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**Regional Expert Advisory Working Group (REAWG)
on Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS)**

Fourth Interim Meeting

**“Achieving functional and integrated AKIS systems in the Western Balkans,
status and the way forward”**

Charalampos Kasimis

*Professor Emeritus
Agricultural University of Athens*

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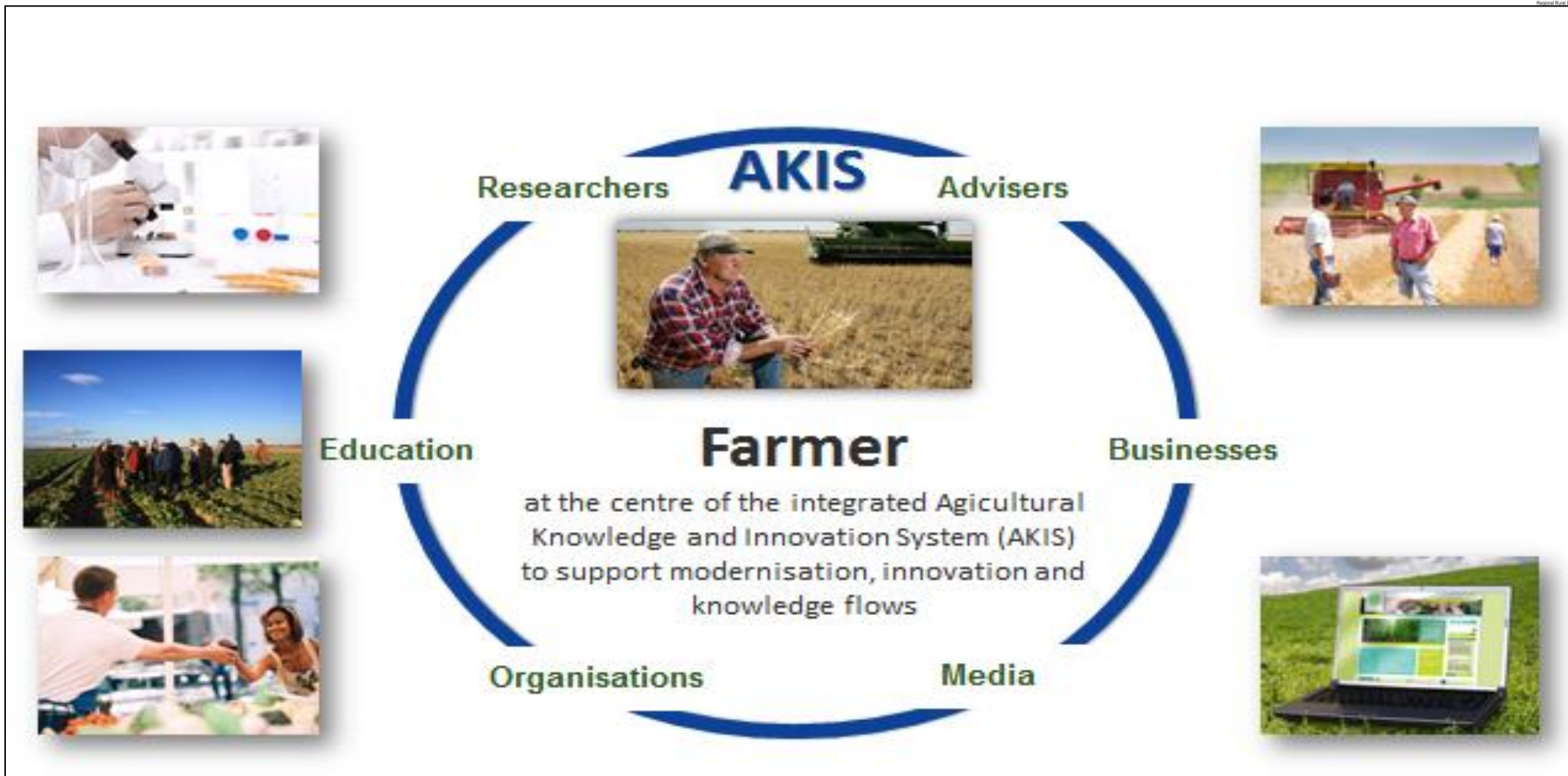
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The graphic presentation of AKIS



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AKIS, more relevant than ever

- The role of AKIS is indispensable in achieving the targets and in overcoming the deficiencies of the new agricultural policies and the green transition.

Critical issue:

- How to strike the balance between the policy target of a successful **green transition** (keeping in mind claims of falling productivity and lower incomes of nearly 15%) and that of **strategic food autonomy** and **increasing productivity** to satisfy demand for food.
- A functioning AKISystem of knowledge, research and innovation exchange, with the support of digitalization and investments in precision agriculture are considered important contributing factors in this direction.

Set targets of the project

- First, the target of **setting up of a network** bringing together farmers, representatives of governments, research institutions and the private sector to establish a functional AKIS structure that would facilitate the dissemination of knowledge, innovation and technology as an in-between mechanism acting top-down and bottom-up.
- Second, the designation of a **national Roadmap strategic document** and of a **national Action Plan** for the implementation of the specified strategic objectives resulting from a SWOT analysis.
- Third, the development and application of **regional and/or sectoral or thematic AKIS Plans** aiming at fostering knowledge and innovation transfer in defined topic areas.
- Fourth, the development of an **education and communication measure** for scaling up technical innovations and innovative business models with special target groups of young, dynamic farmers and agri-businesses.

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Achievements and deliverables to date

1. Updated and prioritized **national AKIS-focused SWOT** analyses for WBCs
2. **National AKIS map depictions** (and a joint regional AKIS mapping worked by SWG)
3. **National Roadmaps** for the development of functional and integrated national AKIS systems
4. **National AKIS Action Plans**

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National Action Plan common key priorities



- In the national reports, the strategic objectives of the Roadmaps are projected well into specified objectives for action in the National Action Plans.
- Where prioritizations differ, they reflect the various country/territory particular priorities set on the basis of their characteristics and the feasibility of the operationalization of their Action Plans.

Key priorities

- The **formalization of advisory services (where missing) and of AKIS** are highlighted as the top Action Plan priorities by most National Experts.
 - We define **formalization** here as the means to give the process a **certain or definite form**, to shape it and give it a formal status or approval.
 - For that purpose we take into consideration the Regulation for the Strategic Plans of CAP (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2021.435.01.0001.01.ENG, Article 114), according to which Member States must include in their Strategic Plans their proposals for AKIS under the horizontal objective of Modernisation.

Key priorities

- **Private advisory services** are considered as a necessary complementary service that needs to be formalized and integrated in the AKISystem.
- **Training, accreditation and impartiality of advisors** are considered *conditio sine qua non* for the establishment of a trustworthy Advisory Services - an integral part of AKIS.
- **Capacity building** of all AKIS stakeholders and enhancement of R&D and Research, Innovation & Technology Transfer (RITT), in particular, seem to attract the attention of most Action Plans.
- The **activation of IPARD's measure of Advisory Services** is considered as supplementary and supportive to the system; an increase in its funding has also been requested.

Key priorities

- The **introduction of new structures** within AKIS cross-cuts all Action Plans. Proposed structures are differentiated on the basis of each country's needs. The feasibility of their realisation needs further investigation in cooperation with the corresponding state authorities.
- The **Coordination Body** is considered most critical, but its role and functionality need to be foreseen and further elaborated in the AKIS formalization documents.
- **Public and institutional awareness raising for AKIS** is a commonly requested action, but needs to be seriously adjusted to the particular environment of each country/territory.
- **Digitalization** is acknowledged as a critical factor for the enhancement of advisory services and AKIS, something foreseen in the cross-cutting modernisation objective of the new CAP.

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The way forward

Two complementary paths of action have been proposed:

1. The **formalization path**

It involves:

- the establishment of Advisory Services as a key component of AKIS and RITT
- the establishment of AKIS as a system

Presupposes the **adoption and endorsement of the National and Regional Action Plans** by the State authorities, prescribed in the submitted Workplan of the project, following the presentation of their final versions in the Agricultural Policy Forum of Tirana in October 2022.



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The way forward



2. The 'experimental' sectoral or thematic path

It requires the adoption of regional AKIS interventions/structures expected to function as **'working/living laboratories' and maturation processes** for the implementation of AKIS.

Possible sectoral AKIS interventions

Some such interventions have come out of the NEs reports. In this respect, the following actions are proposed to be adopted and implemented with the **high supervision of SWG**:

- **Adjustment of the REAWG on Wine** to an AKIS Operational Group with the aim to bring together all related stakeholders for the interactive exchange of research, knowledge and innovation.

- **Adjustment of REAWG on Soil** to an AKIS Operational Group to bring together all related stakeholders for the exchange of research, knowledge and innovation in an interactive manner.
 - a **‘living laboratory’** [example: Soil living labs working together to obtain healthy soils by 2030, The Walloon Agricultural Research Centre (CRA-W) in Belgium]

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?tab=rm#inbox/FMfcgzGqQcsMcFXRgNpmSvTxSgcZCchV>

Possible sectoral AKIS interventions

➤ **Establishment** of a Regional **Organic farming** Operational Group to bring together all related stakeholders for the exchange of Research, knowledge and innovation in an interactive manner.

✓ **Organic honey**, proposed as a micro AKIS case

➤ **Establishment** of a Regional **Dairy farming** Operational Group

The initiatives above, would involve, amongst other activities, capacity building of the different stakeholders in the sectors (wine, dairy and organic farming), digitalization training and cross-border demonstration visits.

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Possible thematic AKIS interventions



- **Establishment of an AKIS Regional Educational, Training and Certification Structure** for the theoretical and practical training and accreditation of farm advisors.
- **Establishment of an ‘AKIS awareness raising’ structure** amongst farmers and other agri-food stakeholders.

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Other possible AKIS related interventions



- Identification of model **monitor/demonstration farms** and establishment of WB **region-wide network of host farms** for the exchange of organized visits of same-field farmers for the sharing of knowledge, practices, challenges and solutions.
- Cross-border and bilateral cooperation for the identification and **prioritization of specific climate and green agenda issues.**

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Method, tools and structures for AKIS related interventions



Methodological steps:

- Depiction of all **stakeholders possible to involve** in the sectoral or thematic group
 - Establishment of the **Operational Group** and its agenda of actions
 - Selection of **Operational Group coordinator**
 - Description of the **interactive knowledge and innovation exchange system** which would bring together specific actors to work in multi-actor projects to give answers to specific questions or to develop concrete opportunities.
- ✓ Establishment of 'knowledge reservoirs'



Method, tools and structures for AKIS related interventions

Tools:

- **Operational Group** approach; sectoral or horizontal.
 - ✓ OP makes the best use of different types of knowledge (practical, scientific, technical, organizational, etc.) in an **interactive manner**, involving producers, researchers, advisors, administrators, the private sector and other possible AKIS stakeholders.

- New insights and ideas are generated and are combined with existing **tacit knowledge to provide focused solutions**.

Other possible optional structures:

- **Innovation** support services
- **AKIS center**, for mapping and managing the existing and future needs for the Advisory Services and other RITT structures.
- **AKIS 'one stop shops'**
- **Agri-food Centers of Innovation and Entrepreneurship** involving University/Research Institutions, Regional authorities, Farm organizations and the private sector.

Final set of observations for the Action Plans

- Critical is considered the **correct identification of the corresponding authorities** for the implementation of requested actions.
- **Assignments and allocation of roles** and responsibilities would be needed for the accomplishment of the Action Plan.
- **Consultation with public, private and other stakeholders** would help investigate and shape the feasibility of the Action Plan in terms of the specified objectives set, their pursuance and operationalization.
- The role and responsibilities of national experts and SWG would need to be enhanced in the process of consultation.

In conclusion

- With the proposed sectoral and thematic AKIS interventions, we more or less fulfill the last two set targets of the project presented in the beginning of this presentation:
 - first, the development and application of **regional and/or sectoral or thematic AKIS Plans** aiming at fostering knowledge and innovation transfer in defined topic areas, and,
 - second, the development and support of an **education and communication measure** for scaling up technical innovations and innovative business models with special target groups of young, dynamic farmers and agri-businesses.

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- In the APF AKIS Working Group meeting in Tirana the proposals were prioritized in terms of maturation and feasibility.
- With the **high supervision of SWG** the next steps of implementation of the regional, sectoral or thematic AKIS interventions can be planned.
- Clarification and elaboration on the measure of education and communication, however, needs to be further worked on.