

**Twelfth Annual Working meeting of
Ministries of Agriculture 2018**
14-16 November 2018, Struga, Macedonia

**Speech of Ms Aleksandra Pivec, PhD,
Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Food of the Republic of Slovenia**

Honourable Minister Ljubco Nikolovski,
Honourable Heads of delegations,
Excellences,
Dear Ladies and Gentleman,

I am honoured to be present at this event of international importance, to address such a distinguished audience in Struga today and to have a possibility to discuss further challenges that are on top of the agenda of the Western Balkan Countries.

Allow me first to extend my warmest congratulations to the successful convening of the meeting, my sincere greetings to all the participants, and gratitude to the Macedonian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural development for the great organization and arrangement of the meeting and for indeed Macedonian traditional great hospitality.

The Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group in South Eastern Europe is well organized and a prosperous platform which deals with the policy issues important for this region, sharing the experiences, knowledge and partnership among the Western Balkan Countries. Slovenia acknowledges the implementation of tailor made pilot projects on Area Based Development approach at the cross border areas of the South Eastern Europe. The results of these projects are great despite small funds available and represent important cross border cooperation.

Western Balkan Countries are still very important trading partners for Slovenian food processing industry. Efforts toward removal of trade barriers are of outmost importance to both sides. In my opinion, the compliance with the EU requirements for the implementation of the trade mechanisms is important already at in the pre-accession stage. This way, your countries' integration process will be facilitated and you will have concrete and important results for rural economy before the accession to the EU.

Programing for agriculture and rural development is a demanding process. As was agreed at the Policy Forum in Jahorina, long term orientation and evidence based policymaking are necessary for the harmonisation with the EU principles. Based on Slovenia's experience, we need to add the importance of multi annual financing approach that demonstrates the achievement of results which will be transformed into the so-called performance of the CAP.

Ladies and Gentleman,

The European perspective of this region is essential for ensuring a long term stability and partnership among Western Balkan Countries.

Based on the Slovenian experience, I would like to emphasize that the accession to the EU is not an easy project. It demands a lot of political willingness, coordination and multi-level governance, as well as efforts by the administration. What is needed are not only the "tick the box" reforms required by Brussels, but also a real policies' implementation into practice.

I would like to emphasise that in the accession process the negotiations in the area of agriculture and rural development are among the most demanding of the EU *acquis*. Therefore the accession negotiation process must be transparent in order to result in successful implementation process.

Slovenia has a first-hand and broad experience in the negotiation process in the area of agriculture and rural development as well as the food safety. We successfully ensured a favourable starting position for our farmers following

the accession in 2004. We are willing to share our experiences and knowledge with the Western Balkan Countries.

From the experiences gained during the implementation of several advice-giving projects in the Western Balkan region we have learned how essential is the knowledge of the basic operating structure of systems that we had in common in the past. We have always tried to incorporate the EU requirements into the existing structures.

In 2018 the Slovenian agricultural ministry, together with the Slovenian Paying Agency and Inspectorate, hosted several study visits from the Western Balkans Countries.

Sharing the knowledge, experiences and good practices at government level and on the ground from the Slovenian farmers was even easier due to the fact that there was no language barrier.

At the moment, a new delivery model for the forthcoming Common Agricultural Policy tops the agenda of the EU member states. As the representative of the Directorate General for Agriculture Mr Haniotis explained today, the new CAP will be oriented toward achieving the results. Consequently, the adaptation of the procedures and governance structures is an ongoing process for national administrations, even after the accession to the EU.

Despite limited human and financial resources for the development cooperation actions, two small scale bilateral technical assistance projects were successfully implemented in 2018.

One was focused on strengthening of the institutional capacities of IPARD operating structure, also linked to the preparation for the introduction of “diversification on farm” measure and quality schemes for agricultural products. This measure is - as you concluded at the Agricultural Forum – the key development driving force also for small farmers and rural businesses.

The second project was focused on the preparation for the implementation of the LEADER approach and recognition of Local Action Groups.

Our experiences with the administrations of the Western Balkan countries are very good and we hope you will continue with devoted work toward achieving the important results in the path toward Common Agriculture Policy rules.

Ladies and Gentleman, Dear colleagues,

Finally, I would like to emphasise that there are existing tools and funds available for future cooperation, assistance and support of the Western Balkan countries for smoother integration processes. It is of extreme importance to use the funds and measures earmarked for the pre-accession period. IPARD measures are prepared on the basis of the EU requirements and are adapted to a certain extent to encourage accession countries to address rural problems and development of agriculture in general.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food of the Republic of Slovenia is willing to remain a trustworthy partner of the future cooperation within the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group in South Eastern Europe.

Thank you for your attention!