

**Dear Ministers of the region's countries,
Dear Deputy Ministers, State Secretary and Representatives of the
Institutions of neighboring countries,
Dear Representatives of the European Commission, FAO, GIZ and all
participants,**

First of all, I would like to thank my homolog Ljupco Nikolovski and SWG's Secretariat for the organization of the meeting of the Ministers in the South East Europe.

Agriculture and rural development have an important role in our country, because about 60% of the population lives in rural areas and the main economic activities that they develop are agriculture activities. Kosovo Agriculture is characterized by small and medium - sized farms, and it contributes about 13% in Gross Domestic Products, includes about 25% of the total number of employees and consists about 15% of the total export value.

As in all EU countries, where through the development of agriculture and rural development efforts are made to reduce the socio - economic differences between the countries of region, and Kosovo the development of these sectors has a great importance and it is a basic part of policies of the Government of Kosovo, which at any time we are increasingly aligning with the Common Agriculture Policies of the European Union.

Sustainable rural development and improvement of the quality of life to be through promotion of agricultural and other economic activities that are in accordance with environmental policies. Then, creating employment opportunities in rural areas, especially through rural diversification and preparing Kosovo's agriculture to integrate in agriculture of European Union countries are a priority for the Government of Kosovo and for the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development.

Agriculture is a priority for Kosovo. In the last two years, we have allocated more than 110 million euro from the central budget for agriculture supporting to increase the land area, increase production, increase agribusiness processing, and most importantly open up new jobs in agriculture only from our investments in grants schemes and subsidies.

Undoubtedly our support has been focused in other forms, the advancement of our laboratories, agriculture institutes and associations, the food control system and certainly in the advisory services for our farmers.

The challenge for us is the lack of modern systems in irrigation, land fragmentation, rural infrastructure and increased production in those products that have potential in us such as vineyards, fruits and vegetables and the meat sector.

These investments have influenced the economic growth in the country and we believe that in other years the results will be even more positive and we will achieve that with our programs we support the ideas of many youths and young women in Kosovo, who want to deal with agriculture, something that is not happening in many states.

It is worth to mention that in the program for Agriculture and Rural Development this year is being implemented a special measure which was given a special importance to small farmers, who did not have the opportunity to benefit from grants scheme based on IPARD procedures.

In fact, this special measure was the goal of supporting farmers and small business in less developed rural areas that are a large number in our country. Through this direct support will increase employment, reduce population migration in rural areas, as you know this phenomenon is expressed in all Western Balkan countries.

It is also worth to point out as a very important step in relation to the approximation of the common agriculture policies with the decision of the Government of Kosovo is the establishment of IPARD structures, since all structures are completed for the implementation of agriculture and rural development program.

The Government of Kosovo remains committed to contribute to the strengthening of SWG's role and initiative and, of course, to other initiatives that help to get closer to us. The economy is the one that should unite us, to

leave the differences to go away, and to be a joint commitment to a greater development of South East Europe.

We have a lot of work to do and of course, we must support each other in order to develop and strengthen the sustainable agriculture policy system.

Undoubtedly, it is very good that we meet here and discuss many ideas and plans, meet in bilateral visits and other meetings and these have given somehow their fruits.

We think what we discuss here, agree and see in the interests of everyone should not only stay within the meetings and the discussions to be become in the action. For this we as a country have a full devotion.

Kosovo continues to have very close cooperation with all international organizations, European Commission, DJ AGRI, USAID, World Bank, GIZ (German Government) FAO in all areas of agriculture and rural development.

In this regard, the European Union should encourage us to strengthen regional cooperation by continuing technical and financial support to SWG member states in the field of agriculture and rural development by focusing on territorial cooperation and implementation in ABDA (area based development approach) in rural areas.

Continuing support will further strengthen EU integration process of the Western Balkan countries, by maintaining the regional rural agenda, ensuring a participatory process and equivalent socio - economic growth in all regions of the Western Balkan countries.

Strengthening of regional cooperation in the field of agriculture and rural economy is essential and would lead to improve sector competitiveness and facilitating trade between the countries of Southeast Europe.

Regarding the regional cooperation, Kosovo has been and remains our call that the Balkan countries to be even more open market and to help each other where everyone has its advantages. It is evident that in some phases the policy is the one that prevents us to move quickly toward the opening, but we must overcome this mentality and look for the common future as a developed region.

In all these processes, the regional cooperation has a special importance, because it helps in sharing information and experience in our common challenge towards joining the European Union. The SWG's platform is a good example of intensifying cooperation and coordination of activities, and in this context, we take very seriously all conclusions and recommendations derived from Jahorinas's agenda.

Thank you!