



## 47<sup>th</sup> online meeting of the Assembly of the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in South Eastern Europe,

### REPORT



09<sup>th</sup> July 2020

## **I. SWG online Assembly Session**

### **1. Introduction**

The 47th SWG Assembly Session was planned to be held in the period 5 – 9 of April 2020 and host by the CIHEAM Institute in Montpellier, France. Due to rapidly escalating health concerns in light of the global impact of the coronavirus disease - COVID-19, following the recommendations of the crisis management teams in the respective Governments which is leading for restrictions on travel across borders, the situation have been reassessed. After having taken into account the situation, SWG Secretariat had to postpone holding of the 47th SWG Assembly Session foreseen for April 2020 and revised possible reschedule for the beginning of July.

The 47<sup>th</sup> SWG Assembly Session was organized online on the 9<sup>th</sup> of July and was attended by SWG delegates from the member institutions from: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, North Macedonia and Montenegro, representatives from observer institutions from Hungary, Croatia, Germany as well as European Commission (EC) - DG AGRI and German International Cooperation (GIZ). The 47<sup>th</sup> Assembly had a qualified quorum for discussion and taking decisions. The list of participants is provided in **Annex 1**.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the retrospective of the accomplishment in the period December 2019 – June 2020, discussion and planning of the SWG major features Agricultural Policy Forum 2020 and Annual Meeting of the Ministers from SEE 2020 and discussion on the internal topics, as well as the cooperation with SWG partner institutions.

Welcome address on behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development of Kosovo\* was given by Mr. Bekim Hoxha, State Secretary at the Kosovo\* Ministry and president of the SWG Assembly. Introduction words were also given by Mr. Zigo Rutkovskis on behalf of DG AGRI, European Commission. The chair of the SWG Assembly was Mr. Boban Ilic. The program of the event is provided in **Annex 2**.

### **2. Report on achievements in the period December 2019 – June 2020 by SWG Secretariat**

SWG Secretariat staff provided review of the realized accomplishments in the period December 2019 - June 2020.

#### *Update on collaboration between SWG and GIZ*

The progress related to the activities performed on behalf of SWG with regards to the SEDRA project:

---

\* 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.

- REAWG COVID – established with aim to assess the multiple impacts of COVID-19 on agriculture, food and rural areas as well as on respective policies in the Western Balkans; More details in **Annex 3**.
- Three Ministerial Conferences and regional cooperation of the WBs during pandemic COVID have been organized; More details in **Annex 4**.
- Progress of the REAWG Economic Diversification through Rural Tourism (ED-RT) and REAWG on quality policy – schemes of geographical indications and traditional specialties (PDO PGI TSG) could be find in **Annex 5**.
- Progress of the REAWG on LEADER until June as well as the action plan ahead could be found in **Annex 6**.
- The grant scheme being implemented via SEDRA project, but through the existing ABDA structures have been also presented. More details on the progress of the performed activities in **Annex 7**.

#### Update on the cooperation with the European Commission

Update with regards to the progress was provided, including the update of the two relevant projects:

- SWG – JRC “Study on the research, innovation and technology transfer capacities and on the recent agricultural policy developments in the context of the EU approximation process in the pre-accession countries (ARAPD)
- SWG – JRC “Study of best practices and potential of participation of the smallholders in the short-value chains in the Western Balkans region and Turkey”

The respective presentations are given in **Annex 8**.

- Update on the collaboration with EC, DG AGRI related to IPARD - the rural development programmes implemented as part of the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance in the Western Balkans - Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in a current crisis triggered by the outbreak of the COVID 19 and the series of the Videoconferences organized in this response addressing the emergency measures and plans with regards to IPARD during the CORONA 19 outbreak was also given. More details in **Annex 9**.

#### Update on the cooperation with GFA Consulting group, BMEL

- Ms. Gjorshoska presented the progress made for the project “Facilitation of exchange through advice on harmonized wine regulations in the Western Balkans” and the work of the REAWG in the process of aligning the national wine regulations with the EU. The full presentation is given in **Annex 10**.

### **3. Elaboration and update of the SWG Operational Plan 2020**

Mr. Ilic provided review of the Operational Plan for 2020. Due to the extraordinary nature of COVID 19 crises, the majority of the Western Balkans registered negative impact with travel restrictions and border closure, thus reflect for postponement of realization of the SWG activities as per

the SWG Operational Plan for 2020. The SWG secretariat was constantly re-planning and preparing an updated version of the Operational Plan 2020. The latest update of the SWG Operational Plan 2020 showing the re-planned activities is provided in **Annex 11**.

#### **4. Preparations for the Agricultural Policy Forum 2020**

Preparations for the Agricultural Policy Forum 2020 started but planning of next steps is done with caution considering the uncertainty with travel restrictions and expected reluctance from invitees to participate in such a big event.

APF 2020 is planned to be held in Pristina, following the rotating rule for hosting of the APF, from 13 till 16 October. The proposed general title of the Forum is: "Agriculture and rural development policy in the Western Balkans in times of pandemic". Its envisaged purpose is to elaborate on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic in agriculture and rural development and present for discussion and endorsement results of the Regional Expert Advisory Working Groups (REAWGs) assessing different agricultural and rural development policy issues.

The proposed topics are:

- Regional cooperation in times of pandemic
- Recent agricultural policy developments in the context of the EU approximation process and pandemic in the pre-accession countries
- Best practices and potential of participation of the smallholders in the short-value chains in the Western Balkans region and Turkey
- The role of rural tourism in diversification of economic activities and its implications in times of pandemics
- Research, innovation and technology transfer capacities in the Western Balkans
- The LEADER Approach in the Western Balkans

The draft program is provided in **Annex 12** and it is a subject to approval by the SWG Assembly, once it holds its next session.

#### **5. Preparations for the 14th Annual Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from SEE**

According to the rotating principle Serbia should host the Ministerial Meeting 2020. Preparations for the Annual Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from South Eastern Europe 2020 started. The Annual Ministers Meeting 2020 is planned to be held in Belgrade, Serbia in the period 16th – 18th November.

Tentative topics to covered are:

- 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 2020
- Current situation in agriculture and negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

More details could be found in **Annex 13**.

#### **6. Initiatives for cooperation and partnerships**

Initiative was taken for cooperation with the USAID Economic Development, Governance and Enterprise Growth Project (EDGE) and Consortium ENgAGE (Expert Network for Agro-Economic modelling) in Wageningen Economic Research (WEER). Possible cooperation with FAO which should be signed soon was also mentioned. More details on it under **Annex 14**.

## **7. Strategy for development of SWG post 2020**

Mr. Boban Ilic presented the new outlook of the SWG Strategy for the period 2021-2025 which represents the main areas and operations to be achieved in the forthcoming five years. The Strategy was developed in consultation with Governments and responsible Ministries from SEE countries.

The floor was open for discussion and possible adoption of the Strategy by the Assembly:

- Mainly the comments referring to the Strategy were valued positively and constructive. Mr. Rutkovskis commented that the situation is unpredictable for this year and even for next year 2021 due to COVID-19 with regards to the implementation of activities on the field;
- Mr. Ilic addressed the question for adoption of the Strategy now or give a possibility to postpone the adoption of the SWG Strategy in September.
- Mr. Gjerci gave a proposition to wait for the adaptation of IPARD III and to follow the development. He suggested to wait for the adoption of the Strategy till September.
- Mr. Rutkovskis stated that the adoption of IPARD III might not be soon. It is difficult to predict whether in September the situation will be clearer.
- Mr. Hoxha recommended also to wait for the adoption accordingly.

It was concluded, the SWG Strategic document to be further reviewed, updated and adopted in September 2020 or latest December 2020 during the next assemblies.

Details could be found in **Annex 15**.

## **8. SWG Manual of Procedures – adoption of the changes**

The SWG Manual of Procedures, was elaborated as per the updated changes and regulation applied in the host country of the SWG Head Office/Secretariat. For some of the sections, modifications have been applied on the procedures and processes of various internal practices, including extensive amplification on important steps and mandatory measures which need not to be overseen. The chapters of the MoP were edited language wise, adding additional definitions and explanation on the SWG

The updated SWG Manual of Procedures has been discussed, reviewed and adopted by the SWG Assembly with five out of six participating countries/territories.

- Mr. Konjevic suggested for the further reference the major changes of the Manual of Procedures to be made in separate document, since MoP is very comprehensive document to go through in a few days.
- SWG Secretariat will prepare a report/presentation on the changes in the Manual of procedures and provide to the SWG Delegates.