

Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group

Conference of Agriculture Ministers, 2016

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MINISTER'S SPEECH

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of the Republic of Srpska, Stevo Mirjanić, PhD

Dear Minister, the host of this conference, distinguished Ministers and Ministry representatives, dear members and representatives of the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group, representatives of international organizations and other participants,

Allow me to express warm regards on behalf of the Republic of Srpska Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management and express our satisfaction for being able to attend the tenth meeting of the regional ministers.

The Republic of Srpska Government expresses its firm determination to continue on the EU accession path, while complying with the Copenhagen criteria that require the establishment of a functioning market economy of candidate countries, with the capacity of their producers to cope with competitive pressures and market forces within the European Union. In that sense, the Republic of Srpska Government held a position that the products with demonstrated special sensitivity for which it was agreed that the customs protection should remain in effect until the European Union accession of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and which are not the subject of the trade arrangement under the SAA should not be the subject of negotiation discussions between the BiH delegation and EC Delegation concerning the signature of the Protocol to the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Communities, of the one part, and BiH, of the other part, in order to take into account the European Union accession of the Republic of Croatia.

Although the abovementioned positions were not accepted in the course of agreeing upon the Protocol, the Republic of Srpska, as well as representatives of agricultural entities in the Republic of Srpska, have given their permission to the signature of the Protocol to the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, with a view to the promise given personally by Minister Schmidt and EU Delegation representatives, relating to:

- The implementation of an objective impact assessment of the adapted Stabilisation and Association Agreement affecting the foreign trade balance and incomes of agricultural producers. Later on, the World Bank team was deployed to complete this assignment, however their team has not submitted any results of the ongoing assessment to date.
- Enabling land transit of animal origin products through EU countries to markets of third countries, like Turkey, etc.
- Support to agricultural producers in BiH in the context of mitigating negative effects of the implementation that the adapted agreement will have on the BiH production sector.

We genuinely believe that this conference and discussions we are about to have can be an additional appeal to the European partners to take into account this difficult market position facing the farmers both in BiH and in the neighbouring countries, and particularly an appeal towards understanding the complex political context in the Balkan countries and separation of the given political context from the economic conditions prevailing in the agricultural sector.

The Republic of Srpska will continue to use and support the SWG as a platform that enables the expression of general interests, regional networking and a way to strengthen mutual understanding, cooperation, exchange of experiences. In that sense, we believe that this regional network serves as an

opportunity for the region as well as for the joint position at the European market and European funds and that in that sense it should have greater ambitions and more significant projects.

The balanced integrated rural development is one of the strategic goals of agricultural and rural development of the Republic of Srpska. Considering that urban areas have no possibility to absorb rural population in view of employment and housing, the solutions should be sought in making efforts to improve the rural livelihoods and employment and enabling favourable conditions for the sustainable economic development. Consequently, the Republic of Srpska Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management expresses readiness to support the continuation of cross-border activities through the Area Based Approach, for identified cross-border regions, and at the same time, we invite the representatives of the European Commission to once again consider the possibility of providing greater support to such projects that enable the accomplishment of development goals in the cross-border rural areas even with the modest amount of funds. The Area Based Development has practically proven to be one of the methods of cross-border cooperation that affects the strengthening of rural capacities at the local level, improvement of market linkages between the urban and rural areas as well as strengthening physical and institutional infrastructure in the rural areas.

For the purpose of more efficient continuation of the European integration processes in the agricultural and rural development sector, that is currently stagnating in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we believe that a change is needed in the approach for resolving pending issues in BiH, as follows:

- To observe the constitutional competences in BiH in the area of agricultural policy and rural development policy,
- To create the required structures to implement the essence of IPARD, which practically means the separation of institutional and legislative reforms from development and investment projects and programmes intended for individual beneficiaries,
- To take into account the actual sector development priorities and restrictions in terms of specific administrative structure and separation of competences,
- To simplify the bureaucratic processes in the implementation of support programmes.

Finally, we would like to thank the host country for the hospitality as well as to the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group for coordination of the conference, hoping that this Ministerial Conference will become the new incentive for all forms of regional networking in the future period, and that it will give the mandate to the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group to undertake initiatives in the direction of better regional cooperation and better strategic positioning of the region of South-Eastern Europe in the coming period both in the area of EU integrations and in the area of fostering and promoting regional identity and specific features.

Respectfully,

Minister, Stevo Mirjanić, PhD

Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina