



**Agricultural Policy Forum 2019:
Contribution to diversification of economic activities for sustainable rural development in
Southeast Europe**

9-10 October 2019
Ohrid, North Macedonia

Ohrid Agenda 2019

The Agricultural Policy Forum (APF), hereafter referred to as the “Forum”, is a comprehensive regional platform enabling all stakeholders - from academics and policy makers to farmers and civil society - to get together and address key concerns about the future of agriculture and rural development, and their role in the prosperity of the South Eastern European region. The current and future state of agriculture and rural development in relation to the dynamics of the European Union (EU) integration process is the central topic of the APF.

The 19th Agricultural Policy Forum, “Contribution to diversification of economic activities for sustainable rural development in South Eastern Europe (SEE)”, was held in Ohrid, North Macedonia on 9th – 10th of October 2019. It addressed the prospects for meeting the sustainable development goals, which depend heavily on collective efforts of countries/territories in the SEE region to face their common developmental challenges. The Forum emphasized the interrelationship between the socio-economic ambitions and the need for a multi-stakeholder partnership approach to harness such synergies. The Forum highlighted that in order for multi-stakeholder partnerships to flourish in SEE countries/territories, cooperation should encompass regional and national aspects.

The plenary session of the Agricultural Policy Forum 2019 focused on policy prospective reform measures, with the aim of smoother EU accession through mutual harmonization of policies. The Ohrid Agenda 2019 summarizes the main outcomes from the plenary session as follows:

1. Financial assistance for sustainable agriculture and rural development is now available and operational in all IPARD countries. A more progressive approach towards the IPARD program is helping the IPARD countries to improve their administrative capacities from improving management systems of processing of applications, to increasing the human capacity for know-how and helping to achieve better absorption of the IPARD funds.
2. As EU policies are supporting diversified economic approaches, rural tourism becomes one of the new sources of sustainable development and income generation in the rural communities. While rural tourism constitutes a growing source of revenue for the Western Balkan countries/territories, much of that growth has been restricted by poor infrastructure, education and promotion activities, often with adverse environmental effects. To support economic diversification, the tourism sector requires efficient educational and management systems and improved coordination of rural tourism value chains. Furthermore, to bring together rural development and tourism policies the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria are available.



3. Harmonizing the legislative framework on wine, with the structure and measures that characterize the accession process, brings with it new changes with the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Strategic Plan which is compulsory for wine. Planned changes in the Common Market Organization (CMO) Regulation regarding wine are 'technical' to cope with new economic, environmental and climatic challenges and need to be followed for the future reform processes of SEE countries/territories.
4. Geographical Indications (PDO and PGI) and Traditional Specialties Guaranteed (TSG) - Quality policy is a useful tool for rural development that includes economic, social and environmental dimensions. To improve traditional production, national authorities need to establish efficient control systems and control bodies while providing flexibility and derogations on the food safety requirements, as it is foreseen by the EU regulations. This will encourage greater involvement of small-scale producers and traditional agricultural households in national and regional markets.
5. Proper agriculture and rural development policy reform and implementation requires transparent and active cooperation of all relevant stakeholders. Following the Lithuanian example entitled "Gate of Innovation", the SEE countries/territories could establish a "knowledge transfer system" as an interactive structure for cooperation between farmers, advisors and academia to provide data and information to the policy makers for proper policy making and implementation.

The Forum concentrated on three selected topics in separate focus groups and recommends the following:

Focus group 1:

In order to support the diversification of economic activities in rural areas there is a need for adequate rural development policies aligned with the EU CAP addressing the challenges of the SEE countries/territories. Consequently, creation and support of public-private partnerships, inter-sectorial cooperation and coordination among various stakeholders on horizontal and vertical level is essential. Therefore, timely involvement of rural communities and farmers into the planning and implementation of policies, considering territorial approach, LEADER/Community-led Local Development (CLLD) and Area-Based Development Approach (ABDA) are strongly recommended. Additionally, it is advisable to strengthen the capacities of the national and local administrations, advisory services, civil society organizations, farmers/producers and service providers in rural areas. It is important to produce reliable data so as to monitor and evaluate the impact of rural development policies.

Focus group 2:

The Forum considered ways to improve the competitiveness of the wine sector in the Western Balkan region. The Forum recognized that there are varying levels of importance of the wine sector in the WB countries/territories. Taking into consideration the comprehensive EU wine legislation and requirements, it was noted that at present there are insufficient capacities for implementation of the EU requirements for the wine sector in the region. The importance of the wine sector was underlined, and it was recommended to adjust the national legislations in order to align with the EU legislation and introduce electronic systems in accordance with the EU standards. It was recommended to introduce common standards related to some regional traditional terms. Regional-wide cooperation focusing on joint promotion and valorisation of



Balkan vine varieties is seen as one of the key priorities. A harmonized regulatory framework is seen as a fundamental precondition for increased trade and export.

Focus group 3:

Continuous fostering of national, regional and international research cooperation and strengthening of networks and partnerships is strongly recommended. Research should achieve a higher position amongst governmental priorities. National budgets dedicated to research need to be significantly increased to improve research funding. Access to research resources, research infrastructure, capacity building and transfer of knowledge are also important. In addition, SEE countries/territories need better support to access available EU research funds. A dialogue platform on research in the Western Balkans should be established to stimulate demand-driven research. SWG should progress this concept.

The Forum agreed that:

- This Ohrid Agenda will be presented and discussed at the 13th Annual Working Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from South Eastern Europe on the 12th of November 2019 in Pristina, Kosovo*;
- This Agenda will be conveyed to the EU institutions, UN agencies and other relevant national and international institutions and organizations;
- The 20th Agricultural Policy Forum will take place in the autumn of 2020 in Kosovo*, which will hold the SWG Presidency for 2020.

The Agricultural Policy Forum 2019 in Ohrid was held under the joint auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy of the Republic of North Macedonia and the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in South Eastern Europe.

The participants of the Agricultural Policy Forum 2019 highly appreciated the support provided by the convening institutions and organizations: European Commission (DG Agriculture and Rural Development) and the German International Cooperation (GIZ).

*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