

**Conclusions of the Ministerial Meeting  
of the Ministers/ Heads of Delegations responsible for agriculture and rural development in  
South Eastern Europe  
Convened in Budva, Montenegro  
15 November 2022**

The Ministers of Agriculture and Heads of Delegations gathered on 15<sup>th</sup> of November 2022 in Budva at the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Working Meeting organized under the joint auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of Montenegro and the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in South Eastern Europe, to review the achievement of the objectives set during the last meeting in November 2021 and recommit themselves to the pursuit of a regional cooperation on the sustainable agricultural and rural development pathway in the context of regional, European and global challenges impacting the sector.

The Conclusions of the Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture and Heads of Delegations summarize the discussions on commonalities in the regional agricultural and rural development in the face of changing international dynamics that are reshaping our economies, environment and social conditions.

The Annual Meeting of the Ministers reconfirmed that agriculture and rural development remain a priority on the EU integration agenda of the SEE countries, and an important part for SEE sustainable growth and economic prosperity.

**CONCLUSIONS OF 16th ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MINISTERS OF AGRICULTURE OF SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE**

**We, the Ministers of Agriculture of South Eastern European countries** gathered in Budva, Montenegro to discuss common issues in agriculture and rural development, in the context of global challenges and long-term threats, the progress in EU integration and approximation of the sector of agriculture and rural development and regional cooperation as an instrument for addressing the issues jointly.

**In particular we:**

**RECONFIRM** the commitment of the entire region to accelerating the process of accession to the European Union, including coordination and harmonization of regulations and policies in agriculture and rural development. We make continuous efforts to bring our agricultural and rural development sectors closer to the EU standards both, through internal strategic and policy reforms and through regional and international activities.

**ARE DEDICATED** to ensuring steady and uninterrupted trade of essential agri-food products and agricultural inputs without any restrictions, and to upgrade regional food security mechanisms to mitigate possible shortages in our region caused by disruptions in the food supply chains.

**STRESS** the necessity for elevating the implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans as a priority, with special emphasis on the actions agreed under the pillar 4 of the Action Plan leading towards creation of sustainable agriculture and food systems, taking into account the global challenges that are already impacting the Western Balkans, such as climate change, energy crisis and food security.

**RECOGNIZE** the significance of the regional cooperation in the sector of agriculture and rural development, facilitated through the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in SEE. We remain committed to support this platform that serves the region's constructive agricultural policy dialogue and enhance our overall EU integration efforts in the sector. We reconfirm the importance of and support to SWG in ensuring ownership in our cooperation and regional integration efforts in view of the association and accession of the SEE countries into the EU. In addition, we welcome all the political and economic initiatives and integration processes contributing to mutual understanding, continuous communication and strengthening of the regional cooperation based on the principles of good neighbourliness and solidarity.

**WELCOME** the recommendations outlined in the Agricultural Policy Forum (APF) - Tirana Agenda 2022. We especially underscore the importance of the matters deliberated, in specific:

- the necessity for public debate and democratic inclusion of citizens on the topics included in the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans among private, public, civil sector and academia, substantially and objectively covered by media
- the urge to improve the availability of agricultural statistics and meteorological observations, including weather data and remote sensing/GIS for effective adaptation of agriculture to the impacts of climate change
- the need for improvements in the institutional setting, including inter-institutional and inter-sectoral cooperation and simplification of the administrative and control systems for policy implementation
- the requirement for adoption of national AKIS action plans, 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
- further strengthening of the competitiveness of wine producers and reduction of the environmental impact of the wineries, as one of the highest priorities for the WBs
- accelerating the process of adopting action plans for the transposition, implementation and enforcement of Regulation 2018/848 with implementing and delegated regulations
- establishment of Western Balkans Regional Soil Partnership to improve knowledge exchange and identify examples of best practices for soil protection from pollution and degradation
- creation of a regional platform for creating vital and resilient forest ecosystems that can stand over climate change risks
- design and implementation of policies that support rural youth and women to become more visible as agents of change in the agri-food systems and rural development

**ENDORSE** the report of the Secretary General on the achievements and results of the SWG work for the year of 2022 and appreciate the results achieved within the span of its operations. We recognize SWG as an organization that serves as a facilitator in the overall process of EU integration and the implementation of agriculture and rural development policies through regular and intensive exchange of experiences, knowledge and information.

**CONGRATULATE** the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Republic of Albania for successfully holding the Presidency of the SWG Assembly during the year 2022.

The SWG Presidency and the duties for the year of 2023 have been handed over from the current Presidency – the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Republic of Albania to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of Montenegro.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Agricultural Policy Forum in South Eastern Europe will be held in Montenegro in autumn 2023.



**APPRECIATE** the support provided by all participating Governments, members and observers of the SWG, as well as convening organizations and institutions, in particularly: the line Ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development, the European Commission (DG AGRI, DG NEAR), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the German Federal Government (BMZ and BMEL), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and Regional Cooperation Council (RCC).

**VOICE** our appreciation for the kind hospitality provided by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of Montenegro. Anew, we have appraised the sequence for regional cooperation and outlined the common objectives for onward encounters. The SWG continues to serve as a vital mechanism all with the objective of enhancing the integration of sustainable development principles into regional development practice of SEE countries during the EU integration process.

## **Present representatives of institutions during the meeting**

### **SWG MEMBERS INSTITUTIONS**

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Albania

Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development, Kosovo\*

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, Montenegro

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy, North Macedonia

### **SWG OBSERVER INSTITUTIONS**

Ministry of Agriculture, Bulgaria

Ministry of Agriculture, Croatia

Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Federal Republic of Germany

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, Slovenia

### **INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND PARTNER INSTITUTIONS**

European Union (EU), Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI)

Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany (BMZ)

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (UN FAO)

Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)

International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM)

Ministry of Agriculture of Czech Republic, represented by the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Belgrade

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\* "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."