

12th Annual Working Meeting of Ministers of Agriculture 2018

14th - 16th November 2018, Struga, Macedonia

MINUTES OF THE MEETING



1. Participants

The 12th Annual Working Meeting of Ministers of Agriculture was hosted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy of Macedonia, and co-organized by SWG. It was attended by high-level delegations from 7 SWG permanent members (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Srpska, Kosovo*, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia), and 6 SWG observers (Croatia, Bulgaria, Austria, Hungary, Slovenia and Germany), as well as the Czech Republic, European Commission and international organizations (GIZ, FAO and RCC).

The full list of participants is provided in **Annex 1**.

2. Program

The event was opened by the Deputy Prime Minister of Macedonia, responsible for economic affairs and coordination with the economic sectors, Mr. Koco Angjushev, the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy of Macedonia, Mr. Ljupco Nikolovski, and the Secretary General of the SWG, Mr. Boban Ilic. Mr. Ilic handed over the presidency of SWG Assembly to Minister Nikolovski, who then congratulated the successful presidency of the BiH Ministry for the previous year, and awarded plaques of appreciation to Minister Sharovic and Mr. Dusan Neskovic. After the key note addresses by the representatives of the European Commission (Mr. Tassos Haniotis and Mr. Colin Wolfe), each national delegation addressed, followed by the addresses of the international organizations' representatives. The event concluded by signing ceremony of the Declaration of the Ministers of Agriculture and Heads of Delegations of South Eastern Europe.



The full program is provided in **Annex 2**.

3. Organizers

Organizers of the event were the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy of the Republic of Macedonia and the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in South Eastern Europe (SEE)

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

4. Background

The SWG as a platform for networking and regional cooperation was established during the Agricultural Policy Forum 2005 entitled: “Rural Development – Opportunities for Cooperation in the SEE” held in June 2005.

The aims of the SWG are to assure constructive and permanent cooperation among the Ministries of Agriculture within the scope of their responsibilities to the ongoing integration processes into the EU. The SWG provides coordinated contributions for the development of rural areas, especially in the border regions.

The overall objective of regional cooperation between the SEE countries is rational use of available foreign assistance and national resources in building up and strengthening capacities for rural development support, as well as for increase of economic competitiveness of rural areas. This is achieved through provision of a platform for exchange of experience, information flow and know-how on agriculture and rural development policies and measures and through concentrated efforts for innovative development of rural areas.

Starting with the first Annual Working Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from SEE organized in November 2007 in Germany and as per the conclusions of the Ministerial Meetings in the past years, the Twelfth Annual Working Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from SEE will be hosted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy of the Republic of Macedonia.

5. Objective of the meeting

The aim of the meeting was to discuss the future of regional cooperation and reforms in the sector of agriculture and rural development in the process of EU approximation of the SEE region.

6. The main topics

The topics which were discussed during the Twelfth Annual Working Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from SEE were:

- EU approximation of the candidate and potential candidate countries from SEE in agriculture and rural development;
- Regional Cooperation and way forward in the region;
- Results and the Agenda from the Agricultural Policy Forum 2018
- Fast green lines at the borders (Trade facilitation).

7. Addresses, discussions and statements of participant

Key Note addresses

Mr. Tassos Haniotis, Director of Strategy, Simplification and Policy Analysis European Commission, Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development, gave a keynote address on the future of the Common Agricultural Policy post 2020. Mr Haniotis stated that analysis and wide public consultation confirmed major achievements of the CAP, but also revealed shortcomings to be addressed in a changing broader environment within which CAP operated.



The full presentation delivered by Mr. Haniotis is provided in **Annex 3**.

Mr. Colin Wolfe, Head of Western Balkans Regional Cooperation European Commission, Directorate General for Neighborhood and Enlargement, recognized the relevance of the agricultural sector for the WB due to its gross value-added and rural population share. It could contribute to the objectives of the Western Balkans strategy by strengthening economic growth in the region, creating jobs in rural areas, engaging youth and retaining people in the region. According to Mr. Wolfe agriculture can specifically be part of flagship actions related to start-ups, SMEs, research and innovation, smart growth, trade facilitation, better access to finance etc. It should be supportive of digital progress, eg. roaming, broadband deployment, e-government, e-services (since this facilitates decentralization from urban to rural base), and benefit from increased regional cooperation.



Mr. Kaj Mortensen, senior consultant, presented the results of the Agricultural Policy Forum 2018 - Jahorina Agenda 2018. Among other, the APF concluded that there was a need for a more transparent policymaking with long term orientation and in line with EU principles. Focus should be placed on improving competitiveness of the large group of small farms and rural businesses.



The full presentation delivered by Mr. Mortensen is provided in **Annex 4**.

Ms. Nadica Dzerkovska from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy of Macedonia, presented the Ministry's initiative for trade facilitation and fast green lines at the borders for the agri-food products in SEE countries. The objective of the initiative is to simplify inspections related to all clearance procedures and reduce formalities to the possible maximum extent; To exchange data between authorities to the extent that each national legislation allows; To mutually recognise the national Authorised Economic Operators' Programmes in each CEFTA Party, provided that both, the legislation and implementation of each national programme, is fully in line with the relevant EU acquis.



The full presentation delivered by Ms. Dzerkovska is provided in **Annex 5**.

Mr. Boban Ilic, SWG Secretary General, provided an overview of the regional cooperation in the South-Eastern Europe in the agri-food sector within the SWG framework, including achievements in the area of policy development, political dialogue platforms, capacity building measures, people-to-people actions etc.



The full presentation delivered by Mr. Ilic is provided in **Annex 6**.

National Delegations' addresses

H.E. Ljupco Nikolovski, Minister, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy of Macedonia, recognized the success of the application of area-based development, regional analytical work and other achievements and results of the work of SWG in the regional framework and invited the European Commission, EU member states and international organizations to further support technically and financially the regional cooperation in the sector of Agriculture and Rural Development, as well as the trade facilitation and fast green lines at the borders for the agri-food products in South Eastern Europe.



The full speech of Minister Nikolovski is provided in **Annex 7**.

H.E. Mirko Sarovic, Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers and Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, emphasized the importance of the continuity of the meeting of ministers, as crucial mode of regional cooperation. He also stressed the significance of the conclusions from the Agricultural Policy Forum 2018, held in BiH, and the need for trade facilitation and respecting mutual agreements among the countries of the region.

The full speech of Minister Sarovic is provided in **Annex 8**.

Ms. Gordana Rokvic, Advisor to the Minister - Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of Republic of Srpska, pointed out at SWG as an excellent platform for regional cooperation and networking of the stakeholders in agriculture and rural development of the Western Balkan countries, and expressed the intention of Republic of Srpska to continue both, supporting and using SWG for regional networking, mutual understanding, cooperation, exchange of experience and work towards common interests.

The full speech of Ms. Rokvic is provided in **Annex 9**.

H.E. Milutin Simovic, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Montenegro, stated that Europe needs stable and integrated Balkans, as well as the Balkans need stable and united Europe. To achieve and sustain stability and integrity, the countries of the Western Balkans must cooperate, exchange experiences, mutually support, and implement joint projects. For that purpose, in the area of agriculture and rural development, SWG a the common platform has a crucial role.



The full address of Minister Simovic is provided in **Annex 10**.

Mr. Mevludin Krasniqi, Deputy Minister - Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development of Kosovo*, expressed the commitment of the Government of Kosovo to further contribute to the strengthening of SWG's role and initiatives in strengthening the regional cooperation, with the aim to develop and strengthen the sustainable agriculture policy system. Moreover, he expressed the need for more intensive follow-up actions coming out of the joint discussions and agreements.

The full address of Mr. Krasniqi is provided in **Annex 11**.

Mr. Ilir Halilaj, Deputy Minister - Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Albania, expressed the commitment of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Albania to regional cooperation, and its importance for the prosperity of the region.

Mr. Senad Mahmutovic, State Secretary - Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of the Republic of Serbia, stated that the regional cooperation was important for the pre-accession countries, as well as for strengthening of the bilateral relations between the countries of the region.

The address of Mr. Mahmutovic is provided in **Annex 12**.

H.E. Rumen Porodzanov, Minister - Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry of the Republic of Bulgaria, stated that agricultural and rural development in the region of South Eastern Europe was an important priority, and its further growth could be achieved through a platform for sharing experience, exchange of information and know-how provided by the SWG.

The full address of Minister Porodzanov is provided in **Annex 13**.

Ms. Aleksandra Pivec, Minister - Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, Republic of Slovenia, acknowledged the great results of implementation of tailor-made pilot projects on Area Based Development approach at the cross-border areas of the South Eastern Europe,

despite the small available funds. She also emphasized that the accession to the EU was not an easy project, based on the Slovenian experience, but the European perspective of the region was essential for ensuring a long-term stability and partnership among Western Balkan Countries.

The full speech delivered by Minister Pivec is provided in **Annex 14**.

Mr. Tugomir Majdak, State Secretary of Ministry of Agriculture, Republic of Croatia, emphasised the appreciation of the SWG activities and the willingness to work and cooperate with its members, especially having in consideration that the Croatian perspective as an EU Member State could be useful for all SWG members being on the road to the EU.

The full address of Mr. Majdak is provided in **Annex 15**.

Mr. Miklos Kis, State secretary of Ministry of Agriculture, Hungary, underline that Hungary was committed to support the EU integration of the Western Balkans in political and professional sense, and emphasized that the strengthening of trade relations and economic co-operation between the countries of the region was essential for the development.

The full address of Mr. Kis is provided in **Annex 16**.

Mr. German Jeub, Head of Directorate EU Policy, International Cooperation and Fisheries at BMEL, Federal Republic of Germany, stated that the SWG and the respective governments had been instrumental in the further improvement of cooperation in the Western Balkans in the fields of agriculture and regional development. He emphasized that the Federal Government and the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture firmly endorsed the prospect of EU membership for countries of the region, and announced that, keeping with tradition, the Agriculture Ministers of the Western Balkan countries would meet on the fringes of the International Green Week and the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture in Berlin in January 2019.

The full address of Mr. Jeub is provided in **Annex 17**.

Ms. Pagona Larda, First Counselor for Economic and Commercial Affairs at the Liaison office of Greece in Skopje, expressed her pleasure to be part of the event, as it was the first time that Greece was represented in the Annual Working Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture of SEE. She requested that a disclaimer related to the constitutional name of the host country is attached to the minutes of the meeting. The statement is provided in **Annex 18**.

Mr. Cristian **Brawenz**, Attache of the Federal Ministry for Sustainability and Tourism, Austria, presented Austria's presidency priorities: Security and Migration; Securing Prosperity and Competitiveness through Digitalisation; Stability in the Neighbourhood – Rapprochement of the Western Balkans/Southeastern Europe.

The full presentation delivered by Mr. Brawenz is provided in **Annex 19**.

Finally, **Mr. Vladimir Olegovich Rakhmanin**, FAO Assistant Director General, **Mr. David Oberhuber**, GIZ Country Director for Kosovo* and Macedonia and **Mr. Gazmend Turdiu**, RCC Deputy Secretary General, addressed the meeting expressing the dedication and commitment of their organizations to regional cooperation and interest for continuous support to the region.



8. Declaration of the Ministers of Agriculture and Heads of Delegations of South Eastern Europe

As a result of the meeting the Heads of Delegations from the SWG member countries/territories, with the exception of Serbia, signed the Declaration of the Ministers of Agriculture and Heads of Delegations of South Eastern Europe, which is provided in **Annex 20**.



3 December 2018



Boban Ilic

SWG Secretary General