a regional project proposal will be held as a side event during the Agricultural Policy Forum 2015 in the period 13<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> of October 2015 in Bulgaria.

*More details can be found in Annex XII*

Additional proposition on behalf of the SWG Secretariat in respect to the discussions for deepening the cooperation among the SEE countries and the Irish Ministry of Agriculture was the initiation of actions related to Food Safety and Rural Development. Namely, SWG Secretary General, Mr. Boban Ilic, discussed with the Irish Minister of Agriculture, H.E. Simon Coveney the idea for establishing a technical working groups with the key people from the Veterinary and Phitosanitary Sector and Rural Development Sector from Western Balkan Countries and use the Irish experience where the sustainable food system will be elaborate in order to build the connection with the EU food safety.

It is foreseen representation on behalf of SWG members to be on a higher executive/ decision making level i.e. 1 SWG member for Rural Development and 1 SWG member for Food Safety (Deputy Ministers, State Secretary, Directors of Directorates/Agencies, Chief of Departments etc.) In this regards the representatives from the above mentioned institutions will have the opportunity to learn from the Irish experience and structures with a specific focus to enhance the development of competitive and economically sustainable agricultural sectors in the region. As discussed with the Irish Ministry, technical working group meetings have to be organized in November 16<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> in Dublin, Ireland.

### **III.1.6 Discussion and planning regarding the Forestry and Water Management Project with GIZ**

Mr. Benjamin Mohr from GIZ has presented the initiated Program on Rural Development via Integrated Water and Forest Management in SEE. The presentation focused on the main objectives and outputs foreseen within the project. Mr. Mohr presented the planned actions and outputs to be taken in the given inception phase of 4 - 5 months. Short overview was done on the activities as planned during the appraisal mission in October 2014 and means of involving the local and regional actions under the same umbrella.

After the presentation, the SWG Assembly discussed the partnership relationship between the SWG and GIZ and the implementing agreement among the two parties. The Assembly raised question in respect to the activities and pilot measure to be taken in respect to the financial means foreseen for the project. The discussion lead towards the need for additional clarifications prior to the beginning of the inception phase between the two implementing parties, SWG and GIZ. The Assembly gave the mandate to the Secretary General to continue the discussion and negotiation with GIZ on behalf of the Ministries. SWG Delegates will be informed accordingly regarding the output of the meetings with GIZ.

*More details can be found in Annex XIII.*



## Conclusions/Decisions Made:

- Agricultural Policy Forum 2015 to be held in the period 13<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> October in Pravetz, Bulgaria. The concept for the Forum has been agreed and approved by the SWG Assembly;
- 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from SEE countries will be held in the period 11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> November in Tirana, Albania. Official Invitations for the meeting sent by Ministry of Agriculture of Albania. SWG delegates need to ensure the participation of the Ministers at this gathering;
- The 34<sup>th</sup> SWG Assembly Session to be held in Bari, Italy in the period 2<sup>nd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> December 2015;
- Hungarian, Croatian and Bulgarian Ministries to provide a list of experts which could be engaged within the SWG activities as an EU Experts;
- TAIEX - Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture expressed interest to assist in drafting the application on Organic Agriculture. Representatives of Macedonian Ministry of Agriculture expressed the readiness to assist in respect to the application on definition of areas with natural constraints;
- Expert Advisory Working Group on Managing Authorities and Paying Agencies meeting to be done the date after the Annual Ministers Meeting on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November 2013 in Tirana, Albania
- The Meeting of the Expert Advisory Working Group on Wine to be organized first or second week of December 2015 either in Kosovo\* or Macedonia.
- First meeting of the involved institutions/organizations for preparation of a regional project proposal related to Areas with Natural Constraints (ANC) to be held as a side event during the Agricultural Policy Forum 2015 in the period 13<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> of October 2015 in Bulgaria.
- Technical Working Group Meetings on Food Safety and Rural Development have to be organized in November 16<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> in Dublin, Ireland.
- The SWG Delegates feedback related development of the SWG Strategic and Operational Plan for the period 2016-2020 expected by September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015. Draft document for review and comments will be shared with SWG Delegates before the 34<sup>th</sup> SWG Assembly Session;
- The Decision for National Seconded Experts to the SWG Head Office/Secretariat have been adopted by the SWG Assembly;
- The upcoming activities via the SWG Operational Plan for 2015 have been discussed, update and agreed upon;