



Report

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

Date: 12th - 13th April, 2016
Location: Ohrid, Macedonia
Organizer: SWG Head Office/Secretariat

Report Prepared by: SWG Head Office/Secretariat

April 2016

I. Purpose of the session:

The 35th session of the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in SEE was held in the period 12th -13th April 2016 in Ohrid, Macedonia.

The aim of the session was to discuss the retrospective of the accomplishments in the period December 2015 – April 2016, planning of the SWG upcoming major events for 2016 as per the operational plan, cooperation with SWG partner organizations and institutions. For the closed session the Assembly discuss regarding the SWG internal operational structures.

All SWG delegates from the nine SWG member institutions, and the seven SWG observer institutions were officially invited to participate on the 35th SWG session.

Representatives from seven 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 of Croatia, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Hungary and Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food of Slovenia participated on the session as observers.

Representatives from the SWG partner institutions and international organizations – 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 Gjerci; Mr. Teuta Topa and Ms. Etleva Husi);
- Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations - Bosnia and Herzegovina (Mr. Jakub Butkovic);
- Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Mr. Marko Srdic and Mr. Ostoja Sinik);
- Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development – Kosovo* (Mr. Bekim Hoxha);
- Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy – Republic of Macedonia (Mr. Gorgi Bozinov);
- Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development – Montenegro (Mr. Darko Konjevic; Mr. Enis Gjokaj)
- Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection – Republic of Serbia (Mr. Aleksandar Bogunovic);

Ministry representatives of the SWG observer institutions present from:

- Ministry of Agriculture - Republic of Croatia (Mr. Mario Njavro, Ms. Nada Trgovcevic-Letica);
- Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development - Hungary (Mr. Balint Illes)
- Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food – Republic of Slovenia (Ms. Brina Bitenc Korinsek)

Other representatives present at the session were:

- German International Cooperation GIZ (Mr. Benjamin Mohr, Ms. Ljupka Polizovski, Ms. Elena Gavrilova; Ms. Henriette Hanf);

List of Participants from the meeting - Annex I.

III. Topics discussed at the 35th SWG Session:

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

I. Internal Session of the SWG Assembly

- Retrospective of the accomplishment in the period December 2015 – April 2016;
- Discussion and planning of the SWG major features related to the Operational Plan 2016;
- Discussion on the future functioning of the SWG Operational structures;
- Discussion and decisions on the SWG Financial Planning;
- Discussion and decision on the internal topics.

II. SWG Session with participation of SWG partner institutions and organizations

- Elaboration and discussions on the cooperation with partner organizations (GIZ, EC, JRC, RCC).
- Discussion related to the project proposal “Areas With Natural Constrains in the Balkans”

Meeting programme is presented in Annex II.

DISCUSSIONS:

Mr. Boban Ilic, SWG Secretary General welcomed the participants and opened the 35th SWG Assembly Session.

On behalf of the Presidency of the SWG Assembly – Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and Water Administration, Mr. Grigor Gjerci, President of the SWG Assembly moderated the 35th SWG Assembly Session.

The Assembly Session provided a qualified quorum with participation of the majority member institutions with voting right. All the decisions on the 35th SWG Assembly Session were reached with a consensus and are qualified decisions of the SWG Assembly.

III.1 Closed SWG Assembly Session

The 35th SWG Assembly Session begun as a closed meeting.

Topics discussed, conclusions and decisions are presented below.

III.1.1 Review of realized activities within the SWG in the period December 2015 – April 2016

The SWG Secretary General and the staff of the SWG Head Office/Secretariat presented the executed activities according to the operational plan set for the year of 2015 and 2016 which contained activities related to the SWG core functions and projects implemented in cooperation with GIZ, EC and other partner organizations.

Based on the agreed and adopted operational plan for 2016 by the SWG Assembly all of the activities have been executed in the reporting period by the SWG Secretariat.

In regards to the cooperation with GIZ and project on Solid Waste Management, Ms. Spasovska gave a short overview on the realized activities in the past period and the actions needs to be taken in the future ahead. The Integrated Solid Waste Management (ISWM) model have been presented and the issues related to practical implementation of the model such as pilot measures taken in the forthcoming period and proposed regional marine litter monitoring method in order the ISWM model to make happen. Based on the developed models for integrated solid waste management in all three regions (mountain, river banks and sea coast), measures and regional policy recommendations have been developed at the joint workshop organized by SWG and NALAS with participation of the stakeholder groups from the three pilot regions. The proposed regional policy recommendations have been presented at the SWG Assembly Session, discussed and agreed upon among the Assembly.

More details could be find in Annex III and Annex IV.

Further, with reference to the realized activities within the LEIWW Project, Ms. Gjorshoska presented the actions taken in the reporting period. Within the performed actions the Regional Expert Advisory Working Group on Wine as of last meeting held in December 2015 has good response. Wine sector and institutions responsible for wine and viticulture resources with other relevant sectors should be strengthened on national and regional level which is a significant point in respect to the networking and cooperation with aim to be recognized on the way to EU and therefore the next meeting of the REAWG on Wine was also discussed and planned for May 2016.

The SWG had the opportunity this year again to showcase its activities in the agricultural sector on the world's biggest fair for food, agriculture and horticulture – the International Green Week Berlin (IGW). As a side event in the context of the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture (GFFA) the Roundtable on Agriculture and Rural Development in the Western Balkans and Turkey initiated by the SWG in a cooperation with DG for Agriculture and Rural Development and Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture of Germany. The Roundtable took place in January in Berlin, Germany and was chaired on behalf of H.E. Christian Schmidt. Ministers of Agriculture from the SWG member institutions had the opportunity to discuss the regional cooperation on agriculture and rural development in the Western Balkans and the key issues in respect to the exchange of experiences in cross-border context between the WB countries and with EU.

Further topic for discussion was related to Areas with Natural Constraints (ANC). The kick off meeting of the REAWG working on ANC was held in March in Skopje, Macedonia organized by the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in South Eastern Europe and German International Cooperation (GIZ). The aim of the meeting was to explore the possibilities for future regional dialogue and cooperation in SEE and setting up the structure and technical

framework of the Regional Expert Advisory Group on developing the ANC in the future ahead. The main outcome is conducting a study and providing policy recommendations on characterization and mapping of areas with natural constraints in the Western Balkan countries compatible with the EU methodology and standards based on the assessment on the areas with natural and specific constraints in agriculture in the Western Balkans.

Main features related the new project “Strengthening regional capacities for rural development through integrated forest and water resources management in Southeast Europe (LEIWW)” have been also presented. The Grant agreement has been signed between SWG and GIZ in March 2016 with duration as of February 2016 – December 2017.

More details could be find in Annex V.

In respect to the Cooperation with DG NEAR – TAIEX Unit, organization of TAIEX multi-country events has been stopped and respectively the realization of approved applications were delayed by the EC due to the administrative procedures. 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 discussed. Applications for TAIEX multi-country workshops: Producer Groups – legal framework, structure, roles and establishment and improvement of national registration systems in Balkan countries with focus on fruit and grape varieties and aligning with EU marketing requirements are approved and its realization will be in 2016. The application for multi-country study tour on Wine particularly related to PDO, PGI was refused by TAIEX with explanation that the WB countries are on different stages related to this issue. Applications for proposed multi-country workshops related to organic agriculture and definition of areas with natural constraint should be further developed.

More details in Annex VI.

Mr. Surlevski presented the process and the achievements and results in respect to the Area Based Development program through the project on "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".

Facilitation of the economic development in the targeted cross-border regions through continuous dialogue, support and cooperation among the stakeholders through SHG meetings and different actions such as P2P events contribute to the promotion of the cross border regions and provide an excellent exercise model for creation of sustainable partnership for other open calls in the cross-border regions. In the reporting period preparation of the baseline analysis and strategic planning in three additional cross-border regions have been developed and the 1st SHG meetings in “Pcinja”, Prokletije - Bjeshkët e Nemuna” and “Neretva” cross-border regions have been organized.

Details regarding cooperation with EC and the project on "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" can be found in Annex VII.

III.1.2 Discussions and planning of the major upcoming SWG activities for Year 2016

➤ Agricultural Policy Forum 2016

- The APF 2016 will be held in the period 11th - 14th October 2016 in Albania. The SWG Secretariat in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture of Albania will determine the location of the Forum (Durrës or Tirana).

- During the Assembly Session the delegates discussed the content of the Forum. Possible topics for discussion were presented and discussed among the SWG Assembly. Besides the presented topics it was also discussed the support for implementation of IPARD specially for the stakeholders and banking sector in sense of support to the beneficiaries, development of mountain areas and milk quotes as a measure needed to intervene in the agriculture was agreed by the Assembly to be considered for the APF Agenda.
- The concept for the Forum has been agreed among the present participants.
- Announcements and Invitations to be send by the SWG Head Office/Secretariat in May 2016.

➤ *10th Annual Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture*

- 10th Annual meeting of the Ministers will be held on 25th November 2016 in Montenegro. The Ministry of Agriculture from Montenegro will determine the location and the venue of the meeting (Podgorica or Budva).
- Announcements for the meeting to be send by end of June 2016 and official invitations by September 2016 by the Ministry of Agriculture of Montenegro.
- Possible topics for discussion during the Ministers meeting were proposed on behalf of Montenegrin Ministry by Mr. Konjevic:
 - Negotiation process of the acquis in all three Chapters (Chapter 11, Chapter 12 and Chapter 13)
 - Regional Cooperation in respect to the market of region and products
 - Free Trade Agreements and barriers with CEFTA
 - The usage of EU Funds
 - Areas with Natural Constraints
 - Traditional organic products
 - Mountain agriculture
 - Agro tourism
 - Cultural Heritage
 - Rural tourism

The recommended topics will be open for discussion during the Annual Ministers Meeting in Montenegro.

More details in Annex VIII.

III.2 SWG Session (Open Meeting)

III.2.1 Discussions on the cooperation with European Commission

Mr. Surlevski presented the future activities within the project in respect to the Area Based Development program through the project on "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*". Mainly the focus will be on organization of the meetings on the stakeholder groups in all four cross border regions, P2P actions, and capacity building trainings for the stakeholders and continuous support to preparation of project proposals in open calls in framework of IPA CBC, as well other calls. Preparations for the Second ABDA Grant Scheme within LEIWW Programme is ongoing and opening of the first call is planned in the course of May 2016. Finalization of the baseline analyses for the additional regions is foreseen latest September 2016.

More details in Annex IX.

In respect to the EU funded project: “National policy instruments and EU approximation process: Effects on farm holdings in the Western Balkan countries”, Mr. Ilic presented the overall context of the study and detailed working plan. The overall objective of the project is to strengthen cooperation among research community and administrations in the WB in order to create an effective and scientifically sound support to policy decision-making. Focus of the Project is 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. First interim meeting is scheduled for April 2016.

More details in Annex X.

III.2.2 Discussions on the cooperation with GIZ

Mr. Benjamin Mohr, Team Leader of the Programm for Rural Development through Integrated Forest and Water Resources Management in Southeast Europe (LEIWW) provided short update of the Programme LEIWW. The Programme is commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and is a joint programme between SWG and GIZ with objective and interventions commonly developed. The programme have been commissioned with a duration of 3 years and contribution of SWG and GIZ.

The presentation focused on the main objectives and outputs foreseen within the project. Mr. Mohr presented the implementation models and main results, outputs and actions planned to be taken during the programme implementation.

It was announced that extension of the LEIWW project is planned but still need to be elaborated and commissioned in the future.

One of the main objectives of the LEIWW programme is to create preconditions for evidence-based and EU-compliant policy design regarding environmental objectives in rural development and agriculture. In line with this objective, development of evidence-based policy assessments and gap analysis is supported in order to provide policy recommendations in respect to rural development including areas with natural constraints and sustainable management of natural resources in SEE. On behalf of GIZ international support will be provided and process of contacting of the National and International experts is in a finalizing procedure. GIZ took over the organizational aspect for the upcoming activities in the future period.

More details in Annex XI.

With regards to the GIZ and project on Solid Waste Management, Ms. Gjorshoska gave a short overview on the planned activities in the future period. Organization of the pilot measures in the pilot regions is ongoing and cleaning actions in the designated hot spot areas will be organized in the course of April. In the frame of the project the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina in cooperation with the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group(SWG) in South Eastern Europe (SEE) is initiating a Trilateral Meeting of the Ministers responsible for Environmental Protection from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro which is to be held on 31st of May in Visegrad, Bosnia and Hercegovina where discussion on waste management problems in the Drina cross-border area and formation of possible Intergovernmental Coordinative Body (Drina Commission) will be discussed. Final project conference will be organized jointly by SWG and NALAS where the final results and achieved impacts of the project will be presented in front of the stakeholders from the SEE countries. The final conference is planned to be held in the period 6th – 7th June in Macedonia.

More details in Annex XII.

Conclusions/Decisions Made:

- The third meeting of the Regional Expert Advisory Working Group on Wine has been discussed and agreed to be held in May 2016;
- The proposed regional policy recommendations in regards to the Solid Waste Management Project have been presented at the SWG Assembly Session, discussed and agreed upon among the Assembly;
- Invitations for the 36th SWG Assembly session to be send in the course of June 2016, location and venue – TBD;
- Agricultural Policy Forum 2016 to be held in Albania in the period 11th - 14th October 2016. The SWG Secretariat in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture of Albania will determine the location of the Forum (Durrës or Tirana). Invitations to be send by end of June 2016;
- 10th Annual Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from SEE countries will be held in Montenegro on 25th of November 2016. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Montenegro should decide on the venue and location of the meeting. Announcements for the meeting to be send by end of June 2016;
- Details regarding the cooperation among SWG with EC, JRC and GIZ were presented and discussed;