South Eastern Europe

SWG RRD

Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group

2017

ANNUAL REPORT

South Eastern Europe

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Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group

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

2017
ANNUAL REPORT

December 2017

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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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FORWARD

Within EU enlargement process and welcoming South Eastern European (SEE) countries, particularly the Western Balkans (WB), into full membership, regional cooperation is seen as basis for its successful implementation and essential for future development of enlarged European Union. Taking into consideration that the region is dominantly rural, agriculture plays a vital role in the development of the WB and its regional economy.

Overall, regional approach as an integrated framework, allows SEE countries to identify needs and allocate available resources thus enabling the region to enjoy a sustainable environment and optimal socio-economic development. This strategic mode enables facilitation of joint initiatives and cooperation of addressing both national and regional priorities and needs. In terms of cooperation, regional initiatives are also building upon the experiences of European Union approaches and South-East Europe integration requirement strategies. In this context, regional cooperation represents one step forward from way of solving problems and meeting challenges to an innovative and potentially powerful method of promoting European integration and territorial cooperation while preserving the subsidiarity, flexibility and inclusiveness essential for efficient, effective and popular interventions

The SWG, as a regional structure, will remain fully committed in supporting the SEE countries during the EU approximation aspirations, as well as implementing and developing regional activities and programs to pursue common goals through regional cooperation. We have dedicated our self towards facilitation and strengthening of our counties to improve negotiating positions for joining the EU, to benefit from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and to facilitate the shift to EU-style policies.

For more than a decade, we are striving to maintain incentive and uplift regional and national players in the region in working together and creating an environment that will ease the EU integration process. Among our work we have been strongly dedicated in creating numerous policy recommendations on agriculture, rural and economic development, areas with natural constrains, LEADER approach and natural resource management. All of the above-mentioned initiatives have been done and closely coordinated with regional expert advisory working groups (REAWG). REAWG has been created for each of the regional policy topics as a technical back up of the evidence based policy making process in the region. The idea behind the aforementioned actions was to support the higher quality decision making, as well as streamlined policy and program development processes and increased efficiency in and effectiveness of service delivery.
The objective of the regional coordination on evidence based policy is mainly to: enhance dialogue between the EU and the SEE countries and to strengthen regional coordination in agriculture, rural development and environment; to support policy makers to adopt EU best practices and to be able to respond more effectively to the existing challenges in management of agriculture, rural development and natural resources.

In the past twelve months, SWG aimed at finding strategic solutions to the problems of local development in conjunction with regional processes and supporting grassroots initiatives. The goal of regional development also defines sustainable and dynamic development of all areas within a country and of a cross-border character. Our local work was followed in accordance with the profile of each cross-border area, overcoming of inter-regional disparities in the levels of socio-economic development to ensure enhancement of human wellbeing levels irrespective of place of residence. The strategy is placed on Area-Based Development (ABD) approach, which as a framework it has been established and functional since 2012. ABD framework focuses on a geographical territory development, based on analysis and identification of the given area peculiarities, addressing area- specific problems through inclusive, participatory, integrated and flexible approaches with particular support to common initiative.

In respect to territorial and local development in the cross-border areas, grants schemes, people to people actions and networking activities have been prepared restlessly on behalf of all our regional ABD offices in the SEE. Inspiring the rural communities on diversification of economic activities and income generation in the rural areas has been one of our major priorities. Our goal has been to encourage a wide range of economic activities in rural areas, including development of small businesses in the cross-border settlements, touristic initiatives, sustainable use of water, woods and forestry, and various cultural deeds. It will assist in identifying potential and existing local entrepreneurs, promote investment and provide employment opportunities for the rural community. Farm, agro and rural entrepreneurship represent solid potential and an effective means for promoting rural economy development and its long-term sustainability.

Given the complexity of such challenges, development approaches must be interdisciplinary and holistic rather than reductionist: environmental issues cannot be isolated from social or economic problems such as poverty and social distress. SWG takes such an approach using ABD framework to explore the multidimensional aspects of livelihoods for consideration of economic diversification as a development strategy for rural living in a cross-border areas of SEE region. Our approaches and way of work are of a multidimensional character and emphasize strategies that simultaneously improve current and future proficiency, lessen poverty, and provide environmental protection without destabilization, but most importantly strengthening, the resilience of the most vulnerable groups in the cross-border local communities in the SEE region.
We remain committed to achieving the priorities of the SEE countries and I am confident that with the work undertaken by the SWG Secretariat and regional offices, the objectives of the regional agenda will be achieved accordingly.

Boban Ilic
SWG Secretary General

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SUMMARY

The Annual Report for the year of 2017 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 2017 have been carried out in accordance to the SWG Strategic and Operational Plan (SOP) for the midterm period of 2016-2020.

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 development.

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 2017.

The Annual report 2017 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 2017

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 rural development 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 ractice 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

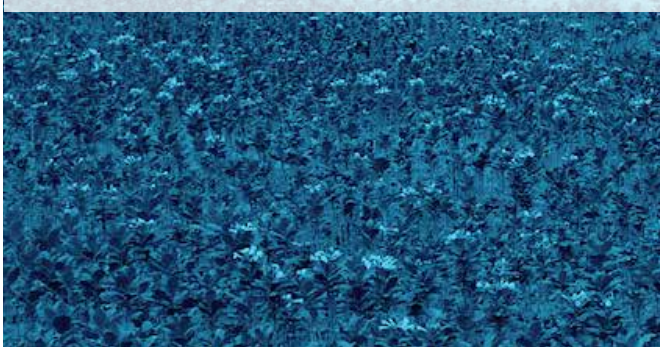
F1. Networking and enhancing regional cooperation

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 AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT
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

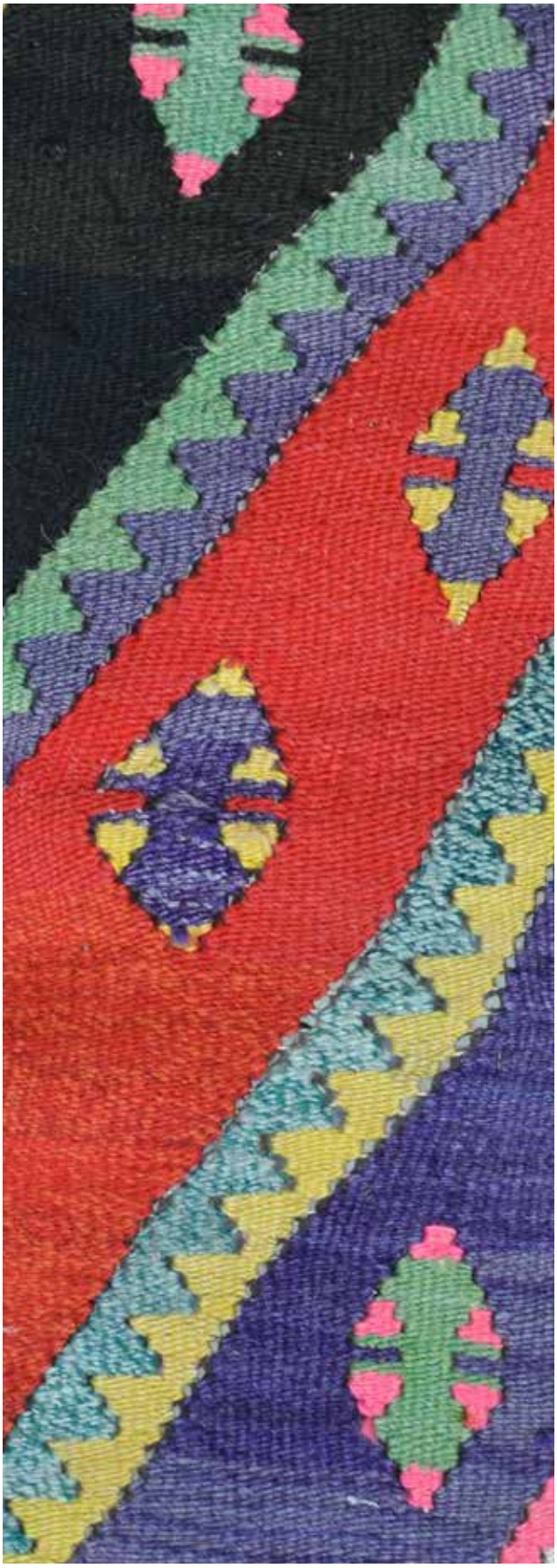
FEDERAL MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, WATER MANAGEMENT AND FORESTRY
FEDERATION OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND WATER ECONOMY
REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT
MONTENEGRO

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND WATER ECONOMY
REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT
KOSOVO*



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SWG OBSERVERS

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

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD
REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

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

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE
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

I. AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

I.I AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUES

In the reporting period SWG continued putting in function its policy dialogue structures, serving as a backbone for common policy recommendations and crosscutting networking activities.

Thus, the 17th **Agricultural Policy Forum (APF)** was jointly organized by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Montenegro and the SWG in Podgorica, on 11 and 12 October. It gathered more than 130 participants from 16 countries/territories of SEE and beyond, representing relevant public authorities, civil and private sector. It addressed the need for adjusting the agricultural and rural development policies in SEE in line with the EU requirements and for improving competitiveness of the rural economy considering the farm structure in the Western Balkans. APF 2017 stressed the existing agricultural products trade barriers and the management of natural resources in the region. IPARD as an instrument for sustainable rural development was elaborated, with special focus on the importance of the LEADER approach.

Recommendations were formulated in respect to the topics discussed and derived as the **2017 Podgorica Agenda** (Annex 6). The 2017 Podgorica Agenda resumes the main outputs from discussions in the different plenary and working group sessions. Some of the messages that came out of the Forum relate to the need for: improvement of the competitiveness of small rural businesses by investments, and by increasing their level of competence for business management and cooperation, thus improving their ability to integrate in short value chains; strengthened cooperation and exchange of experience among WB countries/territories on the implementation of IPARD, giving higher priority to measures facilitating cooperation among small farmers and businesses; continued work on the introduction of LEADER by strengthening capacities of relevant institutions, awareness raising for the LEADER approach and setting up of local action groups; enabling employment and investments opportunities in the rural areas, as well as proper use and management of natural resources to reduce rural outmigration; accelerated harmonization of the relevant trade regulation with the EU and conclude regional/bilateral agreement/s about mutual recognition of certificates.

Pursuing this further, in November 2017 during the 11th Annual Meeting of the Ministers for Agriculture from South East Europe the Ministers and Heads of Delegations discussed and agreed upon certain actions ahead in respect to agriculture and rural development in SEE region.

The meeting was organized under the joint auspices of the SWG RRD and the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relation of Bosnia and Herzegovina on 17th of November 2017 in Jahorina, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The event was of an essential importance for addressing and setting of shared challenges and goals that summarized the objectives for the future wellbeing of the agriculture and rural development in respect to EU integration and regional cooperation in South Eastern Europe.

The main output of the meeting is policy document entitled: **Conclusions of the 11th Annual Working Meeting** of the Ministers of Agriculture from SEE 2017, conveying the common interest in the framework for future cooperation in the field of agriculture and rural development (Annex 7).

I.II EVIDENCE-BASEDPOLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: AREAS WITH NATURAL CONSTRAINS (ANC) IN SEE

In the reporting period SWG contributed towards the development of evidence-based policy papers to address the current situation and to provide policy recommendations in respect to characterization and mapping of areas with natural constrains, in compliance with the EU policies. More concretely, it provided support in the process of coordination of the activities including organization, implementation and follow-up of the final meeting of the REAWG on Areas with Natural Constraints. The meetings were attended by the responsible national, regional and international experts, as well as relevant ministries representatives.

As the conclusive results of the work of these REAWGs, in the reporting period a study was published: "**Areas with Natural Constraints in South-East Europe**: Assessment and Policy recommendations". Both studies were produced in English language and translated in the local languages of the Western Balkans. Their policy recommendations reached wide relevant audience since they were distributed to the relevant ministries in SEE and beyond, relevant EU authorities, international organizations, civil society, private operators, academia etc. For that purpose, the following distribution channels were used: post, direct e-mail, SWG web-site, as well as the regional policy platforms, such as: SWG Assembly meetings, Agricultural Policy Forum and Ministerial Meeting.

The main regional recommendations of the ANC assessment are as follows:

- Facilitate data sharing and flow of information among all stakeholders;
- Conduct additional soil surveys, maintain and improve national meteorological service;
- ANC Policy must be part of the national Rural Development Policies;
- New laws on Agriculture and Rural Development should have a special article on ANCs;
- Rural development strategy must address all aspects of rural life: infrastructure, access to internet, public schools, health facilities, water supply, in addition to the ANC payment schemes;
- Land tenure issues have to be solved by adjusting and implementing relevant legislation;
- Develop and implement specific plans for different ANC regions and explore options for income generation (other than agricultural use of land);
- Implement payment schemes for ANC areas based on natural and socio-economic conditions, with priority on areas with high risk of abandonment;
- IPARD funding mechanisms need to be adjusted to reflect ANC payment schemes.

I.III EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (NRM) IN SEE

In the reporting period SWG also contributed towards the development of evidence-based policy paper to address the current situation and to provide policy recommendations in respect to rural development and natural resource management, in compliance with the EU policies.

Soil, water, forests and biodiversity, are the most valuable assets for economic progress and development. A long and difficult transition period of the countries of the SEE, divergent policy visions and development pathways have led to unsustainable use and degradation of natural resources in the region, and are limiting growth of both the rural communities and the countries. As a result, technical assessment report was published: "**Natural Resource Management in Southeast Europe: Forest, Soil and Water**".

The main regional recommendations of the NRM assessment are as follows:

- Build up new value creation opportunities;
- Improve and harmonize spatial planning;
- Clean contaminated sites;
- Create cross-sectoral platforms for policy- and decision-making
- Investigate new avenues for marketing and payment for ecosystem services;
- Improve law enforcement and legal security;
- Create a business-stimulating environment;
- Support the organization of private land owners;
- Develop clear actions plans in response to climate change;
- Foster integrated, inter-communicating monitoring systems for forest, soil, and water;
- Foster investment in water infrastructure and strategies for a higher efficiency of water use;
- Build professional capacities in administration and institutions;
- Secure national funding for education and capacity building in integrated natural resource management;

With the purpose to build the capacity for evidence-based policy making and improve the link between policy and research, SWG in cooperation with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH organized a travelling workshop/exposure visit for young researchers and junior level representatives of relevant public authorities in natural resources management (NRM). The visit took place in Sweden, in the region Bergslagen-Mälardalen. It contributed to transfer of Swedish experience regarding management of forest, water and soil, and more specifically gaining knowledge about certain aspects of NRM in Sweden, such as: institutional setup, coordination among relevant authorities, link between research and policy making and innovation.

I.IV NATIONAL POLICY INSTRUMENTS AND EU APPROXIMATION PROCESS: \\ EFFECTS ON FARM HOLDINGS IN THE WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES (EUEWB)

In the reporting period the activities under this EC JRC – Joint Research Center project were finalized and resulted in publication of the report: "**Monitoring of agricultural policy developments in the Western Balkan countries**". The present report is based on the results of the third project "National policy instruments and EU Approximation process: Effects on farm holdings in the WB countries (EUEWB)", which was funded by the JRC. The key goals of this report are to provide analytical support to decision-makers in the region by updating agricultural statistics and to support qualitative and quantitative monitoring of agricultural policy in WB countries. In addition, the project is attempting to improve the analytical capacity of the acceding countries by strengthening their institutions and coaching the agricultural economists that deal with agricultural policy.

The report, produced in English language and its translated versions in the local languages of the Western Balkans were directly distributed to the relevant public, private, civil sector authorities and academia of the Southeast Europe, as well as selected EU member states, relevant EU administration, and international organizations. SWG Assembly meetings, Agricultural Policy Forum 2017 and Ministerial Meeting 2017, as regional policy dialogue platforms, were also used for dissemination of the recommendations from the study.

In addition, farm level analyses were conducted in the different Western Balkans countries/territories: Serbia (Productivity of arable farms in Serbia), Macedonia (Productivity of vegetables farms in Macedonia), Albania (Plot analysis of determinants of productivity of Albanian farms), Kosovo* (Effects of irregular migration flow (2014-2015) on agricultural productivity in Kosovo*), Republika Sprska, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Farm productivity based on FADN type of data).

I.V LAND MARKET DEVELOPMENT AND SMALL FARMS' ACCESS TO LAND IN THE PRE-ACCESSION COUNTRIES (LMSF-AC)

With the aim to investigate the functioning of land markets in the WB and their implication for small farm households' access to land, and consequently provide insights to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of adopted relevant policies, SWG was awarded the implementation of a project funded by EC JRC. The project is entitled: Land Market

Development and Small Farms' Access to Land in the Pre-Accession Countries" (LMSF-AC), and its duration is eleventh months. The kick-off meeting took place in December in Skopje and was attended by the selected experts from each of the countries/territories of the Western Balkans and Slovenia, representatives of the relevant public authorities and the European Commission. The kick off meeting concluded with agreed general approach, research questions, and workplan for the project duration. The final result of the project is expected to be a comparative cross-country analysis of the land markets and small farms' access to land in the WB countries.

I.VI AGRICULTURAL POLICY DEVELOPMENTS AND EU APPROXIMATION PROCESS IN THE WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES (APDAP-WB)

APDAP-WB is a JRC funded project, whose implementation was awarded to SWG in December 2017. Its purpose is to provide updated monitoring and collection of information on agricultural policy development in the WB countries. It is expected to contribute towards providing evaluation of the effects of the policy approximation process with the EU acquis in agriculture and rural development and help improve the IPARD programmes. Finally, the project also aims to transfer knowledge to the scientific community and policy experts in the WB on policy impact analysis to enhance their capabilities to conduct scientifically based policy support. The kick-off meeting was organized jointly with LMSF-AC, in December in Skopje. The duration of the project is 10 months and its final result, expected in September 2018, shall be reliable and up-to-date agricultural policy data and a sound analysis of the development of policy instruments in the WB countries. The ultimate goal of the project is to evaluate the policy instruments and policy harmonization process of the WB countries with the CAP.

I.VII LEADER APPROACH IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE

SWG contributed through the "Rural development through integrated forest and water resources management" (LEIWW) project for the development of evidence-based policy relevant for rural development and the application of LEADER Approach in the Western Balkan countries. The aim was to alleviate the importance of LEADER as a model for rural development that needs to be introduced as soon as possible in the region. The work of the Regional Expert Advisory Working Group on LEADER resulted with assessment of the relevant policy frameworks and provision of national and regional policy recommendations for mainstreaming of the LEADER approach. Main outcome of the REAWG is the regional report entitled as **"Assessment of the application of the LEADER Approach in the Western Balkan Countries/Territories - "From local initiative to a mainstream concept in the rural areas"** with aim to improve understanding of the LEADER Approach and contribute to its effective implementation. This approach already has attracted interest of local stakeholders in the process of creating a local partnership between the public, private and civil sector, but also of governments, since LEADER is an integral part of the IPARD in the Western Balkans.

The general regional recommendations of the assessment are as follow:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INSTITUTIONAL SET UP IMPROVEMENTS:

- Government institutions at all levels should continue to work on development of Institutional – week structures on the field;
- Strategic (multiannual programing documents incl. IPARD are not developed/adopted in all countries);
- Regulatory framework for introduction of LEADER (Kosovo*).

STRENGTHENING HUMAN CAPACITIES OF RELEVANT INSTITUTIONS:

- Engage enlarged number of staff from relevant ministries and Paying Agency;
- Staff of Ministries and other stakeholders (municipalities, CSOs, business sector) need more tailor-made trainings;
- Staff of the Managing Authority and the Paying Agency will have to be trained to implement that measure;
- Specialized information campaigns and seminars for representatives of local self-governments should be prepared.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY IMPROVEMENTS:

- LEADER measures are planned but not implemented - measure fishes should be finalized;
- it is important to re- check the existing ones and to elaborate the missing ones;
- Local development policies should be implemented with a bottom-up decision-making process allowing for better connection and coordination of diverse rural actors;
- Development of secondary legislation is needed i.e. rulebooks and regulations on Local Action Groups encompassing guidelines on establishment, role, functioning and accreditation of LAGs including start-up toolkits for development of Local Development Strategy (LDS) for potential LAG constituents.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPOWERING LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

- Awareness raising campaigns needed - diverse models of networking of various local stakeholders (public, civil and business);
- Exchange of information and transfer of best international practices from EU LAGs;
- Capacity building and training should be supplemented with the design and execution of a broad public awareness campaign for the general population;
- Donor support to be better coordinated.

SWG in a cooperation with GIZ organized a study tour for junior level representatives dealing on LEADER Approach issues in order to introduce them with the successful examples of LAGs and LEADER in the area of Austria and Italy. The study tour promoted successful models of mutual understanding and cooperation among the stakeholders, institutional setup, coordination among the relevant authorities, link between the civil and public sector, regional actions implemented in function and project visits related to LEADER in the area.

II. CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

The Area Based Development (ABD) serves as a regional tool by targeting defined geographical areas in cross-border regions which are characterized by a set of common, complex development problems. It is a regional local approach which facilitates sustainable growth in small and socially cohesive rural areas in decline, often characterized by common tradition and identity. The ABD supports development of area-based local development strategies, which via integrated bottom-up approach supports local actors to participate in decision making and selection of priorities to be pursued in their local communities. By means of Stakeholder Groups, acting as regional LAGs, the ABD is supporting establishment of local partnerships, integration and multi-sectoral actions, stimulating innovation (introducing new products/process/market) and finding solutions of persistent rural problems. Mostly, the approach facilitates networking and cooperation measures among the stakeholder groups, rural areas, administrations and organizations involved in rural development on exchanging achievements, experiences and know-how. Such cooperation can help the local communities to boost their activities and allow them to resolve certain problems or add value to local resources.

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 was completed on April 31st, 2017. The project aimed 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 in the pilot cross-border areas.

The ABD approach has been operationalised with functional Project Management Units (PMU) in four cross-border regions of 'Drina-Tara' (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia), 'Drina-Sava' (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia), 'Prespa' (Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) and 'Sharra' (Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Kosovo*) as well as a Regional PMU Office in Belgrade. With baseline analysis as well as a strategic plan prepared, the project will support the application of the ABD approach and the establishment

of similar structures in additional three regions: 'Krsh' (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Montenegro), 'Pcinja - Krajishte' (Serbia, Bulgaria and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) and 'Prokletije – Bjeshket e Nemuna' (Albania, Kosovo* and Montenegro). The PMUs act as a coordination bodies for the stakeholders and established stakeholder groups (SHG) in each of the region. The Project Management Units established in the four cross-border regions under the previous projects and the ones ought to be established, will serve as a technical back up for the ABD framework. The structures will retain their prominent role of strengthening and promoting local ownership by increasing participation within communities and build the sense of involvement and ownership that can instigate local development.

Focus has been given to the development of integrated cross-border models at regional / local level with real targets, action areas as well as project ideas, in sectors such as economy, use of environmental resources, local planning, social infrastructure, culture and tourism. To make the cross-border developmental process more structured, the SWG initiated and explored the possibilities of "regional clusters" with due regard for regional characteristics. Characteristics of this model have been introduced in the established Stakeholder Groups and implemented cross-border activities.

II.I STAKEHOLDER GROUP MEETINGS

The Stakeholder Group (SHG) presents a group consisted of representatives from interested parties - local authorities (municipal and county mayors and/or political leaders of other local government bodies), senior management representatives from the business sector and citizens involved in civil society via NGOs or other local initiatives from all participating countries. Regular SHG meetings in the cross-border regions were organized enabling platform for the members and other interested parties to discuss on the ABO implementation process, prepare for the future development opportunities such as grant scheme, Calls for Proposal (CfP) and to further facilitate the networking and cooperation process in each of the cross-border regions. The work of the SHG is systematized according to the 'Operational Protocol and rules of procedure of the SHG'. In this course of 2017, **eleven (11) SHG meetings** were organized in the cross-border regions, attended by **317 participants**.

II.II PEOPLE TO PEOPLE (P2P) ACTIONS

People to People (P2P) is a specific tool developed to strengthen networking, cooperation, promotion of the regions and their cultural, traditional, natural heritage and economic potential. This foresees support to organization of regional manifestations, events, round table discussions and trade fairs enabling local cross-border stakeholders to present offers from their respective areas both in terms of products and services and proves as excellent model for creation of sustainable partnerships for other open calls in the cross-border regions. This has resulted in an increased sense of joint identity and networking in the cross-border regions.

Throughout 2017, **thirty-five (35) P2P events** were supported and organized in the WB countries/ territories. During the P2P events it is estimated that **4000+ exhibitors/participants were involved, and the events were visited by more than 100.000 people** coming from the WB and EU countries. It is also estimated direct income for the exhibitors of **41.340 EUR from selling products** during the events. Additionally, **value added impact to the local/regional economies is estimated on 203.394 EUR**. List of supported P2P events is attached as Annex III to this Report.

III. CAPACITY BUILDING

For the cross-border areas and rural areas it is necessary for the local actors to obtain essential capabilities regarding project ideas and know-how, human resources to devote to particular activities and entrepreneur measures. These activities will enable local stakeholders to perform more effectively and thus better manage available resources for the intended purpose of improving the quality and quantity of products and services provided. Improved local competences will contribute to better management and strengthening of short value chains.

The aim towards enhanced rural livelihoods is by promoting sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development at local level, strengthening participatory local governance and encouraging community-based initiatives. Most importantly, the focus was on building local capacities and knowledge exchange that contributed to strengthening the local economies and competitiveness. The rural border regions require sustainable interacting course, that targets building sustainable and long-lasting relationships and knowledge among stakeholder networks of local authorities, small business provides, farmers and civil society. As part of the implemented projects in 2017, various capacity building measures such as training and coaching activities were organized mainly with the aim to increase knowledge and capacity of stakeholders and SWG ABD staff to better prepare project applications with adequate quality under different Calls for proposals (CfP) opened in each cross-border region. The ABD approach also facilitates support to small scale farmers and businesses as one of the most important drivers of local economic development. Also, the stakeholders were trained on improvement of 'green' value chains, development of business plans and sustainable use of natural resources. During 2017 were organized **18 capacity building events where 646 stakeholders were trained**. The implemented activities contributed to building value chain clustering capacities and knowledge transfer to create the enabling conditions for effective local action and to greatly speed the scale-up of local-level best practices.

The following capacity building measures were implemented:

- Capacity building workshop on integrated economic development in rural cross-border areas - from visioning to realization" 27-29.03.2017 at Hotel Il Sole in Berane, Montenegro;
- Capacity building workshop on integrated economic development in rural cross-border areas -·from visioning to realization", 22-24.03.2017 in Tivat, Montenegro;
- Capacity building workshop on integrated economic development in rural cross-border areas - from visioning to realization " 15-17.03.2017 in Rankovce, Macedonia;
- Fostering integrated economic development through sustainable use of natural resources and greening of value chains in the cross-border region Pres pa and Sharra, 26.04.2017 in Mavrovo, Macedonia;
- Fostering integrated economic development through sustainable use of natural resources and greening of value chains in the cross-border region Drina-Tara and Drina-Sava, 19-21.04.2017 in Banja Koviljaca, Serbia;
- Successful association - from theory to practice for Drina-Tara stakeholders, 23.10.2017 in Zlatibor, Serbia;
- Planning of growth, development and managing of the association for Drina-Tara stakeholders, 24.10.2017 in Zlatibor, Serbia;
- Successful association - from theory to practice for Drina-Sava stakeholders 25.10.2017 in Sabac, Serbia;
- Planning of growth, development and managing of the association for Drina-Sava stakeholders, 26.10.2017 in Sabac, Serbia;
- Training "Career Counseling", 27-28.10.2017 in Tetovo, Macedonia;
- Adjusting raspberry production to climate changes and Economic aspects of raspberry production", 04.11.2017 in Bijelo Polje, Montenegro;
- Improving of honey production in the cross-border region Drina-Sava, 05.11.2017 in Brcko, Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- Training "Career Counseling", 04-05.11.2017 in Tetovo, Macedonia;
- Value chains in tourism: education, organization and promotion in Drina Sava region, 11-12.11.2017 in Banja Koviljaca, Serbia;
- Improving of honey production in the cross-border region Drina-Tara, 18.11.2017 in Visegrad, Serbia;
- Culinary workshop: Innovative approach in rural tourism – Traditional food in new and authentic way, 13-16.11.2017 in Kosjeric, Serbia;
- Networking among the stakeholders in apple and tourism sectors in the cross-border region Prespa, 20-22.11.2017 in Otesevo, Macedonia;
- Improvement of rural tourism services and products and networking among the tourism stakeholders in the cross-border region Sharra, 23-25.11.2017 in Mavrovo, Macedonia.

IV. GRANT SCHEMES FOR SMALLHOLDERS

The ABD Grant Scheme is designed to support small projects in the cross-border regions related to income generation by improvement of production processes, technology and quality of products and services in various value chains (tourism, agriculture, etc). It supports partnerships of a cross-border character but also individual projects/businesses who have the potential of expanding and engaging into cross-border partnership in the near future. The focus is on sustainable business projects and partnerships who are in line with the local development strategies and considering important economic incentives.

In the course of 2017, the ABD Grant Scheme was supported under LEIWW programme and was implemented in 'Drina-Tara', 'Drina-Sava', 'Prespa' and 'Sharra' cross-border regions. The grants scheme was developed in line with the objectives of the LEIWW programme, supporting the development of short value chains for quality food products and rural tourist products and services through establishment of partnerships and focusing on innovation, with special focus on sustainable use of natural resources, women and young people. In total **54 beneficiaries** and projects were supported with estimated grant funding of **389.224,38 EUR**.

Number of projects per country and grant support from the GIZ LEIWW Project and GIZ Returnees programme

Country	No. of beneficiaries	Total value of grants (EUR)
Albania	5	35.747,50
Bosnia and Herzegovina	9	69.149,04
Kosovo*	8	59.913,63
Macedonia	10	63.236,43
Montenegro	5	22.564,99
Serbia	17	138.612,79
TOTAL	54	389.224,38

The ABD Grant Schemes stimulated **total investments of nearly 600.000 in the WB cross-border regions**, contributing to additional employments and improvement of the local/regional economy.

The resulting grant scheme information is from the call financed solely from the GIZ LEIWW Project

V. 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 2017, the SWG has been once again actively involved in regional networking events, encouraging effective intercultural exchanges and ensuring regional cooperation in the rural areas of the SEE countries.

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 9th Global Forum for Food and Agriculture (GFFA) organized within the International Green Week Fair in Berlin. The Forum deliberated on global challenges and questions, concerning water scarcity, quality and its impacts on agriculture. The 2017 **Global Forum for Food and Agriculture (GFFA)** addressed these questions and a range of other issues. From 19 – 21 January 2017, key international players from politics, industry, science and civil society, at the invitation of the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) and its cooperation partners, had the opportunity to exchange thoughts and ideas on *"Agriculture and Water – Key to Feeding the World"* and on related topics and regional aspects.

Additional networking and exchange of work was done during the Cooperation Market, where SWG was presented with a small stand and promotional materials together with many international organizations and institutions on 19th January 2017 in Berlin.

Photo by: Aleksandar Stojanovic

Inter-regional networking in rural development, civil society and science continued to strengthen. That is achieved through participation in numerous regional events, cooperation with regional initiatives, support to regional networks etc. SWG supported the Rural Networks members of **Balkan Rural Development** Network in the activities which are part of a 4-year project "ALTER - Active Local Territories for Economic development of Rural Areas" for realization of national and regional trainings with practical examples from the region and organization of Rural Policy Forum 2017 organized within the Agricultural Policy Forum 2017, 12th- 13th October, Podgorica, Montenegro.

Representing the rural community and following up to LEADER in Western Balkans, SWG and the Balkan Rural Development Network participated at the **3rd European Rural Parliament** 2017 in Netherlands. 250 people representing rural communities in 40 European countries called, in the **Venhorst Declaration**, for a new era of "bottom-up" local development, based on local action by rural communities. This is inspired by the rapidly growing number of local initiatives in both towns and countryside; and by the need to strengthen the vitality of rural areas throughout Europe. The Declaration also focuses on other key current issues in rural Europe. Participants were encouraged by the increasingly widespread action of rural communities in welcoming refugees and economic migrants and in tackling poverty and social exclusion. They called for imaginative action to sustain rural services and diversify rural economies.

SWG participated in organization and moderation of **Ministerial Conference on GMO-free Agriculture: A Chance for Rural Development in Central and South-Eastern Europe**, Vienna, 10 May 2017. The aim of the meeting was to discuss the opportunities that GMO-free agriculture can create for rural development in Central and South-East Europe to achieve sustainable rural development. Central and South Eastern European countries are major contributors to food safety/security in Europe.

The **2017 Western Balkans Summit in Trieste**, Italy was the fourth annual summit within the Berlin Process initiative for European integration of Western Balkans states. Previous summits took place in Berlin in 2014, Vienna in 2015 and in Paris in 2016. Heads of government, foreign ministers and the ministers of economy of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, as well as EU member states from the region Croatia, Slovenia and EU member states Austria, France, Germany, Italy as well as representatives of the European Union and the International Financial Institutions attended. Participants once again committed the Western Balkan's eventual path into the EU and agreed the next Berlin Process Summit would take place in London. SWG was part of the working group discussions, including the Civil Society Forum.

In relation to food safety and security, SWG participated at the **40th Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA)**, 27 – 28 September 2017 in Budapest, Hungary. The main topic of the 40th Session of ECA was the effect of climate change on transboundary animal diseases (TADs) in Europe and Central Asia. The focus was put on identifying climate-TADs related issues that need to be addressed scientifically and practically, as well as on current impacts of animal diseases on trade and the development of the animal production sector under the conditions of climate change, in the context of local and international trade restrictions.

Photo by: Mirela Causevic

The SWG participated at the **Western Balkans Ministerial Conference on addressing regional climate and environmental challenges** in Western Balkans (WB), on 17 November in Bonn, Germany.
Environmental ministers and high-level panelists tackled upon national and regional priorities, policy responses to current and future challenges, importance of regional cooperation and future activities until 2020.
The meeting was to discuss the implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement, contributions of WB economies within the environment agenda, how the region can properly respond and adapt to inevitable climate changes, as well as the future steps and joining forces in protecting the environment.

SWG actively participates and contributes to the implementation of the **SEE 2020 Strategy**. The RCC has developed the SEE 2020 Programming Document in close cooperation with the RDCs and the national authorities through the consultation process. This SEE 2020 Programming Document sets out the priority actions for the SEE 2020 implementation identified during the annual programming cycle. The Programming Document covers a three-year period, with intended updates on a rolling basis over the next five years of implementation. With its new Strategy and Work Programme 2017-2019, RCC is further focusing its SEE 2020 interventions around three broad themes (connectivity, competitiveness and skills & mobility) to help merge the implementation efforts of different stakeholders towards a single set of objectives. These themes – or flagship initiatives – represent joint endeavours by several regional organizations and/or implementers as partners executing mutually reinforcing activities towards the same SEE 2020 goal.

SWG is responsible for implementing the target measures under the regional action plan for connectivity flagship and is a active member of the Regional Expert Advisory Working group on Environment.

Photo by: Aleksandar Stojanovic

VI. 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.

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SWG ASSEMBLY SESSIONS

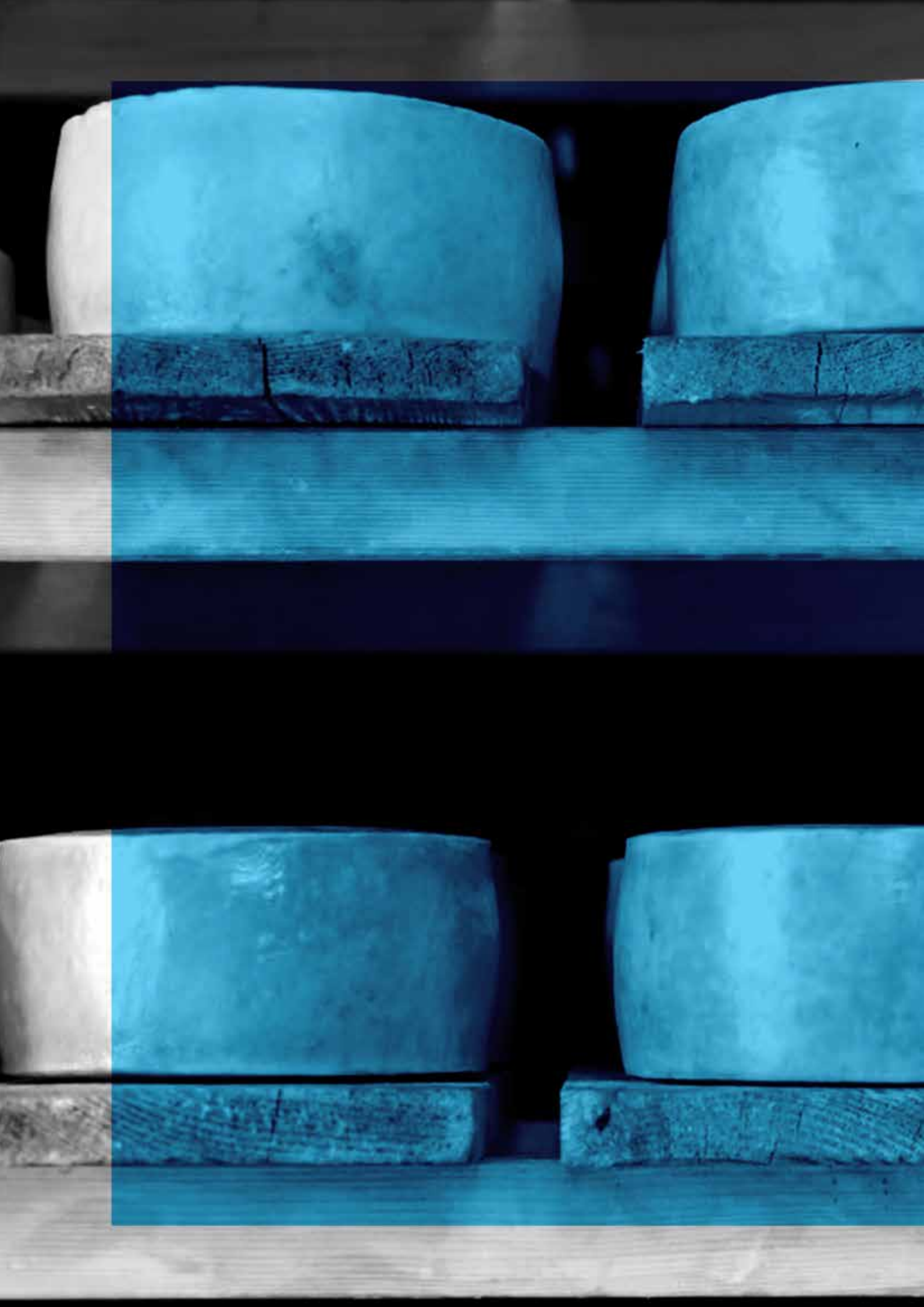
DURING THE SWG ASSEMBLY SESSIONS ORGANIZED AS FOLLOWS:

38TH SWG ASSEMBLY SESSION, 10TH -12TH APRIL 2017, LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA

39TH SWG ASSEMBLY SESSION",13TH – 14TH SEPTEMBER 2017, ZAGREB, CROATIA

40TH SWG ASSEMBLY SESSION", 5TH – 7TH DECEMBER 2017, GRAZ, AUSTRIA

The aim of the SWG Assembly Sessions was to discuss and decide about internal SWG procedures, realization of SWG activities for the year 2017, exchange of experiences about the EU accession process and the benefits of it, as well as to decide on future initiatives, projects and cooperation.



The Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group

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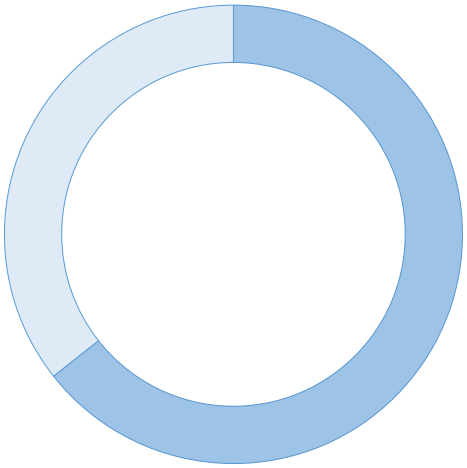
SWG BUDGET IN 2017

(Amounts in EUR)

		For the period from 01 October 2016 through 30 September 2017	For the period from 01 October 2015 through 30 September 2016
SOURCES OF FUNDS			
EC		370,963	141,812
GIZ		981,009	446,398
Sources of funds - projects	**4**	**1,351,972**	**588,208**
SWG Own and Liquidity account		49,300	33,357
SWG General account	5	155,000	215,000
Other Contribution		51,403	52,555
Reimbursements		-	95
Total sources of funds		**1,607,675**	**889,215**
BANK INTEREST			
EC		22	33
GIZ		19	13
Bank interest - projects	**4**	**41**	**46**
SWG Own and Liquidity account		5	11
SWG General account		45	53
Total Bank interest		**91**	**110**
Foreign exchange translation gains		29	66
Total funds received		**1,607,795**	**889,391**



TOTAL FUNDS RECEIVED

FROM 01-OCT-2016 THROUGH 30-SEP-2017

1,607,795

FROM 01-OCT-2015 THROUGH 30-SEP-2016

889,391

(Amounts in EUR)

USES OF FUNDS BY ACTIVITY

		For the period from 01 October 2016 through 30 September 2017	For the period from 01 October 2015 through 30 September 2016
EC		509,718	421,539
GIZ		628,243	463,579
Uses of funds - projects	**4**	**1,137,961**	**885,118**
SWG Own and Liquidity account use	**6**	9,244	47,959
SWG General account	**6**	124,868	117,809
Returned funds to donators		-	23,349
Total financed operating funds		**1,272,073**	**1,074,235**
Foreign exchange translation losses		1,369	751
Total financed trough fund providers		**1,273,442**	**1,074,986**
Funds at the beginning of the period		**1,043,151**	**1,228,746**
Funds at the end of the period		**1,377,504**	**1,043,151**

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".

The Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group

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ANNEX 1

LIST OF SWG PROJECTS IN 2017

LIST OF SWG PROJECTS IN 2017

ACCOMPLISHED PROJECTS:

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 – May 2017)

EC JRC IPTS

- "National policy instruments and EU Approximation process: Effects on farm holdings in the Western Balkan countries (EUEWB)"
  (October 2015 – June 2017)

RUNNING PROJECTS:

Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)

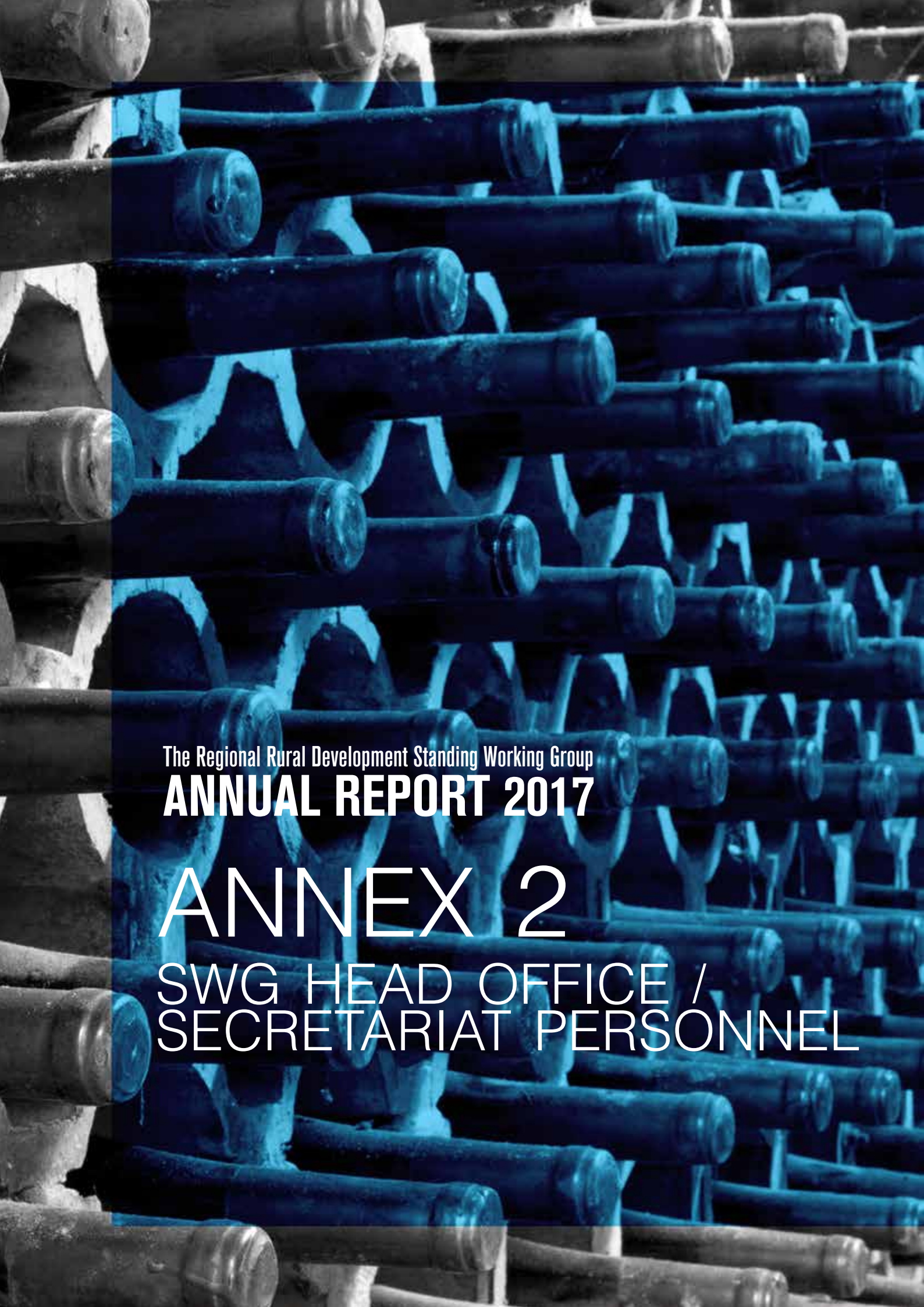
- "Rural development by integrated forest and water resource management in South-East-Europe (LEIWW)".
  (October 2015 - August 2018)
- "Rural development through integrated forest and water resources management in Southeast Europe: Qualification, reintegration and (self) employment opportunities for rural perspectives".
  (July 2017 – August 2018)

European Commission

- "Regional cooperation and networking in the field of agriculture, rural and economic development of cross-border areas"
  (December 2017 – December 2018)

EC JRC

- "Land Market Development and Small Farms' Access to Land in the Pre-Accession Countries" (LMSF-AC)"
  (November 2017 – September 2018)
- "Agricultural policy developments and EU approximation process in the Western Balkan countries (APDAP-WB)"
  (December 2017 – September 2018)



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ANNEX 2

SWG HEAD OFFICE / SECRETARIAT PERSONNEL

SWG HEAD OFFICE/ SECRETARIAT PERSONNEL

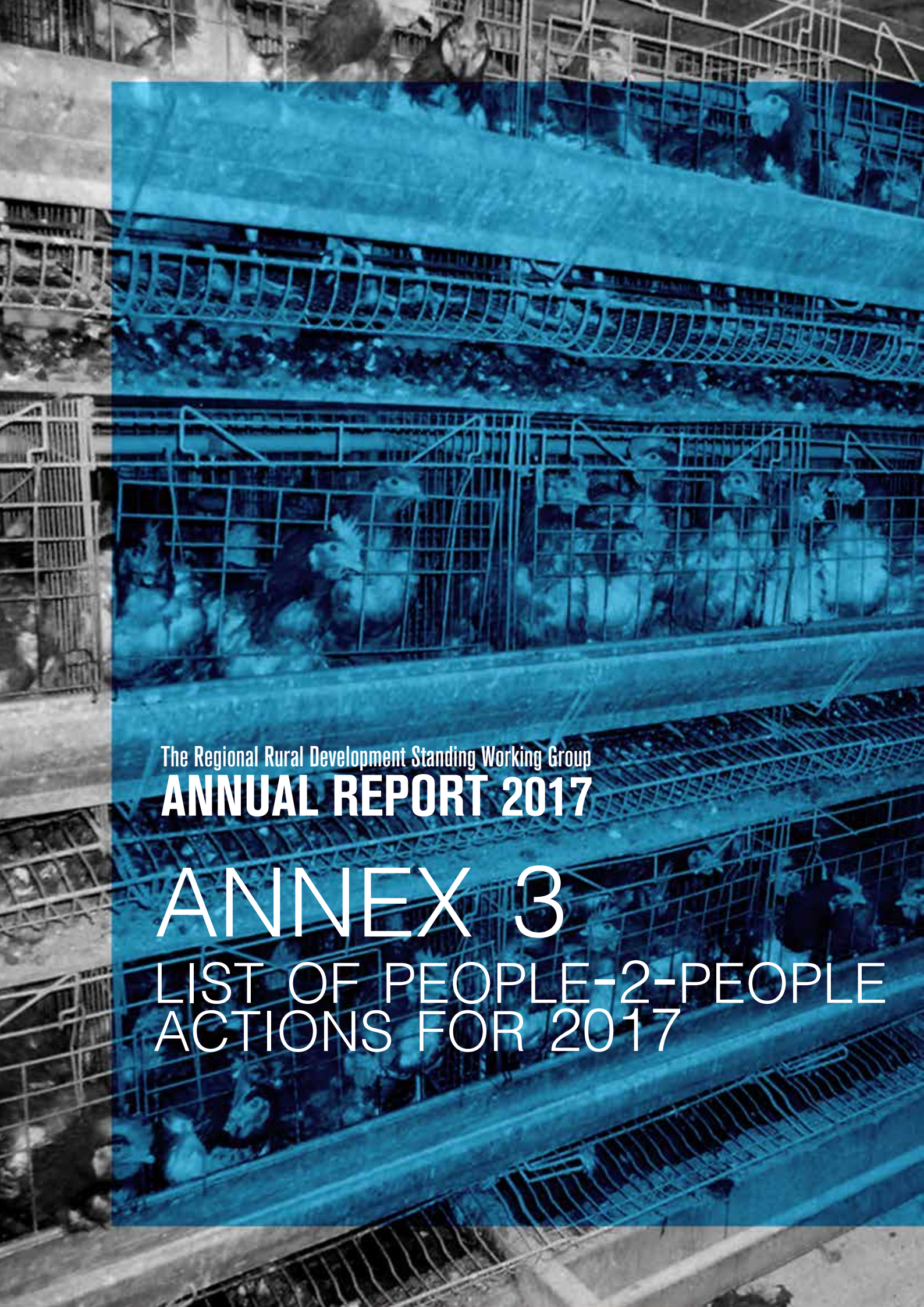
STATUS DECEMBER 2017

SWG HEAD OFFICE EMPLOYEES

Boban Ilic	Secretary General
Katerina Spasovska	Senior Project Manager
Bogdanka Leveska – Gjorsoska	Project Manager
Dori Pavloska – Gjorgjieska	Project Manager
Damjan Surlevski	Project Manager
Julija Brzovska	HR, Contract and Cash Officer
Andrej Josifov	Finance Manager
Ivan Tasev	Finance Assistant
Elena Valmarska	Financial Officer
Oliver Pop-Arsov	Project Assistant and Logistic Officer
Aleksandar Stojmanovski	Logistics Officer

SWG STAFF IN THE REGIONAL OFFICES

Bojana Jovanovska	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
Predrag Markovic	Field Officer
Darko Buzarovski	Field Officer



The Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group

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ANNEX 3

LIST OF PEOPLE-2-PEOPLE ACTIONS FOR 2017

1. Fair of traditional dry cured meet - Prosciutto "Prsutijada 2017", 10-12 February 2017, Mackat, Cajetina, Serbia

2. Gatherings of raspberry producers "Raspberry-there's more to it", 24-26 February 2017, Uzice, Serbia

3. "Rural Tourism Fair", 26 February 2017, Prizren, Kosovo*

4. "Fair of Home-made Products, Rudo 2017", 10-12 March 2017, Rudo, Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina

5. Meeting of raspberry producers from the cross-border region Drina-Tara "Visegrad 2017", 18-19 March 2017, Visegrad, Bosnia and Herzegovina

6. "Transfer of knowledge and experience in beekeeping in the cross-border region Drina-Tara", 25-26 March 2017, Pljevlja, Montenegro

7. 1st International Meeting "Good agricultural practices and improvement of agricultural riparian areas in the cross-border region Drina-Sava", 30 March 2017, Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia

8. „XI International Volunteer Scientific research Eco Camp Trsic 2017", 24-26 March 2017, Trsic, Loznica, Serbia

9. „Youth activism in the sustainable management and biodiversity conservation in ABDA Region of Drina – Sava", 16 March 2017, Lopare, Bosnia and Herzegovina and 29 March 2017, Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia

10. "Through folklore to reconciliation", 25 March 2017, Lopare, Bosnia and Herzegovina

11. "Networking of "LAGs" in the cross-border region Drina-Sava", 24 March 2017, Nijemci, Croatia

12. „Osmomartovska daroteka 2017", 6-8 March 2017, Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia

13. "Regional competition in food preparation of the cross-border region Drina-Sava", 10 March 2017, Bogatic, Serbia

14. "Agriculture Cooperatives in the cross-border region of Prespa", 3 March 2017, Resen Macedonia

15. "Outdoor camp Lagadin", 3-5 March 2017, Ohrid, Macedonia

16. "Improvement of waste management systems in the cross-border region of Prespa", 6 March 2017, Resen, Macedonia

17. "Mapping touristic destinations in Zupa", 11-12 March 2017, Recane, Kosovo*

18. "Off-road Bosilegrad", 11-12 March 2017, Bosilegrad and Trgoviste, Serbia

19. "Slow Food of Prokletije", 2 March 2017, Berane, Montenegro

20. International seminar "Preserving diversity of the web of life of the Balkans", 19-21 March 2017, Zasavica, Serbia

21. "18th memorial Vitomir Dizdarevic – Admiral Kuk Drina-Sava international recreational-touristic kayak-canoe Regatta", 29 April-7 May 2017, in the cross-border regions of Drina-Sava and Drina-Tara

22. "Ohrid trcaT Weekend 2017", 1-4 June 2017, Ohrid, Macedonia

23. "Regional Youth Rural Camp", 24-27 July 2017, Pobori, Montenegro

24. "Day of Mowing- Romanija 2017", 8 July 2017, Sokolac, Bosnia and Herzegovina

25. International fruit brandy festival "Zestival", 18-19 August 2017, Uzice, Serbia

26. "Nusicijada 2017", 24-27 August 2017, Ivanjica, Serbia

27. "Saborsko prelo - Interactive workshops on traditional handcrafts", 17 September 2017, Trsic, Serbia

28. “Bojane Grapes Festival”, 8-10 October 2017, Skopje, Macedonia

29. “XVI Days of Pljevlja Cheese”, 20 October 2017, Pljevlja, Montenegro

30. “Third International Symposium for Agriculture and Food – ISAF 2017”, 18-20 October 2017, Ohrid, Macedonia

31. “Fungal Conservation in a Changing Europe: The Challenges Ahead”, 1-6 October 2017, Ohrid, Macedonia

32. “Days of honey”, 19-20 October 2017, Surdulica, Serbia

33. “Pumpkin Day 2017”, 3 November 2017, Bijeljina, Bosnia and Herzegovina

34. “12th Ethno Food and Drink Fair”, 22 - 25 November 2017, Belgrade, Serbia

35. “Open lecture day - Youth employment in rural areas in the Prespa region”, 17-18 November 2017, Korca, Albania

The Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group

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ANNEX 4

SWG DELEGATES AND OBSERVERS

SWG DELEGATES AND OBSERVERS

LIST OF THE SWG DELEGATES / SWG CONTACT PERSONS

NAME/ SURNAME	COUNTRY	INSTITUTION	POSITION	ADDRESS	CONTACT
Grigor Gjeci	Republic of Albania	Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration	Rural Development Policy Director	Sheshi Skenderbej 2 , 1001 , Tirana , Republic of Albania	0035542223806 Mob: 00355682020879 Fax: 0035542223806 E-mail: grigor.gjeci@bujqesia.gov.al Web: http://www.bujqesia.gov.al
Teuta Topi	Republic of Albania	Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration	Chief of Sector	Sheshi Skenderbej 2 , 1001 , Tirana , Republic of Albania	0035542223806 Mob: 00355672077002 Fax: 0035542223806 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	0038733953500 Mob: 0038765517517 Fax: 0038733953501 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	0038757322090 Mob: 0038765594139 Fax: 0038757322091 E-mail: hamdija.civic@hops.gov.ba Web: http://www.mvteo.gov.ba
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Photo by: Mirela Causevic

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The Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group

ANNUAL REPORT 2017

ANNEX 5

SWG OPERATIONAL PLAN

OPERATIONAL PLAN
JANUARY 2017 - DECEMBER 2017

GENERAL SWG /HEAD OFFICE ACTIVITIES

	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		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 AND ABD))

	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	38th SWG Assembly session (assessments of achievements, replanning of activities)	SWG assembly and partner institutions	Ljubljana, Slovenia	Preparatory activities for APF, MM, and post 2017	1, 2, 3, 4	11th-14th April												
2,2	39th SWG Assembly Session (assessments of achievements, replanning of activities)	SWG assembly and partner institutions	Zagreb, Croatia	Preparatory activities for APF, MM, and post 2017		12th - 15th September												
2,3	40th SWG Assembly session (annual reporting, financial reporting and SWG Assembly decisions)	SWG assembly and partner institutions	Graz, Austria	Preparation of Operational Plan 2018		4th - 7th December												
2,4	Agricultural Policy Forum 2017	SEE ministry representatives, academics and various stake holders	Podgorica, Montenegro	Preparation of the APF Agenda	1, 2, 3, 4	10th-13th October												
2,5	11th Annual meeting of Ministers of Agriculture from SEE	Ministers of Agriculture from SEE, EC and supporting governments	Jahorina, Bosnia and Herzegovina	Preparation of Conclusion of the Ministers for Agriculture from SEE	1, 2, 3, 4	16th-17th November												
2,6	Global Forum for food and agriculture 2017 - trade and global food security	SWG Member Institutions/countries	Berlin, Germany	SWG stand at the cooperation market and Panel Discussion participation	1, 4	18th-21st January												
2,7	Lunchtime Conference- Balkan story of Rural Development	DG Agri	Brussels, Belgium	Presentation of policy outcomes from JRC study	1, 2, 3, 4	30th - 31st of January												

REGIONAL EXPERT ADVISORY WORKING GROUPS

	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
3,1	5th meeting of SEE REAWG on Managing Authorities and IPARD Agencies	SWG EAG Members	Turkey - TBD		2, 3, 4	End of January/February												
3,2	4th meeting of SEE REAWG on Wine	Regional Expert Advisory Working Group (REAWG)	Belgrade, Serbia	Harmonisation of legislation and policy	2, 3, 4	February												
3,3	4th meeting of SEE REAWG on Areas with Natural Constraints (ANC)	Regional Expert Advisory Working Group (REAWG)	Zlatibor, Serbia	Development of a follow up project concept	1, 2, 3, 4	13-15 March 2017												
3,4	Kick-off meeting of SEE REAWG on LEADER	Regional Expert Advisory Working Group (REAWG)	Skopje, Macedonia	Development of methodology for preparation of the assesment	2, 3, 4	March												
3,5	1st interim meeting SEE REAWG on LEADER	Regional Expert Advisory Working Group (REAWG)	Andrevlje, Serbia	Preparation of national reports for the assessment	2, 3, 4	05-07 June 2017												
3,6	Study tour on LEADER in SEE	ABD Stakeholders, Civil Society	Austria and Italy	Successful examples of LEADER and LAG	1, 2, 3, 4	14-19 May 2017												
3,7	Kick-off SEE Working Group on Agro biodiversity - SWG expert advisory group		Skopje, Macedonia		2, 3, 4	12th July 2017												
3,8	First interim SEE Working Group on Agro biodiversity - SWG expert advisory group	REAWG Members	Podgorica, Montenegro		2, 3, 4	13-14 October 2017												
3,9	Second interim SEE Working Group on Agro biodiversity - SWG expert advisory group	REAWG Members	Albania		2, 3, 4	Postponed for February 2018												
3,10	Third interim SEE Working Group on Agro biodiversity - SWG expert advisory group	REAWG Members	TBD		2, 3, 4	Postponed												
3,11	2nd interim meeting SEE REAWG on Water and Forest	Regional Expert Advisory Working Group (REAWG)	Jahorina, BiH	Presentation of draft regional report	1, 2, 3, 4	28 Feb - 02 March 2017												
3,12	Study Tour on Water and Forest	SWG Member Institutions/countries and Young Researchers	Sweden	Foreign experience on Integrated Management of NRM	1, 2, 3, 4	22-26 May 2017												
3,13	Final meeting and presentation of the results and policy recommendations of the Study on Water and Forest	Regional Expert Advisory Working Group (REAWG)	Andrevlje, Serbia	Development of follow-up project concept	2, 3, 4	27-29 June 2017												

3,14	2nd interim meeting of SEE REAWG on LEADER	Regional Expert Advisory Working Group (REAWG)	Zagreb, Croatia	Presentation of the final draft of the assessment	2, 3, 4	September 2017
3,15	Multilateral Agreement-Trade Facilitation in case of dispute- CEFTA	SWG member countries /teritories	Tirana, Albania	Solving the regional aspects related to trade	1, 2, 3, 4	March 2017

GRANT SCHEME FROM LEIWW PROGRAMME

	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	Implementation and reporting of approved projects under the first call	all 4 CBR	all 4 CBR	Improved economic aspects of businesses through sistainable use of natural resources	1, 2, 3, 4	January - May												
4,2	Final on-spot check for projects under the first call	all 4 CBR	all 4 CBR		1, 2, 3, 4	March - May												
4,3	Final payment (After realization of the projects but not later than May 31st, 2017)	all 4 CBR	all 4 CBR			May-17												
4,4	Preparation of Monitoring documents, tables and regular monitoring of implemented projects / investments	all 4 CBR	all 4 CBR	Measurement of ivestments impact		June - December												
4,5	Finalization of Analysis 1 for second call CBR Prespa and Sharra	Private, public and civil sector	Prespa and Sharra			Mid January												
4,6	Analysis 2 for second call CBR Prespa and Sharra - Selection and scoring of eligible projects	Private, public and civil sector	Prespa and Sharra			End of January												
4,7	Analysis 2 for second call CBR Prespa and Sharra - request for supplement documents	Private, public and civil sector	Prespa and Sharra			Mid of February												
4,8	On-spot control for selected project after Analysis 2	Private, public and civil sector	Prespa and Sharra			End February												
4,9	Sample base control for selected project	Private, public and civil sector	Prespa and Sharra			End February												
4,10	Analysis 3 - Final decision for selection of the grant beneficiaries	Private, public and civil sector	Prespa and Sharra			Beggining of March												
4,11	Contracting of grant beneficiaries and contracts signing ceremony	Private, public and civil sector	Prespa and Sharra			Latest by 15th March												
4,12	Implementation of grant projects	Private, public and civil sector	Prespa and Sharra			20th March - 20th August												
4,13	Final on-spot check	Private, public and civil sector	Prespa and Sharra			June - August												
4,14	Final payment (After realization of the projects but not more than 30th of September)	Private, public and civil sector	Prespa and Sharra			July - 30th September												
4,15	impact monitoring of implemented projects / investments	Private, public and civil sector	Prespa and Sharra	Measurement of ivestments impact		July - December												
4,16	Organization of trainings for grant beneficiaries on various topics listed above	Private, public and civil sector	Drina-Tara, Drina-Sava, Prespa and Sharra			Mid of February-end of April												

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

FOSTERING REGIONAL COOPERATION AND BALANCED TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT OF WB COUNTRIES IN THE PROCESS TOWARDS EI INTEGRATION

	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	Facilitation of the economic development of the WB region	Ministries of Agriculture and WB cross-border areas	WB countries	Policy papers	1, 2, 3, 4	January - April												
5,1,1	16th SHG meeting CBR Prespa	SHG Prespa	Macedonia	Increased cooperattion among stakeholders	1, 2, 3, 4	February 2017												
5,1,2	17th SHG Meeting CBR Prespa	SHG Prespa	Albania	Increased cooperattion among stakeholders	1, 2, 3, 4	April 2017												
5,1,3	16th SHG Meeting CBR Sharra	SHG Sharra	Albania	Increased cooperattion among stakeholders	1, 2, 3, 4	February 2017												
5,1,4	17th SHG Meeting CBR Sharra	SHG Sharra	Macedonia	Increased cooperattion among stakeholders	1, 2, 3, 4	April 2017												
5,1,5	16th SHG Meeting CBR Drina-Sava	SHG Drina-Sava	Croatia	Increased cooperattion among stakeholders	1, 2, 3, 4	February 2017												
5,1,6	17th SHG Meeting CBR Drina-Sava	SHG Drina-Sava	Serbia	Increased cooperattion among stakeholders	1, 2, 3, 4	April 2017												
5,1,7	15th SHG Meeting CBR Drina-Tara	SHG Drina-Tara	Serbia	Increased cooperattion among stakeholders	1, 2, 3, 4	February 2017												
5,1,8	16th SHG Meeting CBR Drina-Tara	SHG Drina-Tara	Montenegro	Increased cooperattion among stakeholders	1, 2, 3, 4	April 2017												
5,2	Implementation of capacity building measures for preparation of relevant projects with adequate quality	WB cross-border areas	WB countries	Training material and project proposals	1, 2, 3, 4	End of February - mid of March												
5,2,1	ABD team capacity building - follow up on prepration of project proposals	ABD staff	Albania	Increased capacities of ABD team for preparation of project proposals	1, 2, 3, 4	Mid May												
5,2,2	Capacity building for DT, DS, Pr, Sh	Stakeholders from 4 CBR	WB countires		1, 2, 3, 4	February - April												
5,2,3	Capacity building for new 3 CBR	Stakeholders from new regions			1, 2, 3, 4	February - April												

							Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
5,3	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	1, 2, 3, 4	January - April												
5,4	Performance of publicity activities related to available funding	WB cross-border areas	WB countries	Informative documents, project proposals	2, 3, 4	January - April												
5,5	Organization of people-to-people actions	WB cross-border areas	WB countries	Reports, promotional material, MoUs, contracts etc.	2, 3, 4	January - April												
5,6	Participation in meetings with other regional structures	WB cross-border areas		Reports	2, 3, 4	January - April												
5,7	Finalization of the assessment of the situation, development potentials and strategic planning of the economic development, and follow up activities in three additional cross border areas	WB cross-border areas	"Neretva", "Prokletije" and "Pcinja"	Baseline analysis and strategic development frameworks	2, 3, 4	January - April												
5,7,1	Follow up activites in the new regions	Stakeholders from new regions	"Neretva", "Prokletije" and "Pcinja"	Incresed cooperation betwenn the stakhoders	2, 3, 4	Januari - April												
5,7,2	Organization of SHG meetings	Stakeholders from new regions	"Neretva", "Prokletije" and "Pcinja"	Incresed cooperation betwenn the stakhoders	2, 3, 4	Januari - April												
5,7,3	Organization of capacity building events			Incresed capacities of the Stakholders	2, 3, 4	Januari - April												
5,8	ROM (result oriented monitoring) Assessment	SHG in all CBR	all 4 CBR	ROM assessment report	2, 3, 4	16.01.2017 - 02.02.2017												
5,9	Monitoring of implemented projects / investments within ABD 3 project	contracted beneficiaries in Drina-Tara and Drina-Sava	Drina-Sava, Drina-Tara		1, 2, 3, 4	February - May												
5,10	3rd PSG meeting	PSG members	Brussels, Belgium		1, 2, 3, 4	31st of January												
5,11	Final Report					By end of May												

JRC

"NATIONAL POLICY INSTRUMENTS AND EU APPROXIMATION PROCESS: EFFECTS ON FARM HOLDINGS IN THE WB COUNTRIES (EUEWB)"

	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	Third interim meeting	WB countries	Skopje, Macedonia	Study of agriculture and RD policies and recommendations for their alignment with EU CAP 2014-2020	1, 2, 3, 4	2-3 February												
6,2	Publication of the first part of the results - Agriculture and rural development policy analysis	WB countries	N/A			June 2017												
6,3	Farm productivity analysis in Western Balkans- final model results	WB countries	WB countries			June 2017												
6,4	Final meeting	WB countries	JRC Spain			June 2017												

TAIEX

	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	Producers Groups - legal framework, organization structure, roles, good practices	Representatives of the SWG member institutions	TBC	Capacity building of SWG member insittutions	3, 4	TBD												
7,2	Wine Regulation - PDO, PGI	Representatives of the SWG member institutions	TBC		1, 2, 3, 4	TBD												
7,3	Organic Agriculture - new EU regulations	Representatives of the SWG member institutions	TBC		1, 2, 3, 4	TBC												
7,4	Definition of areas with natural constraints	Representatives of the SWG member institutions	TBC		1, 2, 3, 4	TBC												

OTHER ACTIVITIES

	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	RCC Donors Conference	SWG and other regional initiatives	Sarajevo, BiH	Possible cooperation with donor organizations for implemenatation of SEE 2020 Regional Strategy	1, 2, 3, 4	March												
8,2	RCC Coordination Board Meetings	SWG and other regional initiatives	SEE and EU member states	SEE 2020 Strategy and Programming Implementation for 2017-2019	1, 2, 3, 4	February, June, October												
8,3	Project Evaluation (PEV) Mission	SWG Member Institutions/countries	SEE Countries	Preparation of LEIWW 2 phase	1, 2, 3, 4	March/April 2017												
8,4	Berlin Process - Trieste Summit 2017		Italy	Lobbying and visibility		10-13 July 2017												
8,5	Slow Food International Conference	SWG/ Cross-border stakeholders	Italy			September												
8,6	European Rural Parliament	Civil society, BRDN	Vendors, Netherlands	Integration of BRDN and support of civil society	1, 2, 3, 4	17 - 21 Oct												

8,7	Networking	Civil society, BRDN	N/A	Support of civil society, rural networks - BRDN	1, 3, 4	Throughout the year
8,8	Ministers Meeting GMO	SWG member countries /teritories	Vienna, Austria	Positive examples of RD and policies	1, 2, 3, 4	08-10 May 2017
8,9	GIZ Fachtage	SWG member countries /teritories	Bonn, Germany	Lobbying and visibility	1, 2, 3, 4	First week of July

ADDITIONAL NEW ACTIVITIES

	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	Study tour on Agro-biodiversity	REAWG Members	Germany		2, 3, 4	November 2017												
9,2	Study tour on Areas with Natural Constraints (ANC)	REAWG Members	Italy		2, 3, 4	December 2017												

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

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ANNEX 6

AGRICULTURAL POLICY FORUM 2017

AGRICULTURAL POLICY FORUM 2017

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT FOR ACCELERATED EU INTEGRATION OF THE WESTERN BALKANS

10–13 OCTOBER 2017
PODGORICA, MONTENEGRO

PODGORICA AGENDA 2017

The 17th Agricultural Policy Forum (APF), hereafter referred to as the "Forum", held in Podgorica, Montenegro on 11th – 12th October 2017, is a comprehensive regional platform enabling all those concerned to get together and address key concerns about the future of agriculture and rural development and their role in development around the South Eastern European region. APF provides an open forum for stakeholders across the agricultural and rural development spectrum—from academics and policy makers to farmers—to participate in collaborative discussion and action around the current and future state of agriculture and rural development in respect to the dynamics of European Union (EU) integration process in South Eastern Europe.

The Forum this year focused on *"Sustainable Agricultural and Rural Development for Accelerated EU Integration of the Western Balkans"*. It addressed the need for adjusting the agricultural and rural development policies in SEE in line with the EU requirements; and the empowering processes of increasing rural competitiveness and productivity to enhance the social, economic and environmental well-being of rural areas. It also denoted the value of enhancing diversification advantages in rural communities, improving investment opportunities and building honest partnerships between stakeholders and governments for achieving sustainable and balanced development in the region.

The Podgorica Agenda 2017 resumes the main outcome from these discussions in the plenary and working group sessions:

Rural migration is a result of socio-economic factors, including poverty, limited employment opportunities and access to social protection, poor infrastructure, natural resource depletion and adverse impacts of environmental degradation. The Forum recognized that efforts must be geared towards a more productive agricultural and rural development sector, enabling employment and investments opportunities. The Forum acknowledged that strengthening value chain development and clustering, improving local capacities and supporting innovative business and investment approaches that exploit territorial diversity, creates more effective environment which fosters growth and employment, thus helping prevent rural depopulation.

Stemming population loss and enabling economic diversification of rural areas can be done through sustainable management of natural resources. However, inter-sectorial cooperation among authorities responsible for agriculture, rural development and environment is a major challenge, given that integrated policy development and planning as well as investment mechanisms are still rare. The Forum recommended the need for streamlining policy instruments and management of natural resources, along with creating synergies for multi-functional use of land and ecosystem services as innovative approaches towards new levels of business development. These elements contribute to the development of sustainable income generating activities in the rural areas. They provide alternative livelihoods that relieve pressure on the natural resource-base while also reducing poverty, thereby helping to sustain integrated management and use of natural resources, while protecting critical ecosystem functions and biodiversity of national, regional and international significance.

Concluding from the Panel Discussion, the Forum recommended the following:

- There is a need to improve competitiveness of the agri-food sector and the rural economy and to address the constraints of small farms and rural

businesses. Analysing farm efficiency and its links to subsidy measures is becoming central in applied policy analysis, that needs to provide policy-makers with useful and current insights. Such analytical tools will assist the Western Balkan countries in improving evidence-based policymaking, implementation and evaluation;

- CEFTA Parties should consolidate the actions needed to establish a regional economic area in compliance with the EU acquis to eliminate market access barriers, decrease the cost of trade and attract more investments. Trade facilitation and dispute settlement procedures are essential for improving trade flows among CEFTA parties;
- Policymakers should give higher priority to IPARD measures facilitating cooperation among small farmers and businesses such as setting up and running business partnerships and the development of short value chains. In this regard an efficient and effective legal, financial and administrative environment for rural businesses is of critical importance to enhance absorption of IPARD funds. The SEE countries should strengthen their cooperation and enhance the exchange of experience on the implementation of IPARD in the pre-accession period, concentrate on policies improving the competitiveness of these sectors and facilitating access to markets, both domestic and foreign.
- LEADER has proven to be a crucial tool for involving local people and partnerships in preparation and implementation of sustainable local development strategies. Government institutions at all levels should continue working on strategic and programming documents and the regulatory framework for introduction of LEADER. Strengthening capacities of relevant institutions and stakeholders as well as awareness raising for the LEADER approach and the setting up of local action groups are central to the process.

Focus topic 1:
Improving competitiveness of the rural economy considering the farm structure in the Western Balkans

The Forum deliberated on modes to improve the competitiveness of small farms and rural businesses in the Western Balkan region. This group represents the majority of private businesses in rural areas, essential for income, employment and sustainable rural livelihoods. It was acknowledged that these businesses are, with a few exceptions, not targeted by any policy measures under national schemes, or even IPARD. The Forum reflected that in most countries these businesses have a very low degree of integration in value chains due to the informal economy, their inability to supply sufficiently large quantities, and often their remoteness from the main markets.

The Forum emphasized that policymakers should also address this group of businesses to stimulate rural economic activities and job creation and thus reduce out migration. Consequently, the Forum recommends focusing on improving competitiveness of small rural businesses, by investments as well as increasing their level of knowledge and skills in managing their businesses and forming partnerships or other types of cooperation, thus improving their ability to integrate in short value chains. Traditional products for niche markets should be the leading competitiveness strategy. It was concluded that the ABD approach, though operating at a marginal level of financial input, has shown positive results in terms of providing a platform for networking among local partners, building trust and increasing the understanding and importance of working together to improve their economic performance. IPARD has tools to engage in such policy initiatives but only a few countries have included these measures in their programs. It is therefore recommended that national rural development measures, and/or IPARD, enhance support to local bottom up processes, partnerships, producer groups and/or other forms of cooperation for this type of businesses.

Focus topic 2:
Agricultural products trade barriers in the Western Balkans

Western Balkan countries/territories are very important trade partners. All of them are part of CEFTA, with the purpose of trade liberalization. However, they are still facing many barriers in the trade of agricultural products related to Non-Tariff Measures to Trade (NTMs). Some of those are: absence of mutual recognition of trade procedures, differences in regulations and methods for conformity assessments and excessive sampling by border authorities. These barriers contribute to the downward trend in the mutual trade of most of the Western Balkan countries/territories, recorded in the past period.

To overcome these barriers, the Forum recommends acceleration of harmonization of the relevant regulation of the Western Balkan countries/territories with the EU legislation. So as to avoid lengthy and costly double certification procedures, regional/bilateral agreement/s should be concluded about mutual recognition of

certificates, which should enable movement of agri-food products across Western Balkan. In addition, inspection should be done through risk assessment analyses, which is expected to significantly ease the trade in the region. In order to ensure effective and efficient implementation of these recommendations, capacity building should be conducted for the relevant authorities of the Western Balkan countries/territories.

Focus topic 3:
Sustainable rural development through the LEADER approach in the Western Balkans

Local development policies should be implemented using a bottom up approach for better connection, participation and coordination of diverse rural actors. The Forum urges the National Governments to put more effort in setting up the required legislative and administrative procedures for making the LEADER approach operational under the National Rural Development Programmes and/or IPARD. This effort will validate the work done so far, to strengthen the support to stakeholders in rural areas and ensure sustainability of the LEADER approach.

The added value of the LEADER approach is to strengthen local social capital and improve local governance through empowering rural communities and enhancing partnerships. The Forum acknowledges the crucial role of local action groups in implementing the local development strategies and to animate local actors and networks. Furthermore, the LAGs can skillfully communicate and cooperate with governmental bodies and a broad range of development partners, within and outside the rural areas. The art of animation involves highly diverse skills such as bringing various actors together to participate and jointly contribute, ultimately transforming divergent interests into opportunities for change towards common wellbeing. These capacities should be systematically strengthened.

The Forum agreed that:

- The Agenda will be presented and discussed at the 11th Annual Working Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from South Eastern Europe on the 17th of November 2017 in Jahorina, Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- The Agenda will be conveyed to the EU institutions, UN agencies and other relevant international institutions and organizations;
- The 18th Agricultural Policy Forum will take place in the autumn of 2018 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which holds the SWG Presidency for 2018.

The Agricultural Policy Forum 2017 in Podgorica was held 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.

The participants of the Agricultural Policy Forum 2017 highly appreciated the support provided by the convening institutions and organisations: the European Commission (DG NEAR, DG Agriculture and Rural Development) and the German Cooperation.

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ANNEX 7

CONCLUSIONS OF THE MINISTERIAL MEETING

CONCLUSIONS OF THE MINISTERIAL MEETING

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

CONVENED IN JAHORINA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA NOVEMBER 17th 2017

The Ministers of Agriculture from South Eastern Europe (SEE) and the Heads of Delegations, gathered on 17th of November 2017 in Jahorina at the 11th Annual Working Meeting organized under the joint auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations, Bosnia and Herzegovina 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 2016 and recommit themselves to the pursuit of a more sustainable development pathway in the field of agriculture and rural development.

Grounded on the initiative of founding a regional platform and convening an Annual Ministerial Meetings of the Ministers of Agriculture of the South-Eastern Europe (SEE) Countries, the Ministers and Heads of Delegations once again gathered jointly, plotting the course on sustainable development regionally.
The participating members deliberated on enhancement of EU integration process, which reflects equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of national circumstances. Accordingly, regional cooperation is essential 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 11th ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MINISTERS OF AGRICULTURE OF SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

WE, THE MINISTERS OF AGRICULTURE OF SOUTH EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES:

GATHERED in Jahorina, Bosnia and Herzegovina 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..

REITERATE the value of the European Union (EU) integration process for the Western Balkan countries, principally the reformative path of agriculture and rural development sector, and implication of successful enlargement policy that abides by the Copenhagen criteria and the conditionality of the Stabilization and Association Process.

EMPHASIE the importance of EU enlargement criteria in combination with incremental adoption of the EU's laws, principles and activities — to create market economies and pave the way for EU membership, which consequently reflects to the sustainable development and undermines the potential of the agricultural and rural development sectors in innovation and streamlining of economic prosperity in the Western Balkans.

ENDURE devoted to the efforts for harmonizing national agriculture and rural development policies with the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) of the EU for the 2014-2020 period. We reiterate the commitment towards enlargement agenda and remain committed to integrating the reform and development agendas in the agriculture and rural development sector under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) 2014-2020.

RECALL their dedication on crafting rural development programs and managing funds through the implementation of the IPARD instrument in the pre-accession period, predominantly on resourcing the operating structures and resolving major national obstacles for accreditation related to all IPARD bodies. We highlight 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) – Podgorica Agenda 2017. 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.

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 AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT, 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, WATER MANAGEMENT AND FORESTRY, FEDERATION OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE FORESTRY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT, KOSOVO*

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND WATER ECONOMY, REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT, MONTENEGRO

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND WATER MANAGEMENT, REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

SWG OBSERVER INSTITUTIONS

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, HUNGARY

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

FEDERAL MINISTRY OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE, FEDERAL REPUBLICOF GERMANY

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

EUROPEAN COMMISSION (EC)

DEUTSCHE GESELLSCHAFT FÜR 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."*

South Eastern Europe

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