South Eastern Europe

SWG RRD

Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group

2015

ANNUAL REPORT

The Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG)
in South-East Europe

2015
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December 2015

Report prepared by:
SWG Head Office/Secretariat
Goce Delcev 18, Macedonian Television Building Floor 12,
1000 Skopje, Macedonia
www.seerural.org
E-mail: swgsecretariat@swg-seerural.org

LIST OF **ABBREVIATAIONS**

ABD	Area Based Development
APF	Agriculture Policy Forum
AL	Albania
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BRDN	Balkan Rural Development Network
CAP	Common Agriculture Policy of the European Union
CIHEAM	International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies
HR	Croatia
DG AGRI	Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Commission
EC	European Commission
EEA	European Environmental Agency
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GIZ	German International Cooperation
GFFA	Global Forum for Food and Agriculture
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
IPARD	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance for Rural Development
KOS	Kosovo*
NALAS	Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South East Europe
NGO	Non Governmental Organizations
NRDN	National Rural Development Networks
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MK	Macedonia
MNE	Montenegro
PIU	Project Implementation Unit
PMU	Project Management Unit
SEE	South Eastern Europe
SWG	Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group in South East Europe
SEE	South Eastern Europe
SRB	Serbia
WB	Western Balkans

* "*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.*"

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The Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group

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forward

Exactly ten years ago, the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in South East Europe was created by a group of highly motivated enthusiasts supported by policy wisdom from that generation. Formerly, it was perfectly understood for the need of regional cooperation and integration into the changing world. A vision was to have a region which is stable, integrated with the European Union (EU), and agricultural sector fit to meet the challenges of the expanding international and regional markets with sustainably developed rural areas. Everybody was aware that agriculture and rural areas in the SEE region are faced with set of objectives and challenges, some unique from country to country and some of a common nature, but also some largely unpredictable as of today's point of view. The devotees who supported the creation of this regional initiative, considered that the establishment of rational and practical methods of cooperation will increase regional understanding and ownership, which will lead towards overall and long-lasting development of the region.

Presently on the regional scene, the important matter is aligning agricultural policies with the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to facilitate later accession to the EU. Such forward thinking is necessary, and is of a useful character to assist the SEE countries to better respond to market signals, integrate our agriculture within expanding international & regional markets and radically improve the efficiency of the provided policy support. Addressing compliance with EU food safety standards before accession is also necessary, with regulations and institutions suited to the region's governance conditions. Among the above matters, climate change will have a significant impact on agriculture, with an understanding of its effects and potential mitigation and adaptation strategies being increasingly important.
We are all aware that agriculture is important in the SEE region

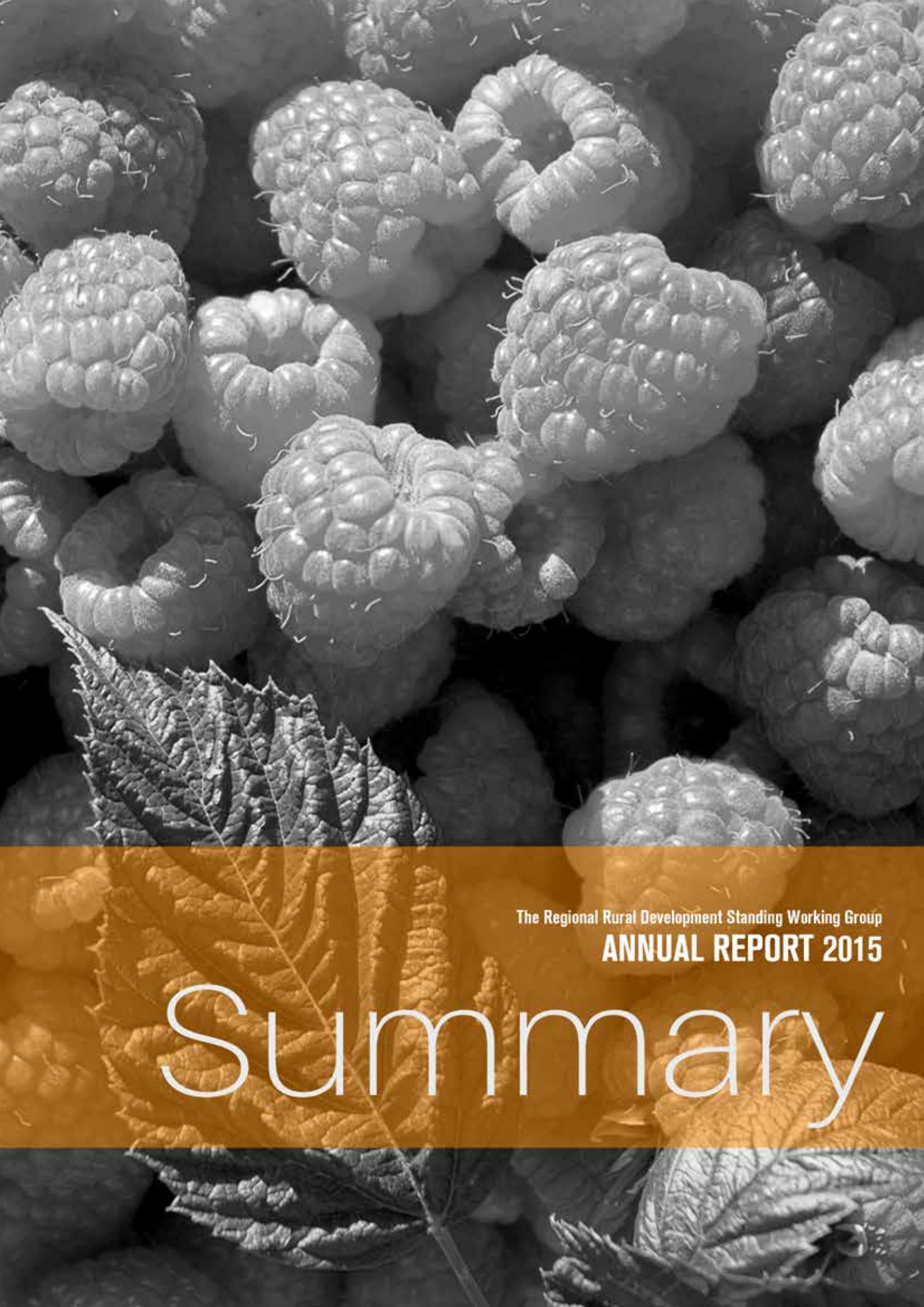
and will remain so, yet the matter is in what form. For a few decades, agriculture has contributed to the economy and supported incomes in poor rural areas. Today, as countries move toward EU membership, the agricultural sector is of a need to transfer from being a source for income support to a dynamic source of economic growth. It is essential to understand and recognize the shifting nature of the agricultural sector and it's evolving. It is our job to follow the current state of play and support our countries in encouraging nonfarm income opportunities by promoting diversified and knowledge-based rural economies. As such, facilitating rural development and natural resource management is important to strengthen the non-agricultural growth in the rural areas. Important factors determining success include a cross-border development approach that empowers regional and local authorities, rural communities, and the private sector to jointly define and leverage their economic potential. This methodology helps to adequately identify local potential and needs and ensures that local players take full ownership of activities. Actively involving regional and local authorities and rural communities has been key to the effectiveness of EU rural development interventions.

One of the key elements in measuring how effective we are at achieving cooperation relates to the process of how we go about setting priorities for development. This refers to all levels: locally, nationally, and both regionally and internationally. With resources available to us, the process through which development priorities are established must necessarily be demanding and easily robust from technical and economic, as well as political perspectives. As such, our governments and institutions involved in agriculture and rural development initiatives are being increasingly aware to ensure that their decision-making processes satisfy these criteria. Certainly, the regional initiatives needed in the region may possibly outweigh the resources provided to support them. Evidently, stronger deliberation and greater wisdom are required to ensure that resources are not applied too thinly nor ineffectively in the hopes of broadening coverage, instead of allocating them to key constraints to development.

Considering all of above mentioned, the SWG, as a regional initiative and organization, has grown massively in the past years, developing comprehensive regional function over the ongoing regional cooperation process. In a decade of its existence, the SWG has successfully spread its management capacity by opening five (5) regional offices, wherein the organization is currently running six (6) fully-functional offices across South Eastern Europe. In respect to the expanding structure, the SWG has expanded its managing project portfolio and increased the operating funds for approx. 1, 2 million EUR per year. In the past ten years, the SWG has supported the SEE countries in framing agriculture and rural development initiatives and programmes. Our focus has been on making a progress in regional cooperation and integration. More is needed to better link national with regional priorities so countries may fully benefit from each other's strengths and overcome mutual problems. Whether it be through policy dialogues, technical measures, grant schemes, or people-to-people actions, SWG is committed to helping its member countries and territories evolve into thriving, modern economies that are well integrated with each other and the world.

In the years ahead, the countries from South Eastern Europe will continue with the EU integration oriented efforts under the new legislative frame. The SWG, as a regional structure, will remain fully committed in supporting the SEE countries provoking our countries and territories to consider how they can further promote and achieve greater cooperation within their own particular spheres of influence.

Boban Ilic
SWG Secretary General



The Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group

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Summary

SUMMARY

The Annual Report for the year of 2015 represents an overview of the actions taken and outcomes achieved by the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in SEE in the field of agriculture and rural development for the region of South Eastern Europe.

The implementation and execution of set initiatives and thus realized goals in 2015 have been carried out in accordance to the SWG Strategic and Operational Plan (SOP) for the midterm period of 2011-2015.

In conformity with the SWG SOP, the SWG this year has once again successfully promoted and stimulated debates and discussions on policy issues among policy makers, governmental and non-governmental organizations from the agriculture and rural development, water and forestry sectors in SEE, relevant international policy and development institutions, as well as academic institutions. With the intention of providing technical background for the policy making process and confront the current challenges and perspectives on sustainable agriculture and rural

Due to strong dedication for reaching the set strategic framework and core functions, the SWG together with its partners within different projects, programs and initiatives has effectively organized a vast number of international and regional forums, conferences, working discussions and meetings with ensured presence of all stakeholders from the SEE region. The SWG evoked the need for key development and reform of the agri-food sector in line with the EU policies, fetched the focus towards developing of rural areas, as well as supported the process of enhancing competitiveness and sustainable use of natural resources facing new challenges like climate change and food safety.

SWG is committed to excellence in everything that it does and promoting excellence will feature prominently in its advocacy, partnership and capacity strengthening functions. Other SWG principles involve commitments to the principle of subsidiarity, delivery and accountability and participatory approaches. These principles are reflected in all SWG's functions and the related activities performed in the year of 2015.

The Annual report 2015 of the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in South Eastern Europe presents a summary of the most important activities undertaken and accomplished by the SWG in the period January – December 2015.

The Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group

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Introduction

SWG STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK AND CORE FUNCTIONS

The "SWG" stands for Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group in South Eastern Europe (SEE). It is an International Intergovernmental Organization consisted of governmental institutions responsible for agriculture and rural development in respective countries and territories.

It is a platform for networking and regional co - operation among the SEE countries and territories in the field of agriculture and rural development.

It was founded on the basis of a common wish to establish an organization for sustainable rural development in SEE. As an organization the SWG is a international body, acting in a spirit of friendship and good neighborliness and enhances mutual respect and confidence, dialogue and cooperation among the Member Institutions.

VISION

Innovative and sustainable agriculture and rural development through cohesive regional co-operation for improvement of rural livelihoods in the SEE countries.

MISSION

To increase horizontal collaboration among respective countries and territories of SEE, coordinating regional initiatives related to agriculture and rural development and support the process of economic development in rural areas of Southeastern Europe.

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

To facilitate close cooperation among the Ministries of Agriculture and other stakeholders in the field of agriculture and ruraldevelopment and to support the EU integration

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

To improve the common understanding of EU agriculture and rural development policies.

To assist the improvement of implementation structures and systems for agriculture and rural development in rural areas, with specific emphasis on cross border cooperation.

To improve the understanding and use of implementation tools for agriculture and rural development.

To identify and share information and application of good practice in agriculture and rural development to broaden the rural agenda.

The functioning of the SWG is divided between the SWG Assembly and the SWG Head Office/Secretariat. The SWG Head Office/ Secretariat is entrusted to the Secretary General who oversees the SWG organizational, administrative, coordinative and managerial tasks.

The tasks of the SWG Assembly include planning of initiatives and projects of SEE regional relevance which are in compliance with SWG principles and guidelines. The Secretariat's functions are to ensure that SWG's Strategic Objective is achieved with maximum efficiency and effectiveness and implements plans, initiatives and projects which are approved by the Assembly.

FUNCTIONS

F1. Networking and enhancing regional cooperation

F2. Capacity Building

F3. Advocacy and resource mobilization

F4. Policy analysis

F5. Information exchange and access to knowledge

SWG MEMBER INSTITUTIONS

SWG MEMBERS

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND WATER ADMINISTRATION
REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN TRADE AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND WATER MANAGEMENT
REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

FEDERAL MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, WATER MANAGEMENT AND FORESTRY
FEDERATION OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD
REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND WATER ECONOMY
REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT
MONTENEGRO

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION
REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT
KOSOVO*

** 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.*

SWG OBSERVERS

FEDERAL MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY, ENVIRONMENT AND WATER MANAGEMENT
REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA

FEDERAL MINISTRY OF FOOD, AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION
FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT
REPUBLIC OF HUNGARY

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FOOD
REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE
REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

PROVINCIAL SECRETARIAT OF AGRICULTURE WATER MANAGEMENT AND FORESTRY
AUTONOMOUS PROVINCE OF VOJVODINA – REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURAL, FOOD AND FORESTRY POLICIES
ITALY

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Development

by task areas

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

South Eastern European countries have clearly recognized the integration into the European Union as a political priority, outlining, among other things, agricultural policy reforms and the need to streamline agriculture. The accession process necessitates not only enhancing competitiveness across the overall agro-food chains, yet embracing a rather different type of agricultural policy, a policy which is more conceptually, administrative and financially challenging.
Based on previous political and economic systems in the SEE countries, agriculture and agricultural policy differs namely significantly from the structures and processes in the EU. The SEE countries, therefore, are in a reform processes in order to align it with the legal and institutional set-up of the EU and to integrate the country's agricultural sector into the EU single market in the most efficient manner.

As previous years, in 2015 SWG has once again supported the SEE countries throughout major steps in acceptance and implementation of the EU body of law (Acquis Communitaire), and the upcoming negotiation process of Chapter 11 (Agriculture and Rural Development), Chapter 12 (Fisheries), and Chapter 13 (Food Safety). In this context, the adoption of new policy instruments and their approximation with the EU acquis in agriculture and rural development requires developing approaches for agricultural data analysis to shed light on potential impacts of the adopted policies on the farming sector.

This will allow better understanding of the effectiveness and efficiency of adopted policies and thus can provide scientifically-based support to policy making. More comprehensive knowledge of the effects of individual policy measures on development of the agricultural sector would allow better targeting on both national support schemes and IPARD pre-accession assistance.

In the period January – October 2015, the SWG in close cooperation with Institute for Prospective Technologies Studies (JRC-IPTS) conducted a study on monitoring and evaluation of the characteristics of the current agricultural policy instruments in the Western Balkan (WB) countries and compared to the current EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2014-2020.

The study covered three main aspects in relation to its aims and objectives:

- Analyze the impact of the national agriculture and rural development policies of WB countries and provide recommendations for their compliance with EU policies;
- Provide a cross-country analysis of the national policy instruments and their effects on food/farming sector;
- The state of harmonization of agriculture and rural development policies of the WB countries with the CAP 2014-2020.

In that respect the research was focused on:

- Development of agriculture and agricultural policy in each of the six participating countries (changes in 2013/14 to the previous period);
- Cross-country analysis and benchmarking with EU (based on previous study);
- Policy assessment and recommendation in context of EU accession (differences to the previous period).Special focus was given on farm structure and small farm issue.

As an output of the study, two common regional databases have been set up, one for agricultural statistics and one for budgetary transfers to agriculture.
Likewise, country report (Country Agricultural Policy Brief) for each of the six participating countries were developed, focusing on changes in the years 2013-2015, i.e. after the publication of the UN FAO study.
In this way, the project brings continuity to the monitoring of agricultural policy, as well as assists in discussions regarding certain key development issues in agriculture and agricultural policy, with a special focus on the EU integration process.

The final deliverables of the project/ study are:

- Agricultural Statistics
  (National data sets, WB agricultural statistics data base);
- Agriculture Policy Measures Data (APM)
  (National APM data)
- Agricultural Policy Papers
  (Country agricultural policy briefs, Regional Policy Brief - synthesis report - final project report).

The study is a result of a continuous work in the region elaborated in close cooperation between policy makers and research institutions in the SEE countries. It is anticipated that it will provide a valuable input for policymaking as well as a solid basis for future cooperation and continued dynamic dialogue between policymakers and research institutions.

Likewise, analysis of agriculture and rural development policies of the WB countries continued with the project: “National policy instruments and EU approximation process: “Effects on farm holdings in Western Balkan (WB) countries”. The project is funded by the European Commission particularly the Joint Research Centre – Institute for Prospective Technological Studies and the implementation period is November 2015 – July 2017.

Firstly, the project aims to monitor and collect information on agricultural policy developments in the WB countries. Such information is relevant for understanding the policy framework under which farms operate as well as giving indication of the potential implications for their development and growth. This analysis would also contribute towards providing evaluation on the effects of policy approximation process with the EU acquis in agriculture and rural development and help to better design and improve IPARD programmes.

Secondly, the project explores the application of appropriate analytical tools for different farm types according to their importance on national agriculture and data availability in particular WB countries. Thus, an important aim of the project is to evaluate the availability and quality of farm level data in the region and to examine their applicability for scientific analysis in support to policy making.

Finally, the aim of the project is to exploit and transfer knowledge to the scientific community in WB on farm level quantitative policy analysis developed in IPTSAGRILIFE, to enhance their capabilities to conduct scientifically based policy support. The special aim in this context is to explore the possibility of extending the application of the EU based IFM-CAP (Individual Farm Model for the Common Agricultural Policy) model developed in IPTS-AGRILIFE to the WB countries.

The WB countries relevant for this project are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia Kosovo*, Montenegro and Serbia. The primary focus of the analysis is micro farm level, while agricultural policy developments should be also explored at aggregate sectoral level to provide a general overview of their development in the region.

Overall, the study should result in providing an analysis of an overall development of agricultural policy, identify and describe farm level (FADN-type) data sources and their potential use for policy analysis and explore potential for their application for quantitate policy analysis for the WB countries.

Addressing the implementation of future EU agricultural and rural development policies and the reflection contributing to the countries of SEE was tackled at the Agricultural Policy Forum (APF) 2015. APF as a platform for international dialogue on policy settings and perspectives of common interest gathered together policy makers, academia, civil society and all other stakeholders on the same table. Recommendations were formulated in respect to the topics discussed and derived as the Pravets Agenda 2015. The Forum resumed main outputs on the reforms of CAP and IPA II, including the impending efforts for area based development in cross-border rural areas, natural resource management and streamlining agriculture and rural development policies in SEE region (Annex 5).

Pursuing this further, in November 2015 during the 9th Annual Meeting of the Ministers for Agriculture from South Eastern Europe the Ministers discussed and agreed on the future developments for agriculture and rural development sectors in SEE region and review the process of the regional cooperation in the given field (Annex 6).

The cooperation once again was acknowledged between the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and SWG with the implementation of the South East Europe 2020 Strategy. The SEE 2020 Strategy, which articulates a shared vision for jobs and prosperity in the region, acknowledges the importance of environmental sustainability, along with regional integration, innovation, skills and governance, as a core pillar of growth and development as well as critical elements of the EU accession process. During the reporting period, each of the participating organizations within the program were responsible for coordinating and promoting measures and activities set in the regional program framework. The Regional Environmental Programme addresses the Sustainable Growth Pillar targets and contributes directly to the achievement of the defined objectives: increase of adaptive capacity; advancement of water, energy and food nexus; initiation of the implementation of a RIWMFA; increase of annual forestation and; increase of share of irrigated agriculture land. Within the developed regional program for the SEE 2020 Strategy divided into three (3) components: climate change, water management and rural development through natural resource management, SWG in close cooperation with RCC started with implementation of the

program activities. The meeting of the Regional Expert Advisory Working Group on agriculture, water and forest management in SEE during the Agricultural Policy Forum 2015 was co-organized by RCC in respect to the given program.
Considering the above, under the umbrella of SWG various regional expert advisory working groups (REAWG) have been established providing non-binding advices and recommendations dealing with topics of a regional relevance. Up to this year, REAWGs have been created in relation to Paying Agencies, Managing Authorities, natural resource management, extension services, food safety and wine. Based on the topic of the REAWG, SWG has succeeded in many cases to organize the activities in close cooperation with its partner organizations.
As of 2015, after few years of consultations and discussions the REAWG on wine and viticulture in SEE was lastly established. The Advisory Group comprised a diversity of perspectives on regulations, practices and reforms in each of the SEE countries in the given sector, which were sought to reconcile through deliberations in light of the background briefings and stakeholder input. These recommendations represent the region's best

guidance for implementing a comprehensive system to respond to the integration of the SEE candidate and potential candidate countries into the EU. Concerning the valorization of autochthonous and new created varieties in the region, the following activities have been defined: setting up of scientific and professional institutional network, exchanging of scientific research and professional information related to clonal selection and certification of vine plant material, screening of legal background and institutional set up and procedures within SWG member institutions, promotion of these varieties, organization of scientific congresses and seminars/ symposiums with an emphasize on local varieties and wines and common items for all SWG members, overview of the institutions that could perform certification of vine plant material, etc. Regarding the balancing of the criterion related to sensorial characteristics of wine within the SEE, the participants agreed that the uniformity of the criteria for wine categorization is useful to be done. The first step will be screening of existing legislation in SWG member countries with the aim of harmonization of sensorial parameters that are crucial for quality categorization of wine in context of EU/OIV requirements.

For the REAWGs on Paying Agencies and Managing Authorities two multi-beneficiary workshops were organized for the candidate and potential candidate countries from the Western Balkan on the rural development measures for IPA II/IPARD 2014- 2020. Participating Managing Authorities and Paying Agencies followed the work done by DG Agriculture and Rural Development on designing rural development measures to be used in rural development programmes under IPA II. The executed workshops build onto the work started by DG Agriculture and Rural Development on identifying main bottlenecks in the implementation and onto the reflections on potential role and structure of the rural development programs. The SEE countries had an opportunity to reflect on problems, concerns, experiences gained and areas of improvement in implementation of the rural development pre-accession assistance post-2013.

Let alone, SWG supported the initiative for establishing the Advisory Services Network of South-East Europe (ASN SEE). In the course of the year, few preparatory meetings were held for the establishment of this network. The focus was on the member countries and biding documents that regulate the status, name, headquarters , representation of the ASN SEE, objectives and activities for the realization of these goals, membership and the rights and obligations of members, powers and decision-making, conditions and methods of election and recall, the duration of the mandate and responsibilities of its members, assets and possible profit, manner of acquisition of assets, termination of operations and procedure with assets in case termination of the regional body, and other issues relevant to the work.
Agricultural institutions from Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Kosovo*, Macedonia, Slovenia and Serbia successfully founded the South Eastern Europe Advisory Service Network (SEASN). SEASN Founding Assembly took place in Bulgarian capital city Sofia at 22nd October 2015. SEASN is association of agricultural advisory services, agricultural chambers, agricultural institutes, faculties and non-governmental organizations. SEASN is operating on the territory of its members and public and private advisory services, advisors individuals as well as other agricultural institutions, non-governmental organizations and natural persons working in agriculture and rural areas can become members in SEASN. SEASN Executive board nominated the SWG as supportive member, regarding their immense assistance and contribution to the SEASN initiative and founding.

SWG enhanced the cooperation among the SEE countries and the Irish Ministry of Agriculture, Food and the Marine by establishing a regional technical working group with key people representing the Veterinary and Phytosanitary Sector and Rural Development Sector from Western Balkan Countries. In the course of November 2015, representatives on behalf of SWG members from the both sectors had the opportunity through the Exposure visit on Rural Development and Food Safety 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 in order to utilize the Irish experience where the sustainable food system especially in rural development and food safety have been elaborated.

Support to policy development and implementation in the region has been also provided via the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument of the European Commission (TAIEX). TAIEX supports public administrations with regard to the approximation, application and enforcement of EU legislation as well as facilitating the sharing of EU best practices.
Priorities for agricultural policy assistance are centered on the establishment and development of paying agencies, delegated national institutions charged with the responsibility of administering trade mechanisms and processing farm support payments, from the application stage through to verification, payment and audit. Furthermore, guidance is given on implementation and enforcement of the common organization of the markets and a range of policy areas from state aids and rural development to quality issues such as the protection of geographical indications and organic farming standards.
During the course of 2015, the SWG on behalf of its member institutions and with support of the TAIEX office, organized various workshops on different topics. Through the instrument, contributions have been made on how to properly transform and strengthen the agricultural extension and advisory systems in the Western Balkan countries and Turkey; on how to better implement and utilize the available tools for publicity and methods of communication related to the EU programs for rural development; on proper implementation and functioning of Farm Accountancy Data Network (FADN) system, methodology and usage of FADN data in the beneficiary countries; and on the rural development measures for IPA II/IPARD 2014- 2020. Representatives from each of the member institutions, SWG staff and representatives of other national/public agencies and services participated on the workshops.

AREA BASED DEVELOPMENT

Area Based Development (ABD) is considered to be an innovative and effective approach to facilitate sustainable growth in rural areas in decline. It is suitable for targeting defined geographical areas in cross-border regions in the Western Balkans, characterized by specific complex development problems. The approach uses a methodology, which is inclusive, participatory and flexible and ensures integration and coherence. It is suitable in particular areas where one or several of the following development situations are present; poverty gap, post-natural or human disasters, post-conflict environment and exclusion issues.

The SWG is continuing with the activities related to the implementation of the ABD approach in the Western Balkan countries. Within the second phase of the EU funded project: "Preparation for implementation of Area Based Development Approach in the Western Balkans" implemented in the period February 2014 – April 2015, the objective was to further work on building capacities and structures in the SWG and "Drina-Tara", "Drina-Sava", "Prespa" and "Sharra" regions in order to be able to implement the forthcoming programmes related to regional and territorial cooperation.
Main focus of the activities on the component for integrated economic development approach was improvement of competitiveness of products and services in the "Drina-Tara" and "Drina-Sava" regions and provision of small grants for supporting investments aimed at enhancing production processes and improving the quality of products and services. Main objective of the grant scheme was to strengthen integrated economic development of the region "Drina - Tara" and "Drina - Sava", focusing on strengthening touristic offers of the region and improving production chains of agricultural and food products, improvement of tourism services through integrated projects and fostering cooperation among operators in the value chain.
As a result, seven new products were developed, four new services are launched, and seven new jobs were created.

In 2015, the project continued with the process of a project pipeline preparation in the four target areas using, amongst other, the experience from the implementation of the ABD pilot project in the "Drina - Tara" and "Drina - Sava" cross-border regions. Projects on integrated economic development in"Prepa" and "Sharra" cross-border regions were developed. Also, major activities were organization of stakeholder meetings in the pilot regions, as well as supporting people-to-people activities for strengthening networking, cooperation, promotion of the regions and their cultural, traditional, natural heritage and economic

potential.
Subsequently, under the ABDA framework the 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” started on June 1st, 2015 and will continue till April 31st, 2017.

The project aims at fostering regional cooperation among institutions and stakeholders in the agriculture and food sector, as well as facilitation of the process of balanced territorial development of the Western Balkan countries in the progression towards EU integration.
The objective of the project is to strengthen networking and cooperation among the public institutions and stakeholders, as well as with other relevant regional bodies, in order to accelerate the EU accession process of the WB candidate and potential candidate countries in the field of agriculture and rural development.

SWG thru the ABDA program continues with the actions initiated in previous project phases. Provision of consultancy support to the stakeholders is to be further provided in order to strengthen the implementation of different projects with cross-border and regional relevance. The SWG will provide assistance to Stakeholder Groups (SHGs) to prepare project proposals for the actions defined in the programming documents. This activity is foreseen for the entire duration of the project.

In addition, the Project Management Units (PMUs) will provide assistance to SHGs to prepare and submit projects, within the framework of the Action Plans, for funding under other available financial instruments such as national rural development schemes, other international and bilateral donor programmes, focusing on IPA II instruments (e.g. IPARD, CBC).
Since the start-up of the project, facilitation of the process for preparation of project proposals for various calls resulted in a submission of 15 project proposals (C-B-C SRB-B&H, C-B-C MNE&SRB), INTERREG Danube Transnational Programme, USAID AGRO project in Kosovo*.

Within the duration of the project since its initiation eight (8) SHG meetings were held with an aim to increase the cooperation among the Stakeholders in the four cross-border areas. In the current phase, the SWG continued to support the organization of people-to-people actions in the pilot region. Organization of twenty eight international events was supported with participation of more than 1.000 international participants and more than 18.000 visitors.

During this period methodology and work plan for the assessment of the situation and development potentials of “Neretva”, “Prokletije” and “Pcinja” cross-border regions are being prepared. Initial communication with potential stakeholders is established and information is shared about the planned activities within the new cross-cross border regions.

Increased information sharing and dissemination on information to the stakeholders for open calls and other important activities in the cross border regions through SWG information tools web-pages and social media platforms. During this period SWG prepared websites dedicated to the cross-border regions “Prespa” - prespa.seerural.org and “Drina - Sava” - drina-sava.seerural.org. Preparatory activities were made for the establishment of the web sites for the cross-border regions “Sharra” - sharra.seerural.org and “Drina - Tara” – drina-tara.seerural.org

SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT

While working in the rural cross-border areas on economic development of the selected cross-border regions, SWG together with its stakeholders denoted another alarming issue. The solid waste mismanagement in the rural areas of the SEE cross-border regions is of an essential environmental and economic concern. The need for organized management of solid waste in the rural and coastal areas has not been properly addressed in SEE countries. The problem is not restricted to a single place rather it covers all parts of the environment which leads to toxic pollutants. Most common practices of waste processing are uncontrolled dumping which causes mainly air, water and soil pollution. As a consequence, waste is becoming a threat to the public health, an ecological problem and an obstacle to the socio-economic development of rural areas in the region. In order to improve the quality of life of rural population, environmental sanitation needs to be improved. The objective of solid waste management in rural and coastal areas is to collect, recycle, compost and/or dispose waste, therefore, granting possibilities for sustainable development of these areas, particularly the development of the touristic and agricultural sector in all bordering countries.
The main obstacles however to the effective solid waste management in rural and coastal areas are: lack of awareness of local communities, disposal habits, lack of administrative and technical capacity of the authorities, insufficient infrastructure and resources, remoteness which means less environmental inspection and enforcement of law and regulations. Within the process of EU integration of the candidate and potential candidate member states harmonization of national laws in line with the EU waste management policy and legislation (75/442/EEC, 91/156/EEC, EEC/96/61, 2000/53/EC) is a must.

As such, SWG in close cooperation with the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South East Europe (NALAS) and GIZ took the initiative of developing a regional project in order to asses affordable system management and develop most suitable models for waste treatment in the bordering rural municipalities and the coastal areas of the SEE region.

The initiative focuses on three pilot areas in the SEE region which are of a different character, also with regards to the waste management problems. Based on the report of the European Environmental Agency (EEA), the generation of municipal solid waste in SEE, particularly the Western Balkans has increased sharply from 2003 to 2007, by an estimated 40% in per capita terms. Although data are particularly incomplete, levels of waste per capita appear to be on a similar level with those of EU-12. The region has many abandoned waste sites and uncontrolled landfills.

In the “Sharra Mountain” cross-border region households and rural communities in their daily activities are major generators of waste, in form of manure, crop residues or mixed solid wastes. Much concern about health risks, quality of life as well as water and soil pollution has been recently seen about the improper disposal of the solid waste around rural communities in the region.
Disposal of solid waste near the river bed of Drina River and also by untreated industrial wastewater discharge deriving from the industries located in the watershed has caused dramatic increase of water pollution and hazards to the environment.
Major effects of poor solid waste management include: blocked drains, flooding, erosion, soil pollution, health problems, unaesthetic dump sites and loss of potential for economic and touristic development.
Furthermore, solid waste and marine litter which floats on the sea surface and/or sinks on the seafloor, as well as some that is washed away on sea coastlines (beach-litter) become a

serious pollution problem in the Adriatic Sea region, particularly in Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. Solid waste and marine litter can be found on the beaches and shores, on the water surface, in the water column or on the seafloor. It can be found near the course of its source, but also can be transported over a long distances with sea streams and winds. This is causing additional pollution across the Adriatic Sea, thus affecting the tourism sector as the main economic activity in this region.

In the reporting period, a method was developed for assessment of cross-border adverse environmental and economic impacts of solid waste mismanagement.
The method of Environmental and Economic Impact Assessment serves as a tool to assist in assessing the potential adverse effects of the current waste activities and in formulation of precautions which could prevent the effects from taking place. Hence, the procedures of Environmental and Economic Impact Assessment are used, in order to:

- Examine the origin, quantity / composition and properties of the solid wastes generated in the pilot rural and coastal regions.
- Analyze the existing SWM practices, including the waste collection, segregation, transportation, recycling / recovery and final disposal in the pilot rural and coastal regions.
- Estimate the annual quantities of waste ending up at river banks, beaches, or environmentally sensitive areas and by various migration paths reaching the sea or river currents and causing pollution of soil and groundwater.
- Identify and assess the magnitude of the prevailing transboundary environment and economic impacts in each pilot region.
- Develop suitable transboundary model, addressing the legal / institutional, technical, financial and stakeholder engagement related measures to mitigate the adverse impacts.
- Propose demonstration projects to speed up transition.
- Facilitate the transboundary cooperation in the pilot rural and coastal regions towards minimizing the environmental and economic impacts in the future.

Once the method was developed, national and regional workshops were organized in order to support the assessment process for development of solid waste management models. As per the stakeholder discussions, collected materials and data, three (3) assessment studies are being prepared.
In the interim, a Dialogue Platform among the impacting and impacted stakeholders was established, constituted by representatives from the public sector, civil society and business sector, across the borders. Dialogue Platform aims at facilitating the communication and cooperation among impacting and impacted communities in three pilot areas. It provides practical tips and tools to help navigate stakeholder engagement in a way that strengthens the long-term sustainability of waste management and enhances trust and reputation among stakeholders. Taking stakeholder concerns and interests into account can improve relationships, which may make it easier for public and private companies to operate, lead to ideas for products or services that will address stakeholder needs, and allow reduction of pollution and costs and increase economic growth.
The 1st DP session focused on the identification of challenges and needs for establishment of cross-border integrated solid waste management models. The 1st DP also served as an opportunity for municipalities from the selected pilot regions to agree on principles of cooperation.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT VIA NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Pressures on natural resources are exacerbated massively by the effects of climate change. The interdependence, as well as conflicts between the use and conservation of soil, forests, water resources and biodiversity demand an integrated approach and inter-sectoral coordination processes between the institutions competent for agriculture, rural development, and forest and water resources conservation.
Since natural resources management is a cross-border issue, and the EU accession process represents a common framework for the countries, this issue affects, in addition to the national level, especially the aspect of regional coordination and cooperation. However, regional capacities for sustainable management of forest and water resources within the framework of developing rural areas are insufficient.
The SWG has given a significant contribution towards a coordinated analysis of problems, existing solutions and the potentials that can build on those solutions, as well as capacity development. On the basis of this foundation, and by promoting inter-sectoral dialogue on the national and regional level (e.g. with the RCC and regional river basin organizations), coordinated planning and efficient coordination between relevant sectors (agriculture and forestry, forest and water resources management, and environmental protection) can be achieved.

In 2015, the SWG together with its well established REAWG on Integrated Resource Management has been actively working on regional activities and initiatives in relation to agriculture, water resource and forestry in the SEE region, tackling issues and challenges of a common character. The working group has developed a set of objectives, focusing on rural development by sustainable management of forests and water, considering the ecological and socio-economic balance of the rural areas, particularly the positive impact of social collaboration at local areas which contributes to the rural income by means of water and forest management.

With the work on the integrated paradigm for rural development through water and forest management in SEE, the SWG together with the regional working group presented and discussed the concept during the Agricultural Policy Forum 2015 and recommendations were granted in the Pravets Agenda 2015.
The focus was made on improvement of regional capacities for the regional sustainable management of forest and water resources within the framework of developing rural areas. Lack of proper correlation among the management of natural resources, agriculture and environment causes additional constraints to rural development in these countries; consequently affecting the overall economic growth and prosperity for EU integration of the WB candidate and potential candidate countries.
Recommendations suggest that regional inter-sectoral cooperation and coordination at the interface among rural development, agriculture, forest and water would contribute to regional strategy processes and strengthen the interlinkages among sectors concerning preservation and use of natural resources for the purpose of rural and economic development of the regions. The Agenda highlighted that development of evidence-based policy is of a need, to address the current situation and to provide policy recommendations in respect to the EU accession

process of WB countries, in order to integrate the environmental and socio-economic objectives into the agriculture and rural development policies.
The rural areas in the SEE are facing a continuing depopulation

followed by social and economic degradation. Local people should use, control, and manage other resources other than land such as water, forests and wildlife which are equally important to the functioning of rural economies. Along with the ABD approach, the Forum recommended implementation of integrated measures in cross-border regions for the purpose of income generation and diversification, based on the use of natural resources in cross-border regions.

In the second quarter of 2015, SWG in cooperation with GIZ started with the inception phase of the "Rural development by integrated forest and water resource management in South-East-Europe" (LEIWW) programme.

The LEIWW program strives to improve regional capacities for agriculture and integrated natural resources management within the framework of rural development. The EU accession, which all SEE partner countries strive for, lays down a mandatory framework for transposition and implementation of relevant strategies, policies and legislation. The 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). Specialized competencies for implementation of integrated management of natural resources and their economic potentials for rural areas are improved on the regional, national and local level. This contributes to sustainable use and conservation of natural resources, which builds the foundation for income generation through agriculture and forestry in rural areas of South-East Europe.

The overall objective of the inception phase was to perform the following benchmarks:

- Stakeholder analysis on regional, national and local level;
- Confirmation of the selection of cross-border pilot regions based on regional/national priorities and/or transparent criteria;
- Identification of needs and strategies for qualification and capacity development at regional and national level and in the cross-border pilot regions;
- Contribution to the strategy development, operational plan ning, results framework and monitoring of the programme.

In reference to already existing SWG regional initiatives, established under its regional umbrella, the program framework is to be developed based on these structures in order to channel the implementation efficiently and ensure successful outputs. The program will be facilitated with the support of the Area Based Development Approach and the Regional Expert Advisory Working Group on integrated resource management.

NETWORKING

SWG as a regional cross-border structure works in many cases with long-term development strategies including economic as well as socio-cultural priorities. The latter ones have proved to be an indispensable and equally relevant element determining the success of cross-border development.

The SWG has been strongly supportive in ensuring wide participation of public and private members of the civil society in order to strengthen civil society organizations/institutions to fulfill their role through joint actions. In 2015, the SWG has been once again actively involved in regional networking and people-to-people events, encouraging effective intercultural exchanges and ensuring regional cooperation in the rural areas of the SEE countries.

The aspirations of the SWG is to identify ways, events and activities to help create and encourage social action - making it easier for people to work together to benefit their community and the lives of those within it.

The Balkan Rural Development Network BRDN, established in 2012 with support of SWG, has developed into a regional platform of NGO-based rural development networks in the WB. The overall aim of the BRDN is strengthening the civil society and promoting multi-national exchange in rural development at regional and EU level. BRDN brings together rural development networks from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo*. The networks are led by the EU democracy principles, embedding the common values of rural people in the WB countries. Independent from, but recognized by the governments the BRDN member networks are crucial assets for effective local development in the SEE.
The BRDN platform is an added value structure to the WB networks in working more closely and articulating the mutual interests, through joint planning of projects in fulfilling the needs of the rural population. Majority of the BRDN networks are partners within PREPARE Partnership for Europe. BRDN continues to work very closely with the SWG.
SWG provided support to BRDN for initiating the possibility for establishment direct collaboration between BRDN and the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) whereas the civil society organizations dealing in the area of rural development from the Balkan countries would have upfront sharing of knowledge and information exchange as well as providing direct feedback information concerning the situation and needs of rural population in the Balkans. ENRD hosted the 7th Assembly Session of the BRND in April 2015 in Brussels and expressed a strong willingness to work on identification of mechanisms for including BRDN in the process of its regular knowledge sharing, and communication. ENRD recommended that the BRDN should continue this process of collaboration together and in cooperation with SWG.

As a contribution to the regional networking and people-to-people actions, the SWG in close cooperation with Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) supported the following regional events:

- Cultural festival “”Drina-Sava regatta - Memorial Vitomir Dizdarevic - Admiral Cook” organized by Kayak club “Serbian Paddlers” from Serbia 1st - 9th May 2015, Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- Nusicijada, 2nd – 4th September, 2015, Ivanjica, Serbia;
- International Conference on Soil was held in the period 4th – 6th May 2015 in the premises of the Agricultural University of Tirana in Tirana, Albania;
- The Faculty of Agriculture, Univer sity of Belgrade was also supported for publishing a text book “Rural Development and Rural Policy”. The textbook is for the purpose of undergraduate students, taking courses in agriculture and agricultural economics and is the first in the field of agricultural faculties in the Balkan region. Coalition-building and networking with the academia, among other stakeholders, is essential to the SEE region, whose support may be necessary to achieve sustainable improvements within the current socio-economic situation in the region.

What is more, through the Area Based Development Approach program a vast number of people-to-people actions were supported, as a toll for strengthening networking, cooperation, promotion of the regions and their cultural, traditional, natural heritage and economic potential is prepared and delivered to the Stakeholder Groups from all four target regions. Organization of abundant international events was supported with participation of more than 1.000 international exhibitors and more than 18.000 visitors.

People-to-people actions were as follows:

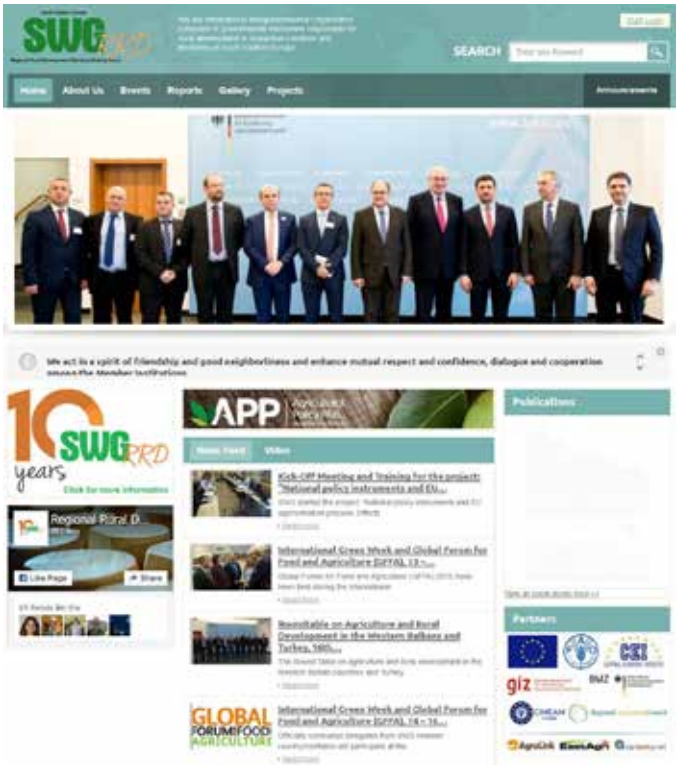
- 21st regional Christmas indoor football tournament in Visegrad, organized by Municipality of Visegrad, Bosnia and Herzegovina from December 25th 2014 till January 5th 2015;
- National Fair of Traditional dry-cured ham – prosciutto and support the promotion of products from the cross - border region "Drina – Tara" on "Prsutijada 2015", organized by "Zlatiborski Eko agrar" on 9th till 11th January 2015 in Mackat, Serbia;
- Vinkovo in Ilok, held from 22th to 24th January 2015, in Ilok, Croatia;
- Be my friend - days of equality, from 4th till 6th February 2015 in MIlici, Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- Thematic Conference "Cross-border cooperation and management of risks from natural hazards in the region Drina-Sava" held on 28th January, 2015 in Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia;
- "20th Srem Wine Fest in Berkasovo", held from 12th to 14th February, 2015 in Berkasovo, Serbia;
- "Regional Gastronomic Fair", 18th February 2015, Municipality of Shtrpce, Kosovo*;
- International tourist eco-ethno fair "Sounds, taste and smells of tradition" held on 13th to 14th February 2015 in Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia and from the 25th to 26th February 2015 in Bijeljina, Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- The International Fair of Tourism (IFT) from 19th to 22nd February 2015 in Belgrade, Serbia;
- International conference "Agricultural cooperatives – drivers of change", 25th to 26th February 2015 in Ohrid, Macedonia;
- "Bona Adventitia – Conference and Fair", 28th February 2015 in Jegunovce, Macedonia;
- "February Fair of Traditional Products-Rudo 2015", 26th-27th February 2015 in Rudo, Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- International Fair of Business, Crafts and Agriculture - "Viroexpo; 2015", 27th of February – 1st of March, 2015 in Virovitica, Croatia
- "Hear the voice from Polimlje", 4th – 25th March 2015 in Prijepolje, Brodarevo, Serbia;
- "VIII International Volunteer Eco camp Trsic 2015", 05-12 March in Loznica, Serbia;
- International sales tourist crafts fair, food produced in traditional way, old and artistic crafts: "Ethno bazaar", 6-7 March in Sabac, Serbia;
- "Regional Art Colony", 06-10 March 2015 in Sabac, Serbia;
- "Workshops on eco-tourism", 05th March 2015 in Nijemci, Croatia and on 11th March 2015 in Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia;
- Workshop "Branding of products and regions", organized in the period 11 – 13.03.2015, in Ohrid, Republic of Macedonia.
- Sharri Cheese Day, 6th March 2015 in Municipalty of Dragash, Kosovo*
- "Come and feel the adventure", 17th - 19th March in Prijepolje, Serbia
- "Children have a right to healthy food", 10th -20th March, 2015, Priboj, Serbia;
- Raspberry Day 2015, 12th August 2015, Recane – Municipalty of Prizren, Kosovo*;
- Wine and cheese Festival 2015, 21-22 August 2015, Ohrid, Macedonia;
- 11th traditional manifestation "Drina Fish Pot", 20th September 2015, Visegrad, Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- 8.Ilok Grape Harvest, 29 August – 6 September, Ilok, Croatia;
- "III Regional Honey Fair 2015", 25-27 September, Loznica, Serbia;
- 14th traditional manifestation "Day of Pljevlja cheese", 23rd October 2015, Pljevlja, Montenegro.

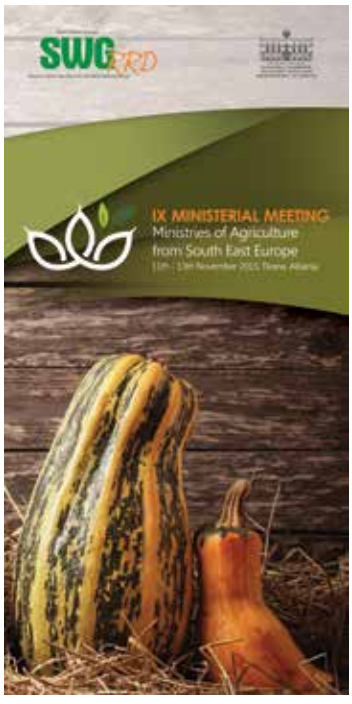
INFORMATION EXCHANGE AND ACCESS TO KNOWLEDGE

Information exchange and access to knowledge has been also a priority to the SWG. Information exchange facilitates collusion by enabling successful learning and implementation of various actions. SWG is serving as a regional network and communication channel that focuses on cross-border information exchange for agriculture and rural development in the SEE region. For achieving better coherence and consolidation in the area of information exchange, SWG has been actively endowing into its networking/communication instruments for enabling smooth flow of information and knowledge among its stakeholders.

The SWG website **www.seerural.org** serves as a platform for regular exchange of information among the SWG members, partners and stakeholders.
The SWG web-site chronologically records increase of site visits in terms of number of visits and diversity of visitors.
In the reporting period, the SWG has worked once again on the improvement of it's the website. The SWG web site has the latest social media features and is easily accessible for information, documentation, reports and activities of a regional character which are happening across the South Eastern European countries.

As a sub-platform the SWG established the Agricultural Policy Plus **www.app.seerural.org** which serves as an online portal for database collection, communication and exchange of





information among public institutions, academic and civil society, in respect to streamlining of agriculture and rural development policies.

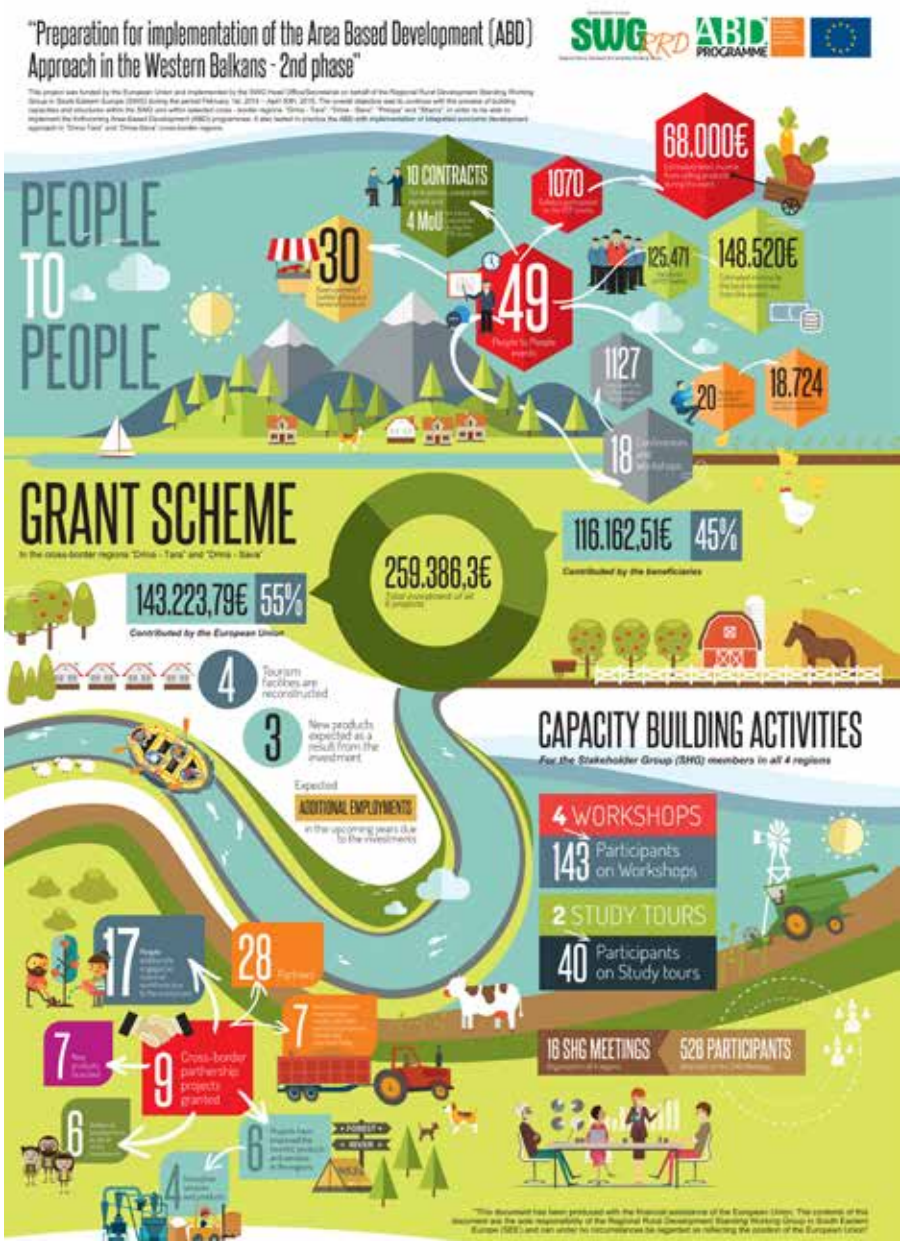
By way of information hub for the ABDA program sub-platforms were prepared dedicated to the cross-border regions "Prespa" - **prespa.seerural.org** and "Drina - Sava" - **drina-sava.seerural.org**. Preparatory activities were made for the establishment of the web sites for the cross-border regions "Sharra" - **sharra.seerural.org** and "Drina - Tara" – **drina-tara.seerural.org**

In addition, promotional material of the Ministries – SWG members regarding technical issues was supported by SWG (reports, strategies, technical announcements and sector oriented promotion materials).

Communication transparency among the SWG Member Institutions, SWG Head Office/Secretariat and Partner Organizations is set as a priority of the SWG.

The SWG public relations and communication with media in the SEE region, as well as SWG visibility is considered as significally improved. Improvements of the SWG communication and visibility will be further considered as priority and focus should be given on establishment of the day-to-day communication and cooperation of the SWG and the relevant media from SWG member countries.
For that reason, the SWG engaged PR staff for communication with media in the SEE region for SWG visibility.

Encouraging an intensive exchange of information is also done through international and regional trade participation. Fair participation represents the best opportunity for a successful presentation.
SWG and its members participated on the 7th Global Forum for Food and Agriculture (GFFA) organized within the International Green Week Fair in Berlin. Under the title "The growing demand for food, raw materials and energy: opportunities for agriculture, challenges for food security?", the forum discussed various topics, such as the ever greater demand for resources and the changes in the roles played by producers and processers in the food industry, formulated new challenges and identified future prospects. SWG was presented with a small stand and promotional materials together with a number of international organizations and institutions on 17th January 2015 in CityCube Berlin.



Based on the cooperation with International Center for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM), SWG participated on the EXPO Milano 2015. The aim of the Milan Universal Exposition was feeding the Planet, Energy for Life. It embraced technology, innovation, culture, traditions and creativity and how they relate to food and diet. Expo 2015 further developed themes introduced in earlier Expos in the light of new global scenarios and emerging issues, with a principal focus on the right to healthy, secure and sufficient food for all the world's inhabitants.

SWG ASSEMBLY SESSIONS

DURING THE SWG ASSEMBLY SESSIONS ORGANIZED AS FOLLOWS:

32nd SWG ASSEMBLY SESSION, 26th -29th APRIL 2015, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

33rd SWG ASSEMBLY SESSION", 8th – 11th SEPTEMBER 2015, MILOCER, MONTENEGRO

34th SWG ASSEMBLY SESSION", 3rd – 5Th DECEMBER 2015, BARI, ITALY

The aim of the SWG Assembly Sessions was to discuss and decide about internal SWG procedures, realization of SWG activities for the year 2015, exchange of experiences about the EU accession process and the benefits of it, as well as to decide on future initiatives, projects and cooperation.

SWG

The Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group

ANNUAL REPORT 2015

Budget in 2015

SWG BUDGET IN 2015

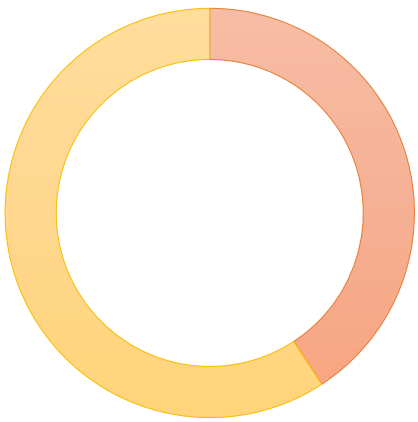
(Amounts in EUR)

SOURCES OF FUNDS

		For the period from 01 October 2014 through 30 September 2015	For the period from 01 October 2013 through 30 September 2014
EC		607,346	858,236
GIZ		122,304	251,156
FAO		18,541	52,060
CIHEAM		3,000	10,000
Sources of funds - projects	**4**	**751,191**	**1,171,452**
SWG Own and Liquidity account		21,000	45,500
SWG General account	5	214,910	234,799
Other Contribution		30,165	24,017
Reimbursements		-	22
Funds for reduction of costs		1,173	543
Total sources of funds		**1,018,439**	**1,476,333**

BANK INTEREST

EC		65	91
GIZ		14	33
FAO		-	2
CIHEAM		1	1
TEMPUS		2	9
Bank interest - projects	**4**	**82**	**136**
SWG Own and Liquidity account		5	30
SWG General account		87	113
Total Bank interest		**174**	**279**
Foreign exchange translation gains		1,156	4,038
Total funds received		**1,019,769**	**1,480,650**



TOTAL FUNDS RECEIVED

FROM 01-OCT-2013 THROUGH 30-SEP-2014

1,480,650

FROM 01-OCT-2014 THROUGH 30-SEP-2015

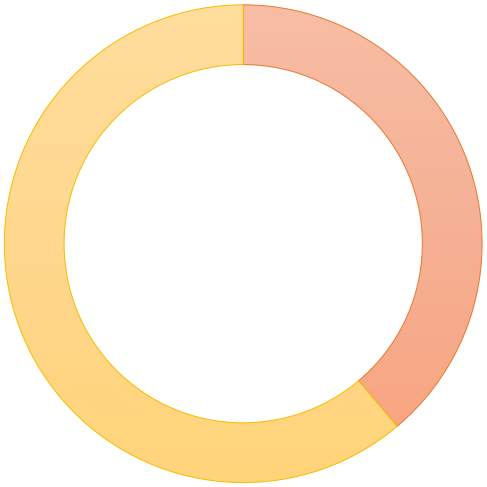
1,019,769

(Amounts in EUR)

USES OF FUNDS BY ACTIVITY

		For the period from 01 October 2014 through 30 September 2015	For the period from 01 October 2013 through 30 September 2014
EC		677,842	477,410
GIZ		201,211	341,112
FAO		-	32,134
CIHEAM		1,504	1,003
TEMPUS		54	-
Uses of funds - projects	**4**	**880,611**	**851,659**
SWG Own and Liquidity account use		14,771	474
SWG General account		195,907	128,091
Returned funds to donators		32,315	13,836
Total financed operating funds		**1,123,604**	**994,060**
Foreign exchange translation losses		414	671
Total financed trough fund providers		**1,124,018**	**994,731**
Funds at the beginning of the period		**1,332,995**	**847,076**
Funds at the end of the period		**1,228,746**	**1,332,995**

The Independent Audit's Report Statement:
"Reviews the financial statements as fairly in all material respects in accordance with the donors' requirements and accounting policies and principles".



FROM 01-OCT-2014 THROUGH 30-SEP-2015

FUNDS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PERIOD
1,332,995

FUNDS AT THE END OF THE PERIOD
1,228,746

The Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group

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Anex 1

LIST OF SWG PROJECTS IN 2015

ANNEX 1: LIST OF SWG PROJECTS IN 2015

ACCOMPLISHED PROJECTS:

Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)

- "EU reform processes in the field of agriculture and rural development of SEE countries and strengthening of regional cooperation and networking in SEE";

  (June 2012 - May 2015)

European Commission

- "Preparation for implementation of Area Based Development Approach in the Western Balkans – 2nd phase"

  (February 2014 – April 2015)

EC JRC IPTS

- "Analysis of agricultural and rural development policies in Western Balkan countries"

  (January – October 2015)

RUNNING PROJECTS:

Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)

- "Solid Waste Management in cross-border rural and coastal areas of South Eastern European region";

  (June 2015 - June 2016)

- "Rural development by integrated forest and water resource management in South-East-Europe (LEIWW)".

  (October 2015 - May 2017)

European Commission

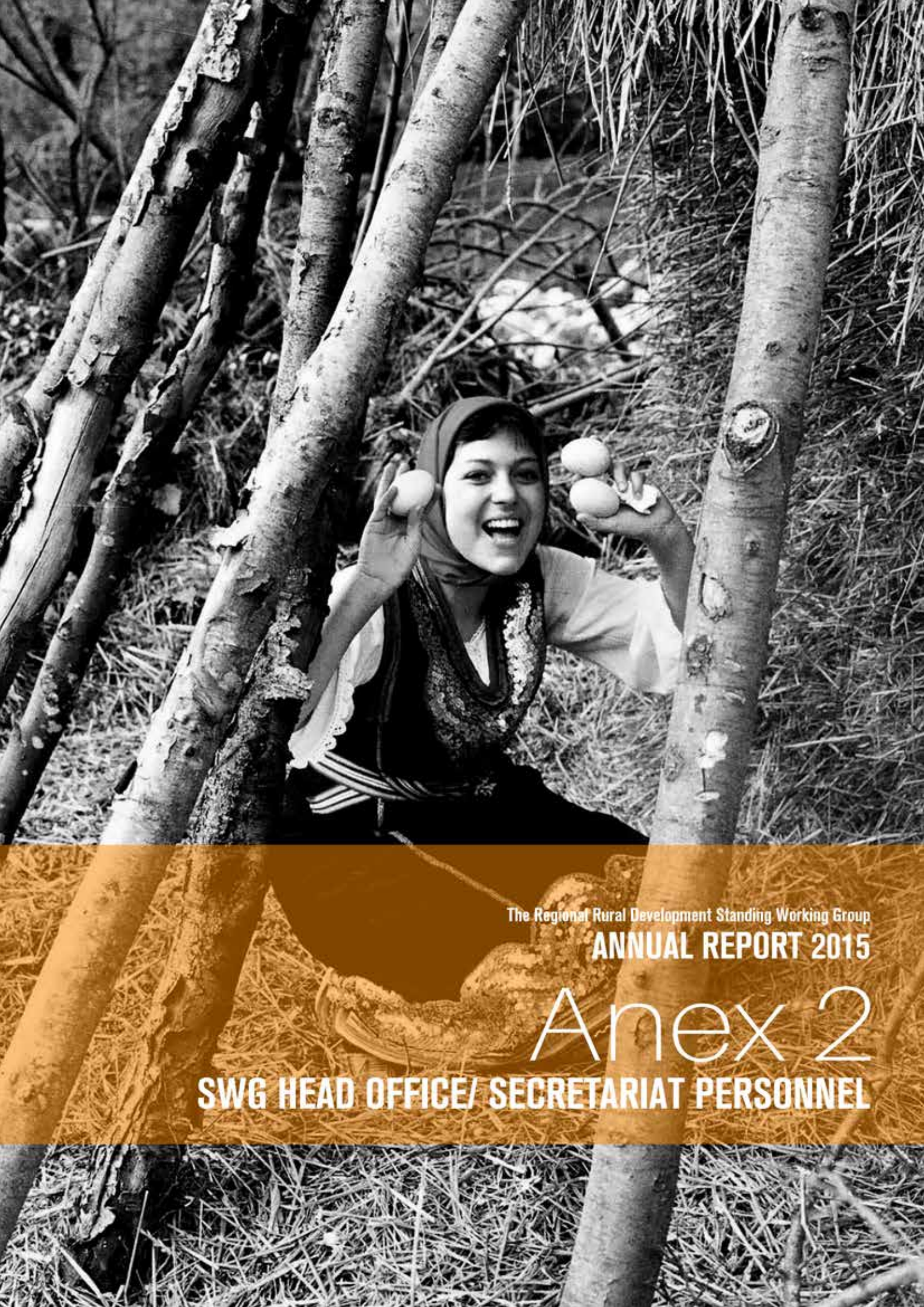
- "Fostering regional cooperation and balanced territorial development of Western Balkan countries in the process towards EU integration - Support to the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in South-East Europe"

  (June 2015 - April 2017)

EC JRC IPTS

- "National policy instruments and EU Approximation process: Effects on farm holdings in the Western Balkan countries (EUEWB)"

  (October 2015 – July 2017)



The Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group

ANNUAL REPORT 2015

Anex 2

SWG HEAD OFFICE/ SECRETARIAT PERSONNEL

ANNEX 2: SWG HEAD OFFICE/ SECRETARIAT PERSONNEL

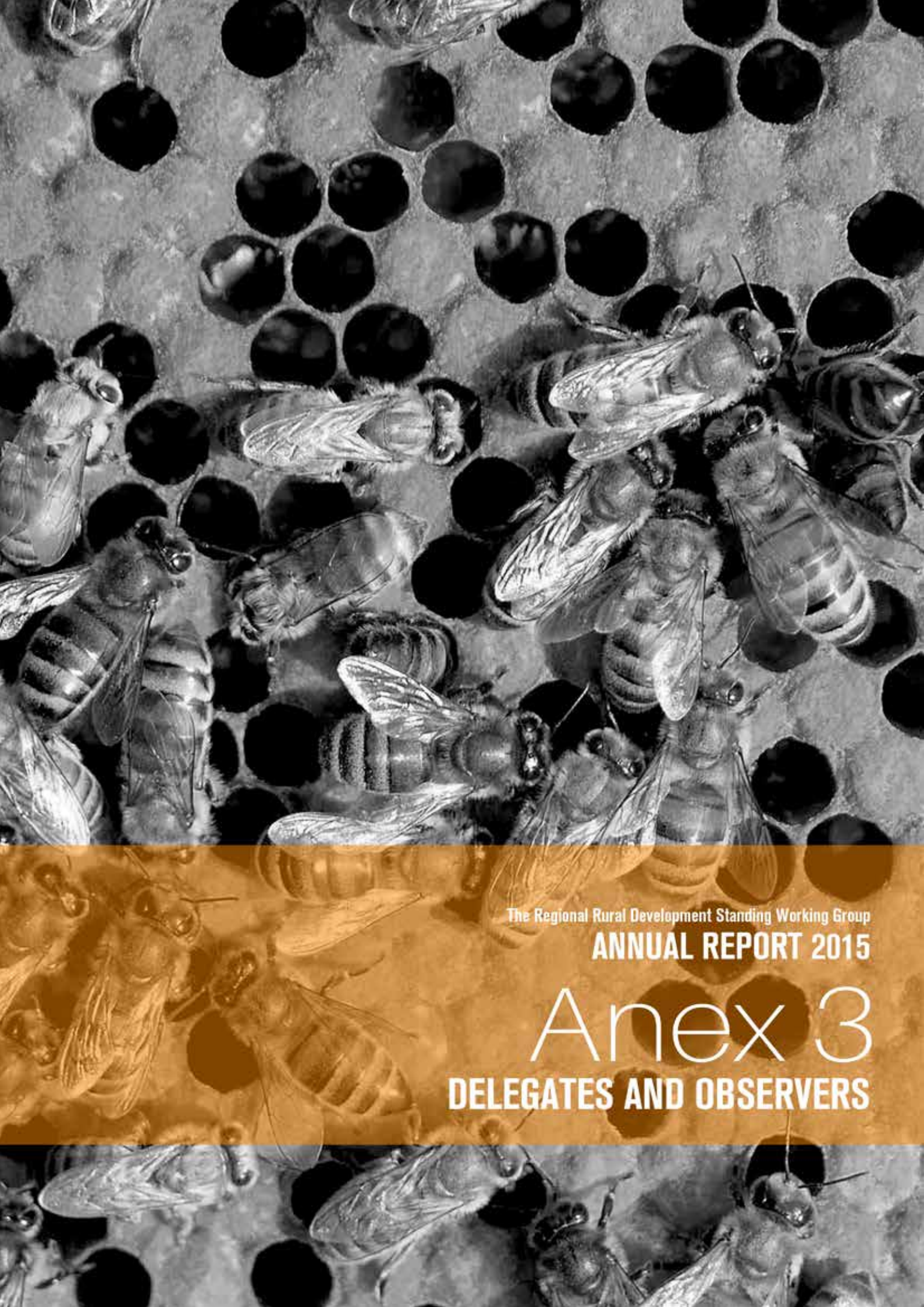
STATUS DECEMBER 2015

SWG HEAD OFFICE EMPLOYEES

Boban Ilic	Secretary General
Irena Dzimrevska	Head of Operations
Katerina Spasovska	Senior Project Manager
Bogdanka Leveska – Gjorsoska	Project Manager
Julija Brzovska	HR, Contract and Cash Officer
Andrej Josifov	Finance Manager
Ivan Tasev	Finance Assistant
Elena Valmarska	Financial Officer
Blagica Slezenkovska	Office Manager
Oliver Pop-Arsov	Project Assistant and Logistic Officer
Aleksandar Stojmanovski	Logistics Officer

SWG STAFF IN THE REGIONAL OFFICES

Damjan Surlevski	Regional Manager “Sharra” and “Prespa” cross-border region
Aleksandar Damnjanovic	Regional Manager “Drina-Sava” and “Drina-Tara” cross-border region
Emrullah Spahiu	Coordrinator “Sharra” cross-border region
Etleva Thimo	Coordrinator “Prespa” cross-border region
Danica Radojicic	Coordrinator “Drina-Tara” cross-border region
Mirela Causevic	Coordrinator “Drina-Sava” cross-border region



The Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group

ANNUAL REPORT 2015

Anex 3

DELEGATES AND OBSERVERS

DELEGATES AND OBSERVERS

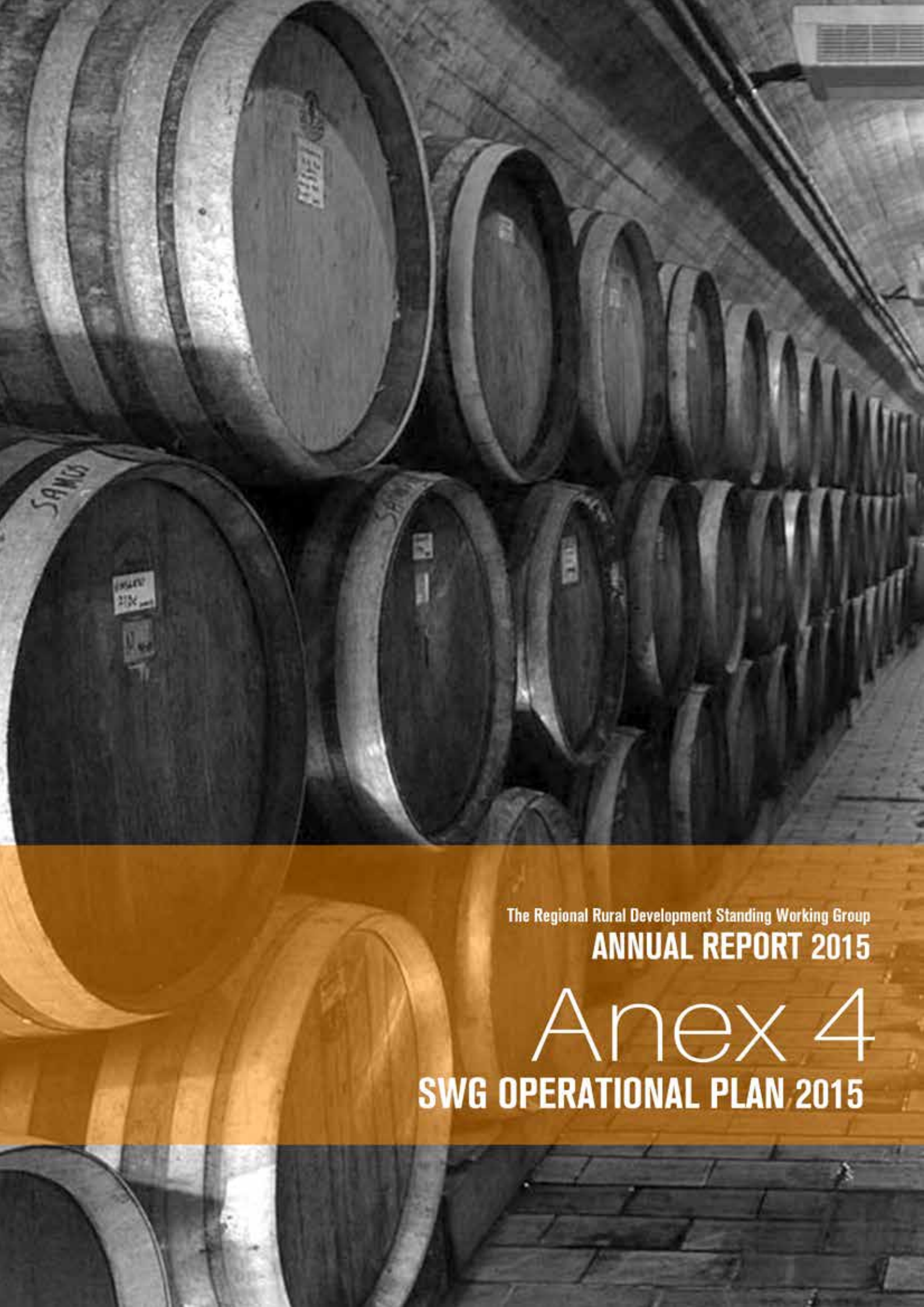
LIST OF THE SWG DELEGATES / SWG CONTACT PERSONS

NAME/ SURNAME	COUNTRY	INSTITUTION	POSITION	ADDRESS	CONTACT
Grigor Gjeci	Albania	Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration	Rural Development Policy Director	Sheshi Skenderbej 2 , 1001 , Tirana , Albania	Tel: 35542223806 Mob: 355682020879 Fax: 35542223806 E-mail: grigor.gjeci@bujqesia.gov.al Web: http://www.bujqesia.gov.al
Teuta Topi	Albania	Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration	Chief of Sector	Sheshi Skenderbej 2 , 1001 , Tirana , Albania	Tel: 35542223806 Mob: 355672077002 Fax: 35542223806 E-mail: teuta.topi@bujqesia.gov.al Web: http://www.bujqesia.gov.al
Dusan Neskovic	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Ralations	Assistant Minister	Musala 9 , 71000 , Sarajevo , Bosnia and Herzegovina	Tel: 38733953500 Mob: 38765517517 Fax: 38733953501 E-mail: dusan.neskovic@mvteo.gov.ba Web: http://www.mvteo.gov.ba
Hamdija Chivic	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations	Head of Department for harmonization and coordination of payment systems in agriculture and rural development	Musala 9 , 71000 , Sarajevo , Bosnia and Herzegovina	Tel: 387 57 322090 Mob: 387 65 594 139 Fax: 387 57 322091 E-mail: hamdija.civic@hops.gov.ba Web: http://www.mvteo.gov.ba
Marko Srdic	R.Srpska, BiH	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management	Higher Assistant	Trg Republike Srpske 1 , 78000 , Banja Luka , R.Srpska, BiH	Tel: 38751338599 Mob: 38765916814 Fax: 38751338599 E-mail: m.srdic@mps.vladars.net Web: http://www.rsapcu.org
Zoran Kovacevic	R.Srpska, BiH	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management	Assistant to the Minister	Trg Republike Srpske 1 , 78000 , Banja Luka , R.Srpska, BiH	Tel: 387 51 338 430 Mob: 387 65 580 011 Fax: 387 51 338 866 E-mail: z.kovacevic@mps.vladars.net Web: http://www.rsapcu.org
Pejo Janjic	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ministry of Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry	Assistant to the Minister for Agricultural Policy and International Cooperation	Marka Marulica 2 , 71000 , Sarajevo , Bosnia and Herzegovina,	Tel: 387 33 726587 Mob: 387 63 294415 E-mail: pejo.janjic@fmpvs.gov.ba; pejojanjic@msn.com Web: http://www.fmpvs.gov.ba
Emir Rascic	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ministry of Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry	Head of Department for International Cooperation	Marka Marulica 2 , 71000 , Sarajevo , Bosnia and Herzegovina	Tel: 387 33 726586 Mob: 387 61 397799 E-mail: emir.rascic@fmpvs.gov.ba Web: http://www.fmpvs.gov.ba
Bozhura Fidanska	Bulgaria	Ministry of Agriculture and Food	Senior Expert	Blvd. Hristo Botev 55 , 1040 , Sofia , Bulgaria	Tel: 359 2 98511430 Mob: 359 887 756011 Fax: 359 2 98513104 E-mail: Bfidanska@mzh.government.bg Web: http://www.mzh.government.bg
Vassil Groudev	Bulgaria	Ministry of Agriculture and Food	Deputy Minister	Blvd. Hristo Botev 55 , 1040 , Sofia , Bulgaria	Tel: 359 2 98511205 Mob: 359 2 9815840 E-mail: vassil_groudev@mzh.government.bg Web: http://www.mzh.government.bg
Ljubo Peno	Macedonia	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy	Senior associate	Aminta Treti 2 , 1000 , Skopje , Macedonia	Tel: 38923113045 Mob: 38970409914 Fax: 38923230429 E-mail: ljubo.peno@mzsv.gov.mk; ljubopeno@gmail.com Web: http://www.mzsv.gov.mk
Gjorgi Bozinov	Macedonia	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy	Head of RD Department	Aminta Treti 2 , 1000 , Skopje , Macedonia	Tel: 38923113045 Mob: 38970409901 Fax: 38923230429 E-mail: gorgi.bozinov@mzsv.gov.mk; bozinovg@yahoo.com Web: http://www.mzsv.gov.mk
Blagota Radulovic	Montenegro	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	General Director	Rimski trg 46 , 81000 , Podgorica , Montenegro	Tel: 38220482271 Mob: 38267576057 Fax: 38220482109 E-mail: Blagota.radulovic@mpr.gov.me Web: http://www.minpolj.gov.me
Darko Konjevic	Montenegro	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	Director General	Rimski trg 46 , 81000 , Podgorica , Montenegro	Tel: 38220482336 Mob: 38269319141 Fax: 38220482109 E-mail: darko.konjevic@mpr.gov.me Web: http://www.minpolj.gov.me
Aleksandar Bogunovic	Serbia	Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection	Head of Unit	Nemanjina 22-26, Belgrade , 11000 , Beograd , Serbia	Tel: 381113348048 Mob: 381666644605 Fax: 381113348048 E-mail: Aleksandar.bogunovic@minpolj.gov.rs Web: http://www.mpzzs.gov.rs
Danilo Golubovic	Serbia	Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection	State Secretary	Nemanjina 22-26, Belgrade , 11000 , Beograd , Serbia	Tel: 381113616574 Mob: 381605555906 Fax: 381113620893 E-mail: danilo.golubovic@minpolj.gov.rs Web: http://www.mpzzs.gov.rs
Milanka Davidovic	Serbia	Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection	Head of Unit (Assistant Minister for International Relations)	Nemanjina 22-26, Belgrade , 11000 , Beograd , Serbia	Tel: 381 11 3611880 Mob: 381 64 8235621 Fax: 381 21 3616-574 E-mail: m.davidovic@minpolj.gov.rs Web: http://www.mpzzs.gov.rs
Genc Prelvukaj	Kosovo*	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development	Political Advisor to the Minister	Mother Teresa 35 , 10000 , Prishitna , Kosovo*	Tel: 3813820038600 Mob: 38649882555 Fax: / E-mail: Genc.prelvukaj@rks-gov.net Web: http://www.mbpzhr-ks.net
Bekim Hoxha	Kosovo*	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development	Director	Mother Teresa 35 , 10000 , Prishitna , Kosovo*	Tel: 38138211827 Mob: 37744117225 Fax: 38188211885 E-mail: Bekim.hoxha@rks-gov.net Web: http://www.mbpzhr-ks.net

DELEGATES AND OBSERVERS

LIST OF THE SWG OBSERVERS

NAME/ SURNAME	COUNTRY	INSTITUTION	POSITION	ADDRESS	CONTACT
Snežana Popovič	**Slovenia**	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food	Head, EU Coordination and International Affairs Service	Dunajska 22 , SI-1000 , Ljubljana , Slovenia	Tel: +386 (0)1 478 9140 E-mail: snezana.popovic@gov.si Web: http://www.mkgp.gov.si
Brina Bitenc Korinšek	**Slovenia**	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food	Secretary, EU Coordination and International Affairs Service	Dunajska 22 , SI-1000 , Ljubljana , Slovenia	Tel: +386 (0)1 478 9129 E-mail: brina.korinsek@gov.si Web: http://www.mkgp.gov.si
Edith Klauser	**Austria**	Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environ-ment and Water Management	Head of Department of Agriculture and Nutrition	Stubenring 12, , AT-1010 , Vienn , Austria	Tel: 43 1 71100 2910 E-mail: edith.klauser@lebensministerium.at Web: http://www.lebensministerium.at
Veronika Neussl	**Austria**	Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environ-ment and Water Management	Division of International Trade Policy	Stubenring 12, , AT-1010 , Vienn , Austria	Tel: +43 1 71100 2839 E-mail: veronika.neussl@lebensministerium.at Web: http://www.lebensministerium.at
Christian Brawenz	**Croatia**	Austrian Embassy in Croatia	Attaché for Agriculture, Forestry and Environment at the Austrian Embassy Agram.	Radnicka 80, Zagreb Tower, 9. Stock, , HR-10000 , Zagreb , Croatia	Tel: +385 1 4862083 E-mail: christian.brawenz@bmeia.gv.at Web: http://www.bmlfuw.gv.at/land/eu-international/Attachees.html
Friedrich Wacker	**Federal Republic of Germany**	Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture	Head of Directorate "International Cooperation, World Food Affairs"	Wilhelmstrasse 54, , 10117 , Berlin , Federal Republic of Germany	Tel: +49 30 18 529-3452 E-mail: UAL62@bmel.bund.de Web: http://www. bmelv.de
Oliver Mellenthin	**Federal Republic of Germany**	Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture	Division 625 "Eastern Europe, Central and East Asia, Enlargement, GFFA"	Wilhelmstrasse 54, , 10117 , Berlin , Federal Republic of Germany	Tel: +49 30 18 529-3144 Mob: +49-160-53 62 07 4 E-mail: Oliver.Mellenthin@bmel.bund.de; 625@bmel.bund.de; Web: http://www. bmelv.de
Katalin Tóth	**Hungary**	Ministry of Agriculture	Deputy State Secretary for Parliamentary, Social and International Affairs	Kossuth Lajos tér 11. , 1055 , Budapest , Hungary	Tel: +36 1 7953433 Fax: +36 1 3020413 E-mail: katalin.toth@vm.gov.hu Web: http://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-agriculture
Balint Illes	**Hungary**	Ministry of Agriculture	Deputy Head of Department, at the Department for EU and FAO Affairs	Kossuth Lajos tér 11. , 1055 , Budapest , Hungary	Tel: +36 1 7953981 Mob: 36-30-397-61-42 Fax: 36 1 3020413 E-mail: balint.illes@vm.gov.hu Web: http://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-agriculture
Davorka Hajdukovic	**Croatia**	Ministry of Agriculture	Assistant Minister, Directorate of Rural Development, ED and International Cooperation	Grada Vukovara 78 , 10000 , Zaghreb , Croatia	Tel: 385-1-6106-908 Mob: 385-99-271-6212 Fax: 385-1-6106-909 E-mail: davorka.hajdukovic@mps.hr Web: http://www.mps.hr
Nada Trgovcevic Letica	**Croatia**	Ministry of Agriculture	Head of Sector for Rural Development	Grada Vukovara 78 , 10000 , Zaghreb , Croatia	Tel: 385-1-6106-70 Mob: 385-99-815-6182 Fax: 385-1-6106-909 E-mail: nada.t-letica@mps.hr Web: http://www.mps.hr
Borislav Brunet	**Republic of Serbia, Autonomous Province of Vojvodina,**	Provincial Secretariat of Agriculture, Water Economy and Forestry	Senior Associate	Blvd. Mihajla Pupina 16 , 21000 , Novi Sad , Republic of Serbia, Autonomous Province of Vojvodina,	Tel: 381 21 4874418 Mob: 381 64 1655796 Fax: 381 21 456040 E-mail: borislav.brunet@vojvodina.gov.rs Web: http://www.psp.vojvodina.gov.rs
Giuseppe Cacopardi	**Italy**	Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry Policies	General Director, Rural Development Directorate	Via XX Settembre, 20 , 00187 , Rome , Italy	Tel: 39 0646654087 Fax: 39 0646654193 E-mail: g.cacopardi@mpaaf.gov.it; disr.direttore@politicheagricole.it; Web: https://www.politicheagricole.it
Graziella Romito	**Italy**	Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry Policies	Head,PIUE II - International Relations and relatiosn with CSA	Via XX Settembre, 20 , 00187 , Rome , Italy	Tel: 39 0646654143 E-mail: piue2@politicheagricole.it; pocoi2@pec.politicheagricole.gov.it; Web: https://www.politicheagricole.it
Massimiliano Piattella	**Italy**	Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry Policies	Rural Development Directorate	Via XX Settembre, 20 , 00187 , Rome , Italy	Mob: 393483849988 E-mail: m.piattella@politicheagricole.it m.piattella@mpaaf.gov.it



The Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group

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Anex 4

SWG OPERATIONAL PLAN 2015

OPERATIONAL PLAN
JANUARY 2015 - DECEMBER 2015

GENERAL SWG /HEAD OFFICE ACTIVITIES

	Description of the activity	Beneficiary/Target group	Location of implementation	Foreseen Outcomes	Relation to the SWG objectives	Date of execution	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
1.1	Steering and facilitation of political/policy discussions regarding SWG	Ministries of Agriculture in SEE	N/A		SWG Objectives 1,2,3,4	throughout the year												
1.2	Fund raising and contacts with donors/partners	Donor community, implementing agencies, governments and EC	N/A			throughout the year												
1.3	Preparation of new SWG regional project proposals	SWG Member Institutions/countries	SWG Head Office			throughout the year												

CORE ACTIVITIES

ASSEMBLY MEETINGS, POLICY AND POLITICAL FORUMS, WORKING GROUPS, EXECUTED IN COOPERATION WITH GIZ (SEF 2 AND HCD 2) ACTIVITIES

	Description of the activity	Beneficiary/Target group	Location of implementation	Foreseen Outcomes	Relation to the SWG objectives	Date of execution	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
2.1	32nd SWG Assembly session (assessments of achievements, replanning of activities)	SWG assembly and partner institutions	Brussels, Belgium	preparatory activites for APF, MM, and post 2015		20-23 April												
2.2	33rd SWG Assembly Session (assessments of achievements, replanning of activities)	SWG assembly and partner institutions	Montenegro		SWG Objectives 2 and 4	8-11 September												
2.3	34th SWG Assembly session (annual reporting, financial reporting and SWG Assembly decisions)	SWG assembly and partner institutions	TBD	Preparation of Operational Plan 2016		01-04 December												
2.4	Agricultural Policy Forum 2015	SEE ministry representatives, academics and various stake holders	Bulgaria	Preparation of the APF Agenda		13-16.October												
2.5	Annual meeting of Ministers of Agriculture from SEE	Ministers of Agriculture from SEE, EC and supporting governments	Albania	Preparation of Conclusion of the Ministers for Agriculture from SEE	SWG Objectives 1,2,3,4	11-13 November												
2.6	SEE Water and Forestry - SWG expert advisory group (Balkan Forest Forum)	SWG EAG Members	Bulgaria		SWG Objectives 2,3,4	26-28 February												
2.7	SEE Working Group on Wine - SWG expert advisory group		Macedonia	first informal meeting Belgrade in May	SWG Objectives 2,3,4	December												
2.7.1	Preparatory meeting for Working Group on Wine	SWG EAG Members	Serbia	provisonal plan	SWG Objectives 2,3,4	June 12-13												
2.8	Study on LFA's in SEE	SWG EAG Members	SEE		SWG Objectives 1,2,3,4	May start												
2.9	SEE Managing Authorities and Paying Agencies	SWG EAG Members	Podgorica, Montenegro		SWG Objectives 1,2,3,4	27th May 13th November												
2.10	SEE Fresh Fruits and Vegetables - SWG expert advisory group	SWG EAG Members	Macedonia		SWG Objectives 1,2,3,4	last week February, 1st week of March												

	Description of the activity	Beneficiary/Target group	Location of implementation	Foreseen Outcomes	Relation to the SWG objectives	Date of execution	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
2.11	SEE Strategy 2020	SWG Member Institutions/countries	SEE countries	Strategy for the SEE region for the period 2014-2020	SWG Objectives 1,2,3,4	throughout the year												
2.12	European Investment Bank Meeting	RD Departments, Ministries of Finances	Luxemburg	Credit line for IPARD		last week of January 2015												
2.13	Global Forum for food and agriculture 2015 - trade and global food security	SWG Member Institutions/countries	Germany	SWG stand at the cooprailton market and Pannel Discussion participation	SWG Objectives 1 and 4	15-18 January												
2.14	Support to the establishment of SEE Extension Services Network	SWG EAG Members	Montenegro or Macedonia	Discussion and follow up of the TAIEX WS October 2013 IPARD 2 Programs	SWG Objectives 1,3 and 4	05-06 March												
2.15	People to people actions				SWG Objective 4	TBC												
2.16	Balkan Rural Development Network Assembly Meetings	BRDN of SEE	Bosnia and Herzegovina		SWG Objectives 2,3 and 4	20-23 April												
2.17	International Soil Conference	WB countries	Albania		SWG Objectives 2,3 and 4	04-07 May												
2.18	Planning for cooperation on Rural Development, Food Safety and Advisory Services	SEE Ministries of Agriculture	Ireland		SWG Objective 1,3 and 4	15-20 November												
2.19	Investment business forum CEI Summit of Prime Ministers		Macedonia		SWG Objective 1,3 and 4	November												

ACTIVITIES RELATED TO COOPERATION WITH FAO

FAO TCP FACILITY - "SUPPORT TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AN INTEGRATED AND INNOVATIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT APPROACH IN DRINA-TARA AND DRINA-SAVA – THE AREA BASED DEVELOPMENT APPROACH"

	Description of the activity	Beneficiary/Target group	Location of implementation	Foreseen Outcomes	Relation to the SWG objectives	Date of execution	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
3,2,1	Training on networking, partnership development	"Drina-Tara" and "Drina-Sava" cross-border regions	Serbia	strengthened networks between grant beneficiaries; increased capacities	SWG Objectives 2,3 and 4	22-23 January												
3,2,2	Practical training on sustainable diversification of rural economy	"Drina-Tara" and "Drina-Sava" cross-border regions	Serbia/Croatia	strengthened capacities of grant beneficiaries and stakeholders		22-28 March												
3,2,3	Preparation of training material	"Drina-Tara" and "Drina-Sava" cross-border regions				by end of April												

GIZ-RURAL DEVELOPMENT ON WATER AND FOREST MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

	Description of the activity	Beneficiary/Target group	Location of implementation	Foreseen Outcomes	Relation to the SWG objectives	Date of execution	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
4.1	Orientation phase for the project impementation		SEE	engagement of experts and definition of operaitonal plan	SWG Objectives 1,3,4	September - January 2016												

ABD EUROPEAN COMMISSION ACTIVITIES

	Description of the activity	Beneficiary/Target group	Location of implementation	Foreseen Outcomes	Relation to the SWG objectives	Date of execution	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
5,1	Organization of Project Steering Group Meeting and WG disscussions on ABDA	WB cross-border areas	Brussels	Conclusions, Reccomendations	SWG Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4	22-23 April												
5,2	Organisation of meetings of Stakeholder Groups and Working Groups	WB cross-border areas	WB cross-border areas	Conclusions; Endorced documents		March												
5,3	Meetings with donor community	WB cross-border areas	WB and EU countries	Possible agreement on finacing of development priorities for the region		February												
5,4	Finalization of grant projects	"Drina-Tara" and "Drina-Sava" cross-border regions	"Drina-Tara" and "Drina-Sava" cross-border regions			by 15th April												
5,5	Promotional activities of "Drina-Tara" , "Drina-Sava"., "Prespa" and "Sharra" products and services throught people to people actions	"Drina-Tara" and "Drina-Sava" cross-border regions	WB cross-border areas															

JRC - ANALYSIS OF AGRICULTURE AND RD POLICIES OF WB COUNTRIES

	Description of the activity	Beneficiary/Target group	Location of implementation	Foreseen Outcomes	Relation to the SWG objectives	Date of execution	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
6,1	Analysis of agriculture and RD policies of WB countries	WB countries	WB countries	study of agriculture and RD policies and recommendations for their alignment with EU CAP 2014-2020	SWG Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4	possible start January												
6,2	Organization of kick - off meeting		Belgium/Macedonia			19 February/19-20 March												
6,3	Organization of interim meeting		BiH or Serbia			10-11 September												
6,4	Dissemination meeting - presentation of results		APF Bulgaria			13-16 October												

TAIEX

	Description of the activity	Beneficiary/Target group	Location of implementation	Foreseen Outcomes	Relation to the SWG objectives	Date of execution	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
7.1	Advisory Services in Agriculture sector	Representatives of the SWG member institutions	Macedonia	national legislation alligned with EU legislation, proper strustures established in WB countries	SWG Objectives 1 and 4	5th February												
7.2	Publicity - IPARD and national RD programme	Representatives of the SWG member institutions	Croatia		SWG Objectives 1, 3 and 4	27-28 April												
7,3	Producers Groups - legal framework, organization structure, roles, good practices	Representatives of the SWG member institutions	Macedonia		SWG Objective 3 and 4	TBC (possibly 1st quarter 2016)												
7.4	FADN	Representatives of the SWG member institutions	Croatia		SWG Objective 3 and 4	22-23 October												
7.5	Registration of plant varietes	Representatives of the SWG member institutions	TBD		SWG Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4	TBD												
7.6	Wine Regulation - PDO, PGI	Representatives of the SWG member institutions	TBC		SWG Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4	TBD												
7.7	Organic Agriculture - new EU regulations	Representatives of the SWG member institutions	TBC		SWG Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4	TBC												
7.8	Definition of areas with natural constraints	Representatives of the SWG member institutions	TBC		SWG Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4	TBC												

GIZ SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT IN SEE

	Description of the activity	Beneficiary/Target group	Location of implementation	Foreseen Outcomes	Relation to the SWG objectives	Date of execution	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
8.1	Orientation phase for the project impementation	Ministries of Agriculture and Environemnt in SEE	SEE countries	Definition of experts and implementation actions	SWG Objectives 1,2,3,4	February - March												
8.2	Kick off meetings	Stakeholder groups from the pilot region, Municipalities of the regions	Adriatic coastal region/ Albania	Introduction of the project and the operational plan to the stakeholders		25th-26th August												
8.3	Tendering procedure for International Expert	N/A	SEE region	engagement of the International expert		in the course of July and August												
8.4	Drafting of ToRs for the regional/ national experts	N/A	SEE region	engagement of the regional experts		in the course of July and August												
8.5	Development of a method for assessment of cross-border adverse environmental and economic (tourism) impacts	Stakeholder groups from the pilot region, Municipalities of the regions, Ministries of Agriculture, Water and Forest Management and Environment	Drina-Tara/ Drina Sava and Sharra Region	Method for assessment has been developed		October 5th final document of the method 2015												
8.5	Conducting of assessment of regional cross-border impact of solid waste management in rural areas	Stakeholder groups from the pilot region, Municipalities of the regions, Ministries of Agriculture, Water and Forest Management and Environment	Drina-Tara/ Drina Sava/ Sharra Region	Assessment/analysis paper of the pilot regions has been developed		Information/results to be conducted till 31st October 2015, final draft November 2nd 2015												
8.7	1st Dialog Platform session for identification of challenges and needs for establishment of cross-border ISWM model	Stakeholder groups from the pilot region, Municipalities of the regions, Ministries of Agriculture, Water and Forest Management and Environment, NALAS	Drina-Tara/ Drina Sava/ Sharra Region	Presentation of the assessment preformed and feedback provided from the stakeholders, identification of challenges and needs for models		2nd - 4th November 2015												

EC -FORSTERING REGIONAL COOPERATION AND BALANCED TERRITORIAL DEVELOPEMNT OF WB COUNTRIES IN THE PROCESS TOWARDS EI INTEGRATION

	Description of the activity	Beneficiary/Target group	Location of implementation	Foreseen Outcomes	Relation to the SWG objectives	Date of execution	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
9.1	Facilitation of the economic development of the WB region throught intensive political and policy discussions	Ministries of Agriculture and WB cross-border areas	WB countries	policy papers	SWG Objectives 1, 2,3 and 4	June - December												
9.2	Implementation of capacity building measures for preparation of relevant projects with adequate quality	WB cross-border areas	WB countries	training material and project proposals	SWG Objectives 2,3 and 4	June - December												
9.3	Provision of consultancy support to stakeholders for preparation of project proposals for different calls with special emphasis on Calls within IPA II	WB cross-border areas	WB countries	project proposals	SWG Objectives 2,3 and 4	June - December												
9.4	Performance of publicity activities related to available funding	WB cross-border areas	WB countries	informative documents, project proposals	SWG Objectives 2,3 and 4	June - December												
9.5	Organization of people-to-people actions	WB cross-border areas	WB countries	reports, promotional material, MoUs, contracts etc.	SWG Objectives 2,3 and 4	June - December												
9.6	Participation in meetings with other regional structures	WB cross-border areas	WB countries	reports	SWG Objectives 2,3 and 4	June - December												
9.7	Initiation of the assessment of the situation, development potentials and strategic planning of the economic development of two additional cross border areas	WB cross-border areas	"Neretva", "Prokletije" and "Pcinja"	baseline analysis and strategic developemnt frameworks	SWG Objectives 2,3 and 4	June - December												

OTHER ACTIVITIES

	Description of the activity	Beneficiary/Target group	Location of implementation	Foreseen Outcomes	Relation to the SWG objectives	Date of execution	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
10.1	World plowing competition	SWG Member Institutions/countries	Denmark		SWG Objective 4	3-4 October												

EXPLANATION OF THE DIFFERENT COLORS

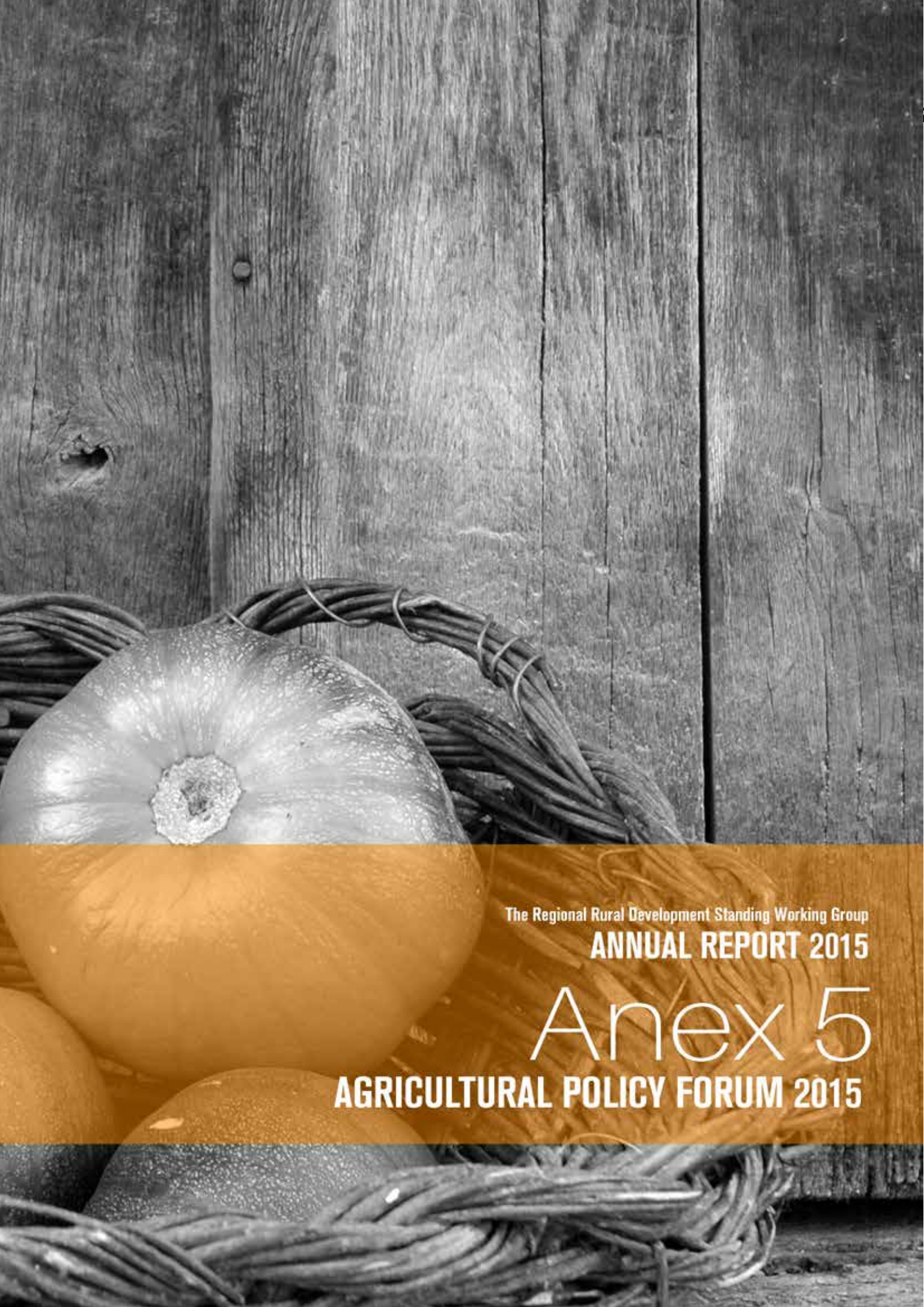
- Preparation period
- Execution period
- Time for follow up activities after the execution

- Ongoing Activities
- Finished Activities
- Cancelled activities
- Long Term activities
- Postponed activities
- New activities

SWG OBJECTIVES:

- To improve the common understanding of EU agriculture and rural devel opment policies
- To assist the improvement of implementation structures and systems for agriculture and rural development in rural areas, with specific emphasis on cross border cooperation
- To improve the understanding and use of implementation tools for agri culture and rural development
- To identify and share information and application of good practice in agriculture and rural development to broaden the rural agenda

Kosovo "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."*



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Anex 5

AGRICULTURAL POLICY FORUM 2015

AGRICULTURAL POLICY FORUM 2015

MODERN RURAL POLICY: COMPETITIVENESS, INVESTMENT AND WELL-BEING IN RURAL REGIONS OF SOUTH EAST EUROPE

14TH – 15TH OCTOBER 2015
PRAVETS, BULGARIA

PRAVETS AGENDA 2015

The 15th Agricultural Policy Forum (APF), furthermore referred as the "Forum", held in Pravets, Bulgaria in the period 14th – 15th October 2015, provided an opportunity to review the accomplishments achieved by the APF process over the past period, while considering the challenges and opportunities for the development of agriculture and rural areas in South Eastern Europe (SEE) over the period up to 2020.

The Forum promoted and stimulated debate and discussion on policy issues among policy makers, governmental and non-governmental organizations from the agriculture and rural development, water and forestry sectors in SEE, relevant international policy and development institutions, national, regional and international experts and academics in order to provide technical background on the regional aspects of the European Union (EU) integration process.

In a time where the EU integration process has become inert with an equivocal perspective for accession of EU candidate and potential candidate countries from the SEE region, in particular the Western Balkan (WB) countries, the Forum addressed and provides guidance on agricultural and rural development policy in the context of regional cooperation.

This 2015 Pravets Agenda resumes the main outputs from these discussions in the plenary and working group sessions.

The Forum was informed about the **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2020** and its implementation. The new CAP maintains the two pillars, but increases the links between them, thus offering a more holistic and integrated approach to policy support. Specifically it introduces a new architecture of direct payments; better targeted, more equitable and greener, an enhanced safety net and strengthened rural development. Under the **Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance in Rural Development (IPARD)**, the Forum was updated about the progress in preparation for implementation, which is expected to be accomplished during the coming months with a perspective of starting programme implementation during the second half of 2016.

The Forum emphasised that, while the objective of IPARD is first of all to give the candidate countries direct experience in managing EU funds, it also contributes to improve food quality and safety standards in the region as well as increasing prosperity and quality of life in rural areas.

The Forum encouraged all the governments of Western Balkan (WB) countries to maintain committed in aligning their agricultural policies with the CAP in order to modernise and to improve the competitiveness of their agricultural sectors. There is an obvious need for continuous monitoring of the development of agricultural policies at the regional level and review of the progress towards EU policies. The established **regional policy analysis platform** is now delivering its second report. The overview places special emphasis on the comparison of agriculture policies within the region as well as with the EU.

The Forum reviewed **the experiences of EU member states (Bulgaria)** in a timeframe starting from the Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (SAPARD) to the new Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. Bulgaria has achieved significant experience, knowledge and capacities in the field of EU policy implementation. Positive results have been achieved in respect to agriculture, rural development, forestry and environmental protection.

The Forum acknowledged the cooperation between the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) and the implementation of the **South East Europe 2020 Strategy**. The SEE 2020 strategy, which articulates a shared vision for jobs and prosperity in the region, acknowledges the importance of environmental sustainability, along with regional integration, innovation, skills and governance, as a core pillar of growth and development as well as critical elements of the EU accession process.

The Forum endorsed the achievements on the implementation of the **Area Based Development (ABD) approach in selected rural cross-border areas of the Western Balkan countries**. The Strategies and related Programmes for integrated economic development of each particular cross-border rural areas provide

guidance for planning, development and implementation of priority actions/ projects. The Forum recommended the importance of attracting additional support to achieve the development goals of rural cross border regions.
In respect to **community initiatives**, the Forum recognized the importance of developing the capacity of the LAG's. A case study outlining the experience of an Irish LAG delivering the LEADER approach for over twenty years was reviewed by the Forum. The continuous development of the capacities of the LAG, Managing Authorities and potential beneficiaries was identified as key elements in the successful implementation of LEADER. Major issues for the LAGs include the small scale of budgets and delays in the funding between Programmes. Furthermore, the Forum agreed that there is a need to develop cooperation between the Authorities and LAGs in the South Eastern Europe and experienced Authorities and LAGs in the EU to share best practice, experience and ideas.

On developing the geographic information system (GIS) the Forum debated the proposal to develop EU compatible methodology for mapping Areas with Natural Constraints (ANC) in the Western Balkans to respond to regional and country level specific conditions. The Forum strongly recommended that this policy issue needs to be further elaborated in order to start with its implementation.

The Forum debated in detail on the following three policy topics relevant to the SEE countries:

Focus topic 1.
Area Based Development (ABD) approach in rural cross-border areas

The structures for implementation of the ABD approach in four cross-border areas are consolidated with balanced representation of local authorities, civil and business sector.
Considering the fact that most of the available support instruments on cross-border/ trans-national level mainly target civil sector and local authorities, the Forum encouraged the SWG and its Member institutions to continue to seek support from these instruments with particular focus on targeting small entrepreneurs operating in rural cross-border regions.
Experience shows that private businesses are interested in developing business partnerships and quality oriented short value chains.

In this regard the Forum recommends that:

- The future actions targeting rural cross-border areas, should build on the ABD programming documents;
- Possible future grants schemes should focus on rural development with emphasis on sustainable management and use of natural resources;
- Coordination of local and national authorities in the programming process of the rural development is of crucial importance;
- Political commitment supported with financial contribution by the WB Governments will boost the sustainable economic development of rural cross-border areas.

Focus topic 2.
Rural development via Natural resource management

The Forum stressed the importance on improvement of the regional capacities for the regional sustainable management of forest and water resources within the framework of developing rural areas. Lack of proper correlation among the management of natural resources, agriculture and environment causes additional constraints to the rural development in these countries; consequently affecting the overall economic growth and prosperity for EU integration of the WB candidate and potential candidate countries.
The Forum recommended that regional inter-sectoral cooperation and coordination at the interface among rural development, agriculture, forest and water would contribute to the regional strategy processes and strengthen the interlinkages among sectors concerning preservation and use of natural resources for the purpose of rural and economic development of the regions.

The Forum highlighted that development of evidence-based policy is of a need, to address the current situation and to provide policy recommendations in respect to the EU accession process of the WB countries, in order to integrate the environmental and socio-economic objectives into the agriculture and rural development policies.
The rural areas in the South Eastern Europe are facing a continuing depopulation followed by social and economic degradation. Local people should use, control, and manage the other resources than land such as water, forests and wildlife which are equally important to the functioning of rural economies. Along with the Area Based

Development approach, the Forum recommended implementation of integrated measures in cross-border regions for the purpose of income generation and diversification, based on the use of natural resources in cross-border regions.

Focus topic 3. Analysis of agriculture and rural development policies in Western Balkans

WB countries are adopting the main strategic documents for the period 2015-2020 where objectives and proposed actions are mostly compliant with the EU integration Agenda. New policies have been introduced in recent years and visible progress is witnessed in terms of content and structure. However, while the strategies include CAP like objectives,planned policy measures are not fully in line with those objectives.
Some policy measures, incompatible with the CAP (output payments, input subsidies), are still used and rural development is still a less important part of policy. Consistent implementation of the objectives and actions set out in the Strategies is required by Governments in order to achieve policy consistency with the EU. Therefore, the Forum strongly recommended formulation and implementation of concrete Action Plans to the strategic documents.
IPARD funding is still a new experience for most of the countries. Until now the absorption of funding is low due to limited country resources as well as the complexity of EU procedures and requirements. In this context, the Forum stressed that the attention should be given to addressing the constraints hampering the absorption of IPARD funds at country level.
The Forum recommended that governments in WB should increasingly rely on evidence based policymaking and to involve all stakeholders in policy formulation. In this regard the Forum welcomed the importance of the monitoring and analytical work of the regional policy analysis platform and recommends that the work of the platform is strengthened in the future.

The Forum agreed that:

- The Agenda will be presented and discussed at the 9th Annual Working Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from South Eastern Europe on 12th November 2015 in Tirana, Albania.
- The Agenda will be conveyed to the EU institutions, UN agencies and other international institutions.
- The 16th Agricultural Policy Forum will take place in the autumn of 2016 in Albania, which holds the SWG Presidency for 2016.

The Agricultural Policy Forum 2015 in Pravets was held under the joint auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food of Republic of Bulgaria and the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in South-Eastern Europe.

The participants of the Agricultural Policy Forum 2015 highly appreciated the support provided by the convening institutions and organisations: the European Commission (DG NEAR, DG Agriculture and Rural Development, JRC-IPTS), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) commissioned by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nations (FAO UN) and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC).

The Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group

ANNUAL REPORT 2015

Anex 6

CONCLUSIONS OF THE MINISTERIAL MEETING 2015

CONCLUSIONS OF THE MINISTERIAL MEETING

MINISTERS/ HEADS OF DELEGATIONS RESPONSIBLE FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

CONVENED IN TIRANA, REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA NOVEMBER 12th 2015

The Ministers of Agriculture from South Eastern Europe (SEE) and the Heads of Delegations, gathered on 12th of November 2015 in Tirana at the 9th Annual Working Meeting organized under the joint auspices of the Ministries of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration of the Republic of Albania and the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in South Eastern Europe, to proclaim that the main objectives set during the last meeting in November 2014 have been achieved and reaffirm their determination to continue developing the regional cooperation in the field of agriculture and rural development.
As an expressed commitment of the participating countries and based on the established institute of having an Annual Ministerial Meetings of the Ministers of Agriculture of the South Eastern Europe (SEE) Countries, the Ministers and Heads of Delegations had an open discussion about the common interests of the countries in the SEE region and to reconcile differing issues and views.
The cooperation of the Ministries of Agriculture from SEE continues to focus on regional activities and initiatives within the SWG, as a platform for networking and regional cooperation, striving at strengthening the regional partnership.

CONCLUSIONS OF 9th ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MINISTERS OF AGRICULTURE OF SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

We, the Ministers and Head of Delegations of the Ministries of Agriculture from SEE have gathered in Tirana, Republic of Albania to discuss the future developments for agriculture and rural development sectors in SEE region and review the process of the regional cooperation in the given field. We reconfirm our commitment and willingness to strive towards the mutual cooperation agenda and shared vision for better future in our region.

IN PARTICULAR:

1. We evoke the importance of the European Union (EU) integration process for the Western Balkan counties and recall the commit ment towards coherent implementation of enlargement criteria and conditionality in becoming EU members. In this regard, the EU member countries from the SEE region reconfirm their assurance to strengthening regional cooperation and further support the efforts for the process of EU approximation of the agriculture and rural development of the WB countries.
2. We reconfirm our commitment and support to the EU integration process and to continue our efforts in streamlining our national agriculture and rural development policies with the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) of the EU during the period 2014-2020. We strive for achieving successful enlargement policy, in particular under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) 2014-2020 by integrating the reform and development of our agendas in the given sectors.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE MINISTERIAL MEETING

3. We express our appreciation for the EU support for rural development through the IPARD instrument in the pre-accession period, providing respected assistance for gaining experience in designing EU compatible rural development programs and in managing EU funds. Hereof, we, endorse our liability to cooperate and exchange our experiences in preparing for, and implementing the IPARD programs with a view to elevate the benefit of this instrument.

4. We welcome the recommendations outlined in the Agricultural Policy Forum (APF) - Pravets Agenda 2015. We especially underscore the importance of the topics discussed (streamlining of agriculture and rural development policies, area based development approach and rural development through natural resource management), in specific:

   - We welcome the establishment of the regional platform for cooperation among the academic institutions and the Ministries of Agriculture in order to increase the capacity to objectively analyze agricultural and rural development challenges and policy performance;

   - We applaud the achievements made under the Area Based Development (ABD) approach in the selected pilot regions and confirm our political support to the initiatives and activities taken to facilitate a sustainable socio-economic development in the cross-border rural areas of the SEE region. Furthermore, we remain committed to provide political, financial and technical support to the implementation of a multi-annual area based development program during the 2014-2020 period. In addition, we are ready to enlarge our cooperation in all other horizontal issues under the authority of our institutions and assist the SWG in attracting additional support to achieve the development goals of rural cross border regions;

   - We support the joint efforts of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and the SWG in addressing the measures of the South Eastern European Strategy 2020 regarding free trade area, competitiveness, environment and natural resources management of the rural areas;

   - We stress the importance on developing the policy compatible to EU in regard to delineation of Areas with Natural Constraints (ANC) in the Western Balkans to respond to regional and country level specific conditions;

   - We acknowledge the need for regional inter-sectoral cooperation and coordination at the interface among rural development, agriculture, forest and water, which will contribute to the regional strategy processes and strengthen the interlinkages among sectors concerning preservation and use of natural resources for the purpose of rural and economic development of the regions;

   - We welcome the recommendation on creating evidence based policymaking and to involve all stakeholders in policy formulation, particularly the importance of the monitoring and analytical work of the regional policy analysis platform and recommends that the work of the platform is strengthened in the future.

5. We endorse the report of the Secretary General on the achievements and results of the SWG work for the year of 2015 and the achievements in the past decade. We express our gratitude for the responsibilities and an equitable and appropriate contribution to the regional effort that SWG strives to tackle on agriculture and rural development issues in SEE region. We stress the importance of this organization in ensuring ownership in the regional cooperation and the regional integration efforts, based on common interests, in view of the association and accession of the Western Balkan countries into EU.

6. We call upon International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM) to explore the possibilities to involve the countries participating in SWG work into the research network of CIHEAM and to determine their status within the organization

7. We congratulate the Ministry of Agriculture and Food of Republic of Bulgaria for successfully holding the Presidency of the SWG Assembly during the year 2015.

   The SWG Presidency and the duties for the year of 2016 have been handed over from the current Presidency – the Ministry of Agriculture and Food of Republic of Bulgaria to the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration of Republic of Albania.
   The 16th Agricultural Policy Forum in South Eastern Europe will be held in Republic of Albania in autumn 2016.

8. We highly appreciate the support provided by the convening organizations and institutions: the European Commission (DG AGRI, DG NEAR, JRC/IPTS), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM) and Regional Cooperation Council (RCC).

We express our appreciation for the kind hospitality provided to us by the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration of Republic of Albania. At this meeting in Tirana, we have once again reviewed and defined the course for regional cooperation for the years ahead. In this context, the SWG will remain an essential tool for advocating policy dialogue and regional cooperation, with continues support to the agriculture and rural development sector of SEE countries during the EU integration process.

PRESENT REPRESENTATIVES OF INSTITUTIONS DURING THE MEETING

SWG MEMBERS INSTITUTIONS

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND WATER ADMINISTRATION, REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN TRADE AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND WATER MANAGEMENT, REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD, REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE FORESTRY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT, KOSOVO*

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT, MONTENEGRO

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

SWG OBSERVER INSTITUTIONS

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, HUNGARY

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURAL FOOD AND FORESTRY POLICIES, REPUBLIC OF ITALY

SWG NON-MEMBERS INSTITUTIONS

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT, ROMANIA

MINISTRY OF FOOD, AGRICULTURE AND LIVESTOCK, REPUBLIC OF TURKEY

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

EUROPEAN COMMISSION (EC)

DEUTSCHE GESELLSCHAFT FUER INTERNATIONALE ZUSAMMENARBEIT (GIZ), COMMISSIONED BY THE FEDERAL MINISTRY FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF GERMANY (BMZ)

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS (UN FAO)

REGIONAL COOPERATION COUNCIL (RCC)

INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR ADVANCED MEDITERRANEAN AGRONOMIC STUDIES (CIHEAM)

SWG Head Office/Secretariat
Blvd. Goce Delcev 18,
Macedonian Television Building Floor 12,
1000 Skopje, Macedonia
www.seerural.org

Some photos in this Annual Report are taken by
Suzana Djordjevic - Milosevic, Simo Maric & "Moba" - Ljig