



Joint Statement of the SEE countries on

”Streamlining of agriculture and rural development policies of SEE countries in the EU Accession process”

The participants and other stakeholders in the project **”Streamlining of agriculture and rural development policies of SEE countries in the EU accession”** jointly implemented by Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group agreed on a Joint Statement for strengthening of the cooperation between the policy makers and academic research institutions.

Background

Agriculture, rural development and related issues represent approximately 40 percent of the total Acquis Communautaire. Therefore, for the potential and candidate countries for EU membership, the biggest challenge in the upcoming negotiation process is the acceptance and the implementation of Acquis Chapter 11 (Agriculture and Rural Development), Chapter 12 (Food Safety) and Chapter 13 (Fisheries). Due to their common challenges and interest, the countries in the region intend to cooperate closely at political level, as well as at technical level.

The responsibility for implementation of rural development policy lies with the Ministries of Agriculture, of which the administrative capacity is rather limited and not appropriately qualified and not enough experienced in EU harmonization process. In addition, national policy responses have not always been followed by clear and well established strategies, and policy-making has lacked orientation towards the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

In parallel to that, a wide range of analyses, reports and studies, including policy recommendations, have been elaborated for the region by national and international academic institutions, universities and development organizations. However, in most cases these documents and knowledge have not been taken into consideration in the course of policy formulation. Thus, there is a common problem in the region: the lack of dialogue between policy makers and academics, on one hand, and the lack of a reliable and well systematized databases, which collects all the relevant materials in one place for access and ease of use for policy-makers on the other. This situation generates a critical gap that hinders EU integration, based on the fact that academics are not able to write „digestible“ papers, while policy makers are not able to understand the academic language and identify the relevant materials for policy making.

Considering the above, the project aims at addressing a closer coordination, and, in the long run, a stable relationship between policy makers and academics, and between the SEE countries, which is essential for an effective administrative system and an accelerated accession process.

As the outcome of the project, governments of the SEE accession countries are streamlining their agriculture and rural development policies with the current and future CAP.

During the project implementation it was concluded that:

- the cooperation among policy makers and academic institutions is very important and could improve the efficiency and quality of the policy!
- the cooperation exists:
 - but, is not permanent, it is rather occasional, with not stable institutional set up on both sides;
 - supply and demand face weaknesses.

Therefore:

- mutual understanding of the role and needs on both sides are needed;
- new structures (institutional set up on both side) should be established;
- permanent cooperation and investment in human capital and public knowledge is needed!

Future steps

Future steps to be undertaken by the responsible institutions in the countries and the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in South-East Europe to address the key issues as outlined during the project implementation are:

- Maintenance and intensification of a closer coordination, cooperation and stable relationship between policy makers and academics, and between the SEE countries, as essential pre-condition for an effective administrative system and an accelerated accession process.

Recommendations

Governments and other stakeholders are encouraged to align their national agriculture and rural development policies with the EU Common Agriculture Policy.

Therefore, it is recommended to:

- Maintain and intensify functional cooperation between Governments and academia at national level and networking at regional level for exchange of information and recommendations relating to EU agriculture and rural development policies;

- Continuously update, systematize and assimilate all the available information related to national and EU agriculture and rural development policies and record in a rural development policy database;
- Continuous preparation of recommendations for each participating country on completion of necessary analyses, studies and strategic documents relating to EU CAP;
- Ensure within SWG as a regional platform, efficient and impartial collaborative partnerships among governments, academic institutions, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders;
- Provide sufficient resources to address the above mentioned recommendations.