

## Agricultural Policy Forum 2022

### *Agriculture and Rural Development in the context of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans: Overcoming the Impact of the Global Challenges*

18 - 20 October 2022  
Tirana, Albania

### **Tirana Agenda 2022**

The 22<sup>nd</sup> Agricultural Policy Forum, “*Agriculture and Rural Development in the context of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans: Overcoming the Impact of the Global Challenges*”, hereafter referred to as the “Forum”, was held on 19 and 20 October 2022 in Tirana, Albania. The Forum placed a special focus on the impacts of climate change on agriculture in the Western Balkans (WBs) and the recommended policy actions towards mitigation, including enabling and stimulating organic agricultural production as well as sustainable wine production and finding respective markets for it, sustainable forest management, developing functional Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems, and Regional Soil Partnership in the Western Balkans. Rural youth received attention in the Forum due to its potential to be the major driver of sustainable rural development.

Humanity is being challenged at a level that we have seldom seen before in human history. Thereby, many challenges to the food system occur simultaneously and are of diverse nature: social – as global food security has been threatened, environmental – as climate change must be tackled, economic – as energy security is currently at great risk and food prices are surging. The Forum greatly appreciates the efforts of the EU and the countries/territories of the Western Balkans to accelerate the EU accession process of the region. It encourages the governments in the WBs and especially the ministries of agriculture to undertake all the necessary actions in order to respond to the challenges along the way. While focusing on immediate issues (food security, increased prices of agricultural inputs as a result of the high energy cost) the countries/territories are urged to stay on track with the implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (GAWB).

The Tirana Agenda 2022 summarises the main outcomes as follows:

1. **The Forum recognizes the GAWB** as a driver for the transition to modern, carbon-neutral, climate-resilient and resource-efficient economies, and for unlocking the potential of the circular economy, sustainable food systems, fighting against agroecosystems degradation, and improving waste management, towards a cleaner, safer and healthier future. **The Forum strongly encourages** the WB authorities to take advantage of the **IPARD instrument** and its investment, land management, knowledge and innovation and rural areas measures as tools for implementation of the GAWB. **The Forum underlines** the necessity for **public debate** and democratic

- inclusion of citizens on the topics included in the GAWB among private, public, civil sector and academia, substantially and objectively covered by media.
2. To adapt agriculture to the **impacts of climate change**, the **Forum urges** the Western Balkan countries/territories to improve the availability of agricultural statistics and meteorological observations, including weather data and remote sensing/GIS. Farming systems need to be diversified to adapt the choice of varieties and cropping cycles, enable efficient resource use, as well as soil-conserving cropping practices. Institutional frameworks should be adjusted to incentivize nature-based solutions.
  3. EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) remains a benchmark for agricultural policies in the WBs. However, the long-lasting period of pre-accession has a negative impact on the adoption of all CAP elements. To enable the creation of **effective agricultural and rural development policies, aligned with CAP**, the **Forum recommends** further improvements in the institutional setting, including inter-institutional and inter-sectoral cooperation and simplification of the administrative and control systems for policy implementation. The budget for structural and rural development measures should be more substantial and adequate support needs to be dedicated to promoting quality of life, innovative rural infrastructure to strengthen value chains, attraction of young people and employment in rural areas. Further alignment with EU policies is needed for linking payments to cross-compliance standards. The Forum calls for a transformation of the agri-food systems to eradicate poverty, improve food and nutrition security, and support rural development while protecting the environment. That should be done by the use of abandoned and uncultivated land, expansion of storage capacities, interventions in the food reserves and reduction of food waste. Resources and capacities focusing on regional cooperation should be enhanced in order to address cross-border challenges, such as climate change.
  4. **The Forum calls** public authorities of the Western Balkans to enable functional and integrated **Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS)** in the region. This would be a long-term process that could be achieved gradually through steps that focus on the transfer of knowledge pertinent to addressing the impact of the global challenges of food security and climate change. National AKIS action plans should be adopted, leading to enhancing existing and creating new structures and forms of networking, capacity building and knowledge exchange of all actors in the agri-food system. The level of awareness of farmers should be raised on the benefits of the use of knowledge, technology and innovation. Use of all financing mechanisms, including IPARD support for the knowledge - based measures, should be availed of as part of this process.
  5. In the past year, the market situation has deteriorated dramatically, with high energy and fertiliser prices having a particularly severe impact on the agricultural sector in general. Therefore, efficient management of energy, prudent use of fertilisers and pesticides remain important factors for sustainable development. In addition to these challenges the **wine sector** also copes with a scarce supply of glass bottles and other packaging materials. Further on, it is expected that the demand for wine will decrease. Therefore, the Forum confirms that further improving the competitiveness of producers and reduction of the environmental impact of the wineries should continue to be among the highest priorities for the WBs. For example, new fungus resistant grape varieties are available on the market and can help to reduce the use of pesticides by up to 80%

- in humid climate conditions. Promotion and information campaigns are needed to make the wine sector more attractive for young producers and make consumers aware of wine as part of a healthy Mediterranean diet. The wine sector continues to aim at high-quality wine and access to research, innovation and knowledge will encourage wineries to improve the quality of their grape and wine production. In case that negative market trends continue in 2023, specific tailor-made measures should be developed to support small producers in particular.
6. **The Forum calls** for enhancing the **export of organic goods** from WB to the EU market by accelerating the process of adopting action plans for the transposition, implementation and enforcement of Regulation 2018/848 with implementing and delegated regulations; bringing the existing group of operators into compliance with the requirements of the EU organic regulation as soon as possible; strengthening the capacity of laboratories testing organic products, especially with regard to pesticide residues; incorporating the principles of the official control regulation as a stand-alone law or integrating it into organic law. In parallel, the domestic/regional organic market needs to be developed by stimulating the demand for organic goods, securing consumer confidence, promoting the benefits of organic farming, supporting local and small-volume processing in short supply chains.
  7. **The Forum emphasizes** the need for investment in **soil monitoring** and enhancing policy coherence for the development of **soil management practices** considering that land use change, contamination, erosion and loss of organic carbon are serious threats to soil health. Moreover, it is necessary to harmonize the goals set within the strategic documents of the Western Balkans countries/territories with the requirements set in the new EU Soil Strategy for 2030. Capacity building should be conducted for all stakeholders from policy makers to farmers', to increase the level of awareness for proper implementation of sustainable soil management practices. **Western Balkans Regional Soil Partnership** should be established to improve knowledge exchange and identify examples of best practices for soil protection from pollution and degradation.
  8. Climate change presents a significant potential risk in achieving **sustainable forest management**. Following the EU Forest Strategy, Forest Europe principles and other international commitments, the Forum recognized the importance of multifunctional forest management as an approach to fulfilling economical, ecological and social needs of the society in Western Balkan countries/territories. Close to Nature Forest Management has been proposed as the main concept for improving conservation value and climate-resilient multifunctional managed forest. Creating a regional platform for strengthening long-term cooperation and exchange of best practices in the region could serve as effective tools towards creating vital and resilient forest ecosystems that can stand over climate change risks.
  9. The Forum recognizes the importance and underutilized potential of the **rural youth** for development in rural areas. Massive rural outmigration has been occurring, especially among the rural youth population. In that context, the Forum strongly encourages the creation and implementation of policies that support rural youth to become more visible as agents of change in the agri-food systems as well as enhance their contribution to the sustainability of rural areas and rural development in the WBs.



MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE  
AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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10. The Forum sees **regional cooperation and solidarity** as an answer to all the above-mentioned challenges. Regional cooperation is a must under the current circumstances presented and debated during the Forum, and it is the best mid-term operational mode for overcoming the challenges in the region within the agriculture and rural development sector before the full accession of the WBs in the EU. The WB countries/territories offer a dedicated cohesive added value to the current member states of the EU. The faster and deeper the internal cooperation and solidarity in the region advances, the more positive the impacts on the development and the expansion of the EU.

The Forum agreed that:

- The Tirana Agenda 2022 will be presented and discussed at the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Working Meeting of Ministers of Agriculture from South-Eastern Europe on the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 2022 in Budva, Montenegro;
- This Agenda will be conveyed to the EU institutions, UN agencies and other relevant national and international institutions and organisations;
- The 23<sup>rd</sup> Agricultural Policy Forum will take place in the autumn of next year in Montenegro, which will hold the SWG Presidency for 2023.

The Agricultural Policy Forum 2022 was held under the joint auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Albania and the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in South-Eastern Europe.

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