

**Conclusions of the Ministerial Meeting
of the Ministers/ Heads of Delegations responsible for agriculture and rural development in South
Eastern Europe
Convened in Becici, Montenegro
November 25th 2016**

The Ministers of Agriculture from South Eastern Europe (SEE) and the Heads of Delegations, gathered on 25th of November 2016 in Becici at the 10th Annual Working Meeting organized under the joint auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Montenegro and the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in South Eastern Europe, to review the achievement of the objectives set during the last meeting in November 2015 and recommit themselves to the pursuit of a more sustainable development pathway in the field of agriculture and rural development.

As an expressed commitment of the participating countries and based on the established platform of having Annual Ministerial Meetings of the Ministers of Agriculture of the South-Eastern Europe (SEE) Countries, the Ministers and Heads of Delegations deliberated on pertinent issues of how countries in the SEE region can harmonise frameworks and establish common mechanisms of cooperation to achieve collective goals of sustainable development and transformation.

The cooperation of the Ministries of Agriculture from SEE remains evident through the success of the regional activities and initiatives instigated within the SWG, as a platform for networking and regional cooperation, striving for fortifying regional partnerships.

**CONCLUSIONS OF 10th ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MINISTERS OF AGRICULTURE OF SOUTH
EASTERN EUROPE**

We, the Ministers of Agriculture of South Eastern European countries:

GATHERED in Becici, Montenegro 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 aim towards the cooperation agenda and shared vision for better future in our region.

RECOGNIZE the significance of the European Union (EU) integration process for the Western Balkan countries, reflecting the agriculture and rural development progress, and pursue successful enlargement policy that complies with the Copenhagen criteria and the conditionality of the Stabilization and Association Process.

STRESS the meaning of intelligible support from the EU on implementation of enlargement criteria and conditionality in becoming EU members, which consequently reflects to the sustainable development, competitiveness of the regional markets and undermines the potential of the agricultural and rural development sectors in transformation and generation of economic growth in the Western Balkans.

COMMIT in synchronizing national agriculture and rural development policies with the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) of the EU for the 2014-2020 period. Thru amalgamating the reform and development agendas in the agriculture and rural development sector under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) 2014-2020 we reiterate the conclusive assurance towards enlargement.

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ARE DEDICATED to sculpte rural development programs and managing funds through the implementation of the IPARD instrument in the pre-accession period, whilst resolving obstacles for accreditation related to all IPARD structures and bodies. We strive to elevate the benefit of this instrument for investments but also for developing agriculture and rural areas with the characteristics of the SEE countries, i.e. very small entities and inefficient value chains.

WELCOME the recommendations outlined in the Agricultural Policy Forum (APF) - Tirana Agenda 2016. We especially underscore the importance of the matters deliberated, in specific:

- The need to improve competitiveness of the agri-food sectors and the rural economy and to address the constraints of small farms and rural businesses.
- To actively pursue harmonization of trade policies and marketing standards to facilitate regional business cooperation, product development and improvement of the value chains, due to the small size of the agri-food sectors in the SEE countries.
- The take towards enhancement of partnership based cooperation and networking between the rural civil society sector and local and national governments for achieving sustainable rural livelihoods.
- Provision of higher priority to IPARD measures facilitating cooperation among small farmers and businesses.
- The need for strengthening water, forestry and soil policy implementation in the SEE region to uphold the progress towards EU.
- To strengthen the cooperation of ABD structures in the regions with regional and national authorities for streamlining the planning of financial support to economic development of cross-border areas.

ENDORSE the report of the Secretary General on the achievements and results of the SWG work for the year of 2016 and the overall triumphs in the span of its operations. We voice our appreciation for the immense efforts and an impartial impact that SWG has fetched upon by facilitating and promoting agriculture and rural development issues in SEE region. We stress the need of improved coordination and support among the Ministries and member countries in ensuring that this organization remains devoted to the regional ownership and integration efforts to the scope of realizing sustainable regional development, in view of the association and accession of the Western Balkan countries into EU.

WELCOME the intention of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) to integrate and uphold the agriculture and rural development topics within the Programming Document 2017-2019 of the SEE 2020 Strategy framework and implementation processes. Rural development and natural resource management are essential for economic prosperity of the region. Integration of the sustainable management of natural assets across the rural activities reflects to the recognition and greater awareness of the economic, social and cultural value of natural resources (agriculture, soil, biodiversity, water and forestry).

HIGHLIGHT the importance of the Cork 2.0 Declaration 2016 on the future of EU Rural Development Policy setting out a renewed approach for tackling the multiple challenges and the opportunities facing rural communities and farming. Hence, we emphasize and call upon the EU member states to consider the EU candidate and potential candidate countries from the Western Balkans in the future when discussing current and future challenges of farming and rural areas, as well as potential policy responses.

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EMPHASIZE the importance of strategic partnership with international organizations and associates in the pursuit of the regional agenda on sustainable development, recognizing agriculture's important contribution to the 2030 Agenda, in addition to the prevailing activities, and call upon their continued commitment of the agriculture and rural development sectors.

CONGRATULATE the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration of Republic of Albania for successfully holding the Presidency of the SWG Assembly during the year 2016.

The SWG Presidency and the duties for the year of 2017 have been handed over from the current Presidency – the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration of Republic of Albania to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Montenegro.

The 17th Agricultural Policy Forum in South Eastern Europe will be held in Montenegro in autumn 2017.

APPRECIATE the support provided by all participating Governments, members and observers of the SWG, as well as convening organizations and institutions, in particularly:

the line Ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development, the European Commission (DG AGRI, DG NEAR, JRC/IPTS), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the German Federal Government (BMZ and BMEL), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and Regional Cooperation Council (RCC).

VOICE our appreciation for the kind hospitality provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Montenegro. Anew, we have appraised the sequence for regional cooperation and outlined the common objectives for onward encounters. The SWG continues to serve as a vital mechanism all with the objective of enhancing the integration of sustainable development principles into regional development practice 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 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

The Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, Republic of Austria

Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Federal Republic of Germany

Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies, Republic of Italy

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)

* "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."