

The 3rd Agricultural Policy Forum (APF) of South East European Stability Pact Countries (SEESPC) entitled "Rural Development – Opportunities for Cooperation in the SEE" was held from the 1st – 4th June 2005 in the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Serbia. Earlier APFs were held in Leipzig 2001 and 2004.

The event was initiated and jointly organized by the Ministries of agriculture of the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Serbia. The organization of the APF was supported by GTZ (German Technical Cooperation) and InWEnt (Capacity Building International) from Germany.

The aim of the APF was to develop further on the overall objective of the Leipzig Agenda 2004 document, i.e. fostering the implementation of agricultural and rural development policies in SEESPC, in particular aiming to contribute to the:

1. Establishment of a Standing Working Group for rural and regional development in SEESPC,
2. Identification of possible joint cross-border rural development projects and activities,
3. Elaboration of plans related to the EU Rural Development Policy 2007-2013 and its relevance for the SEESPC as potential EU members.

The APF provided a platform for capacity building, policy dialogue and interregional exchange of experiences for high level executives and decision makers of SEESPC, as well as for representatives of donor organizations working in the area of rural and regional development.

The APF was organized in 3 sessions, including a guided tour through two rural neighboring municipalities in the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Serbia.

The first session, entitled "**Rural Development – state-of-the-art in SEE**", gave the introductory floor to the guest speaker, Mr. Franc But, State Secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food of the Republic of Slovenia. Mr. But tackled strategic priorities in Rural Development in his speech: "Meeting EU standards - experiences of Slovenia as a new EU-member country". The continuation of the first session was focused on country presentations with special emphasis on:

- *Plans of agricultural ministries related to the approximation process to the EU rural development policy,*



- *Proposals of activities for projects between countries in cross-border regions and intentions for future activities related to development policies.*

The second session of the regional APF was focused on **"Regional Co-operation and Plans related to the EU Rural Development Policy 2007-2013"**.

The introductory speech was made by the second guest speaker, Mr. Martin Wille, Former State Secretary at the Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture of the Federal Republic of Germany, giving an overview about the Rural Development Policy of the EU with special emphasis to the 'New Strategic Approach to Rural Development 2007 – 2013'. The presentation including some important guidelines for potential candidate countries was the key for discussion in this session.

Two working groups were established during this session in order to discuss the:

- Identification of possible joint cross-border rural development projects and activities (Group I),
- Elaboration of plans related to the EU Rural Development Policy 2007-2013 and its relevance for the SEESPC as potential EU-members (Group II).

The third session of the APF took part in Vranjska Banja, Republic of Serbia, and was entitled **"Establishment of a Standing Working Group for Regional Rural Development in SEE"**.

The participants agreed on the establishment of a Standing Working Group for Rural and Regional Development in SEESPC. The idea had already been discussed and supported during the previous APF in Leipzig (2004) and preliminary work about possible projects and activities had been identified during the first day of this APF in Skopje.

During the second day of the APF the participants accepted the proposal given by the Bulgarian delegation to organize the next Regional APF in Bulgaria.

Also, but apart from this third Regional APF for SEESPC, a "Protocol for scientific, technical and economical co-operation" in the area of agriculture/rural development was signed between the two Ministries of agriculture of the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Serbia. The signing of this document, of strategic importance for both countries, derived from the commitment of both governments for further comprehensive regional collaboration.



Summaries of sessions/working groups

Skopje, June 2nd, 2005

Summary of Working Group I:

"Identification of possible joint cross-border rural development projects and activities"

In order to identify possible joint cross-border rural development projects and activities, the participants of working group I (all together 28) were asked at the beginning to define the ***Driving Forces for Stronger Cross-Border Cooperation***.

The following issues were defined as important driving forces:

- **Economic interests:** profitability,
- **Funds:** access to funds (including local and regional),
- **EU-accession:** political commitment for cross-border co-operation; communities having similar problems and challenges; solving similar problems; sharing a similar EU-membership vision; understanding priorities and formulating strategies and plans to deal with these priorities,
- **Public awareness:** promotion of understanding,
- **Social integration:** existence of minorities; family and social connections and the (emotional) need for re-unification in SEESPC,
- **Networking:** capacity development,
- **Involvement of stakeholders:** ownership of development; initiatives of local people; capacity building of institutions and local groups.

The second step was the ***Elaboration of Concrete Project/Activities Focused on Rural Development*** (in line with the defined driving forces and based on EU-principles). Some of the proposed activities came out from a group of participants involved in already running initiatives (e.g.: regional activity Skopje-Nis-Sofia).

The participants defined the following regions of realization, activities and actors:

Region	Activities	Actors
Skopje-Niš-Sofia	▪ Assessment of needs and potential (resource mapping) ▪ Local pilot projects ▪ Euro-region, multiple pilot projects	▪ Local self-government ▪ Ministries ▪ NGOs ▪ Institutions/agencies
Shkodra Lake, Bunq-Bojona Delta	▪ Joint actions in sensitive cross-border areas focused on typical products: cheese,	▪ Public institutions (research, extension, ▪ Private sector, NGOs



Note: One of the participants (GTZ, Albania) underlined that cross-border activities/projects should be based on already proven local projects as a guarantee for successful implementation.

Skopje, June 2nd, 2005

Summary of Working Group II:

"Elaboration of plans related to the EU Rural Development Policy 2007-2013 and its relevance for SEESPC as potential EU members"

Altogether 22 participants joined this working group.

At the beginning of the session the discussion concentrated on **Major Challenges for SEE-Countries Regarding EU Rural Development Policy** (country specific and general challenges) taking into consideration the EU-approximation process of all SEE-countries.

The first issue introduced by the guest speakers was the recommendation not to establish 'Payment Agencies' for the implementation of agricultural rural development measures in concerned countries. The discussions resulted in a consensus of the majority of participants in favor of the creation of such agencies. The reasons given were:

- transparent, responsible and efficient management of national, as well as EU funds available for the implementation of a rural development policy;
- guaranteed accountability towards tax payers and donors;
- collection of proper data for analysis of applied rural development measures.

Further more, the aims of rural development have been discussed regarding the situation in SEE and two major conclusions were drawn:

- the need of survival of small farmers,
- the constant fight against de-population and out-migration in rural areas.

In order to achieve these conclusions, the group made strong emphasize on the transfer of power and responsibilities from central governments to local level (decentralization). Local communities are supposed to take their own initiative, make decisions, take ownership about actions and be independent. A conclusion is that central governments and donors have to change their opinion that "people in the region do not understand". In addition they have the responsibility to strengthen democracy, disseminate proper information to local level and involve local people in the preparation of programs.

Major challenges for the governments of SEESPC in the coming years will be to:

- improve the administrative capacities of governments and of local level,
- create regional development institutions,
- establish credit markets,
- establish land markets.



Certain controversial topics were raised during the discussion of the group. The first one was the lack of money for the implementation of rural development measures versus the lack of administrative capacity. The challenge even exists - if countries in SEE have enough funds - to judge whether they really develop adapted programs and where and how to use them.

A second controversial topic was about the role of a general agricultural and rural development policy. The discussion rose opposite opinions on “whether agricultural policy and agriculture should only be considered from the economic performance point of view (increased competitiveness) or also be considered from the social aspects side of agriculture as a main activity of people in rural areas (improvement of rural life and living standard)”.

The keywords of the discussion concerning major challenges of SEESPC regarding rural development policies were **capacity building** (government administration, local administration, local civil society through knowledge transfer), **awareness creation** (political level and wider public) on the significance of rural development), **increased competitiveness** of the agricultural sector and **social aspects** of rural life and rural economy.

The second step undertaken within Working Group II was to discuss about **Possible Joint Strategies to Face These Challenges**:

The clarification of the expression “joint strategies” took a major part of the discussion. The group made a clear distinction between the strategy as a ‘strategic paper for rural development’ and the strategy as an ‘approach’:

- “National strategy for rural development” which should respond to the individual country situation and its specific needs as well as to the acceptance of EU pre-accession funds,
- “Strategy of SEE countries” as a common challenge in relation to the EU, in order to strengthen the negotiating position of SEE countries. This common strategy should be based on the extensive exchange of experiences between SEE countries concerning models and methods of the implementation of rural development (RD) measures.

The continuation of the work of the group concentrated on the topic **Driving Forces for Cross-Border Cooperation in Rural Development**. Several reasons for enhanced cross-border co-operation related to rural development as well as to common problems of rural populations living in border areas were elaborated. In brief, the situation can be described as common local interest in terms of business development, similar tradition and culture, mutual natural resources and environment as well as ethnic mixtures at most border sides.



Establishment of the Standing Working Group for Rural and Regional Development in South Eastern Europe

Vranjska Banja, June 3rd 2005

During the second day of the APF, participants agreed on the establishment of a Standing Working Group for Rural and Regional Development (RRD) for SEESPC. The idea had already been discussed and supported during the previous APF in Leipzig and preliminary work about possible projects/activities had been identified during the first day of this APF.

The first step was a presentation of possible tasks and activities of the Standing Working Group of SEESPC on RRD (see Annex) followed by a number of comments and questions regarding:

- the objectives of such a Standing Working Group,
- its institutional set-up,
- its responsibilities, competences and
- its mandate,
- possible involvement of other actors such as NGOs and projects.

The second step was to identify members for this initiative as well as to name a representative from each country being member of the Standing Working Group. The following members and representatives volunteered and were nominated:

Serbia	Suzana Djorgjevic-Milosevic, suzana.djordjevic@minpolj.sr.gov.yu
Macedonia	Valentina Gjosevska, valentinagjosevska@yahoo.com
Albania	Albert Dubali, albertd@icc-al.org
Bosnia & Herzegovina*	Savo Rankic, rankics@rstel.net ; mpsvrs@rstel.net
Bulgaria	Dr. Miroslava Georgieva, mira@mzgar.government.bg
Croatia*	Marjan Brcic Kostic, marjan.brcic-kostic@mps.hr
Montenegro	Dr. Milan Markovic, milanm@min.yu
UNMIK Kosovo	Peter Welling, Peter.Welling@gtz.de ; gtz@wellingoffice.de



Romania*

GTZ Romania (Adina Dabu,
h.jakob.gtz@rdslink.ro), will transfer idea to
Ministry

- * These mentioned members were at present not able to commit themselves in participating in the standing working group. However, they promised to inform the other members about their final decision on participation until the end of June 2005.

Further decisions made were about the following:

- Chairman of the Standing Working Group will be Mrs. Suzana Gjorgjevic-Milosevic until the next APF,
- Afterwards, the chairman function will rotate,
- The first meeting of the Standing Working Group is going to be held by the end of September 2005,
- The issues to be discussed and decided upon during this first meeting are about rules and procedures of the standing working group.

The Bulgarian Delegation expressed readiness to organize the next APF in Bulgaria. Other proposals were UNMIK, Kosovo and Montenegro either in collaboration with Croatia or Bosnia & Herzegovina.

A majority decided that the next APF should be held in Bulgaria in June 2006.



Annex:

Tasks and activities of the RRD Standing Working Group of SEE Stability Pact Countries

1. Provide a permanent discussion platform and information/documents exchange for assistance in formulating policy measures towards an improved and more coherent and efficient rural development in the region. The improvement of data and information management should be realized through:

- Creation of a necessary knowledge-base on requirements and a methodology of data and information management in the EU,
- Provision of a panel for policy dialogue and interregional exchange of experiences for EU-accession,
- Upgrading existing platforms of information exchange, particularly regarding a regional market information systems,
- Execution of joint analysis and information exchange on relevant cross-border issues,
- Initiating joint pilot projects to adopt EU-practices.

2. Improve the institutional framework through:

- Provision of an active platform for capacity building (human and institutional),
- Permanent exchange of information on available trainings and education,
- Joint organization of training courses on issues such as EU-regulations, quality and information management, vocational training and the exchange of corresponding curricula,
- Sharing trainings and educational programs for the purpose of better use of available resources (internal and foreign),
- Building up of a rural development expert-pool and supporting the formation of centers of excellence for rural development in the region,
- Supporting the establishment of decentralized structures for rural development, emerging out of consultancy and NGO-involvement in rural development.

3. Intensify international and cross-border co-operation and regional integration through:

- networking of stakeholders at all levels through networking of designated state bodies for rural development (ministries, departments, sectors, agencies and similar responsible for rural development).



4. Exchange personnel at all levels through internships, study tours, visits, etc.
5. Lobby and raise funds for rural development with special emphasize on facilitating regional co-operation in project design and implementation.