REPUBLIKA E SHQIPËRISË

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND WATER ADMINISTRATION

Agriculture Policy Forum 2016
12th and 13th October
Tirana, Republic of Albania

South Eastern Europe
SWG RRD
Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group

Agricultural Policy Forum 2016:

Evidence – Based Agricultural Policy: Enabling Environment for Developing the Agricultural Sector in the South East Europe

12 – 13 October 2016
Tirana, Albania

Tirana Agenda 2016

The 16th Agricultural Policy Forum (APF), hereafter referred as the "Forum", held in Tirana, the Republic of Albania between 12th – 13th October 2016, summarizes the state and goals of the emerging trans-disciplinary field of agriculture and rural development in South Eastern Europe (SEE),particularly in regard to issues of sustainability; provides a working outline for research, education and policy for the implementing period up to 2020 to ensure sustainability; and provides some policy guidelines and recommendations for achieving these goals. As led by the Berlin process, a five-year halt on enlargement will stipulate a new impulse towards regional cooperation in order to consolidate and keep the dynamics in European Union (EU) integration process in SEE.

The Forum brings together a wide and diverse range of stakeholders to inspire new thinking on how South East European agriculture and rural development policies should respond to the major trends and challenges of delivering agriculture, economic and environmental prospects.

The agenda this year focused on the *Evidence – Based Agricultural Policy: Enabling Environment for Developing the Agricultural Sector in South East Europe*. It addressed the need for adjusting the agricultural policy in SEE based on relevant in-depth analyses of the situation, at the same time having in consideration the adaptations necessary due to the EU approximation process.
The Forum focused on regional networking of relevant stakeholders, promotion of the Area Based Development (ABD) approach as a tool for rural development with upscaling potential, along with the need for sustainable use of natural resources and involvement of the rural civil society, as crucial factors for development of rural areas.
Luminaries from various leading international and regional institutions, governmental and non-governmental organizations and academic establishments presented their diverse views to a large audience of experts and stakeholders.

The Tirana Agenda 2016 resumes the main outcome from these discussions in the plenary and working group sessions:

The 2016 Forum was informed about the consequences of the trends in global and, in particular, EU trade and market policy development and their impact for the agricultural sector in the SEE countries. In this regard the Forum also received a report from the regional policy analysis platform on agricultural policy development in the SEE countries and progress towards EU integration, and discussed the possibilities for adjusting agricultural and rural development policies to address these effects.

ABD PROGRAMME
Area Based Development Programme in the Western Balkan countries

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It is evident that the agricultural sectors in the SEE countries cannot, with the exception of very few products and/or regions, sustain the competitive pressure from mainstream imports. The main reasons are deficient infrastructure and weaknesses in the value chains as well as the vast number of very small entities.

The analysis highlights the need to improve competitiveness of the agri-food sectors and the rural economy and to address the constraints of small farms and rural businesses.
The Forum recommends that the SEE countries take full advantage of the pre-accession period, and concentrate on policies improving the competitiveness of the given sectors and facilitating access to markets, both domestic and foreign.

All countries have adopted strategies for agriculture and rural development for the period up to 2020. However, the implementation is not consistent and only to a limited extent follows the concept of the policy cycle relying on the principles of evidence based policymaking.

The agri-food sectors in the SEE countries are very small compared to the EU or indeed most EU member states. In this regard the Forum recommends that the SEE countries actively pursue to harmonise their trade policies and marketing standards to facilitate regional business cooperation, product development and improvement of the value chains.

Furthermore, the countries are in the early stages of, or close to, starting IPARD implementation. Apart from representing a substantial share of the agricultural budget for investments, IPARD provides tools for developing agriculture and rural areas similar to the EU. However, these tools are only to a limited extent exploited in the current IPARD programmes which only address a marginal number of farms and rural businesses. The forum recommends that policymakers give higher priority to IPARD measures facilitating cooperation among small farmers and businesses such as setting up and running business partnerships and the development of short value chains in line with the EU cluster policy. In this regard a supportive legal, financial and administrative environment for business development is of critical importance.

Furthermore, the Forum recommends that policies in areas with natural constrains become an integral part of the Rural Development policies and IPARD measures. Development and implementation of specific plans and ANC mechanisms are needed to support income generation and reduce emigration and land abandonment.

The Forum discussed the progress of the implementation of the Area Based Development (ABD) approach in cross-border regions and enabling rural stakeholders to participate in regional policy development and implementation. The ABD approach has proven its ability to strengthen local cross border cooperation, notwithstanding the fact that funding of grant schemes supporting small scale investments have been scarce. Currently, the approach is fully implemented and consolidated in four cross border regions, while it is in the preparation stage for additional three regions. The forum recommends to increase funding to small scale investments contributing to economic development and sustainable use of natural resources.

Focus topic 1: Area - based development approach in the Western Balkans (WB): a tool for rural development with upscaling potential

- The Forum recommends that cooperation of ABD structures in the regions with regional and national authorities should be strengthened for streamlining the planning of financial support to economic development of cross-border areas. Public Private Partnerships should be promoted within ABDA. In this regard, it also recommends that municipalities of the cross-border regions plan budget allocations for strengthening regional cooperation;
- The Forum encourages the SWG to explore the reasons why projects prepared under the ABDA are not awarded additional points within the ranking criteria under the CBC calls although it is included in the IPA CBC Programmes covering the cross-border regions;
- Cross-regional exchange of experiences and knowledge is important for further strengthening of cooperation in the newly established cross-border regions.

Focus topic 2: Natural resources management in the frame of environment protection policies and sustainable rural development in the Western Balkans

- The Forum draws attention to the policy challenges of natural resources management in the frame of environment protection and sustainable rural development in the Western Balkans. Key barriers in evidence based policy making recognised implicate to fragmented policy frameworks, lack of law enforcement, deficiencies in relevant data and insufficient risk management and planning;
- The Forum highlights the need for strengthening water, forestry and soil policy implementation in the SEE region, particularly WB, to uphold the progress towards EU;
- The Forum advocates towards proper data collection instruments, access to data along with fair and transparent sharing of information on natural resource management;
- The Forum affirms the need for integrated cross-sectoral coordination among policy areas, levels of governments, civil society and research communities. Such multi-level approach further consolidates regional cooperation for inclusive and sustainable development of SEE countries;
- The Forum advocates for integrated disaster risk management and planning, reflecting the considerable challenges that natural hazards pose to inclusive socio-economic development of rural areas in SEE.

Focus topic 3: IPARD and rural development policy evaluation: main concepts, on-going evaluation, policy follow-up

- The Forum recognises that the IPARD programming and implementation is applying the evidence based policy making approach;
- The Forum emphasises on the IPARD Managing Authority to have staff with strong drafting and analytical skills in programming, reporting and evaluation functions;

- The Forum strongly advises to make full use of Technical Assistance under the IPARD II;
- IPARD Managing Authorities must draw upon wider policy analyses (eg. sectors) capacities, including policy units and research institutes;
- IPARD leads to a development of a culture of evidence based policymaking, with particular regard to small scale farmers and rural businesses;
- The Forum highlights the need for constant capacity building: both for the Managing Authorities and for policy researchers / evaluators.

Focus topic 4: Strengthening the civil society and promoting multi - national exchange in rural development on regional and EU level

- The Forum recommends partnership based cooperation and networking between the rural civil society sector and local and national governments to be enhanced for achieving sustainable rural livelihoods. Such partnership will be effective in producing concrete results and building mutual trust;
- The Forum recognises the role of the rural civil society sector in offering feedback of rural people and communities' needs and aspirations, as a significant contributor in creating and implementing the strategic framework for rural development. The civil society sector contributes to evidence based policy making in accordance to the real needs of rural people and communities.
- The Forum proposes to use best experiences and practices in everyday work, inclusion of relevant stakeholders in the definition of a better future, and to learn from previous mistakes as objectives of proper cooperation and networking.
- The Forum appeals to national governments and European Union in acknowledging the enormous potential of civil society sector towards peaceful reconciliation and sharing common values.

The Forum agreed that:

- The Agenda will be presented and discussed at the 10th Annual Working Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from South Eastern Europe on the 25th of November 2016 in Becici, Montenegro;
- The Agenda will be conveyed to the EU institutions, UN agencies and other relevant international institutions and organizations;
- The 17th Agricultural Policy Forum will take place in the autumn of 2017 in Montenegro, which holds the SWG Presidency for 2017.

The Agricultural Policy Forum 2016 in Tirana was held under the joint auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration of Republic of Albania and the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in South-Eastern Europe.

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