

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GREEN AGENDA FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS: OVERCOMING THE IMPACT OF THE GLOBAL CHALLENGES

Agricultural Policy Forum

Tirana, Albania

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Participants

- Held under the joint auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Albania and the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in South-Eastern Europe
- Over 140 attendees
- 12 countries/territories
- Public institutions, universities and research institutes, private sector, international organizations, farmers, civil society organizations, chambers.



Main topics of the debate

- Impacts of climate change on agriculture and recommendations for adaptation measures
- Green Agenda for the WB and IPARD III implementation
- Agricultural policy developments
- Agricultural knowledge and innovation systems (AKIS)
- Regional cooperation on legal harmonization and market development in the wine sector
- Organic Agriculture
- Towards the Regional Soil Partnership in the Western Balkans
- The role of youth in the rural development
- Sustainable Forest Management



Green Agenda for the WB

- GAWB - driver for the transition to modern, carbon-neutral, climate-resilient and resource-efficient economies.
- IPARD instrument - to be taken advantage of through its measures as tools for implementation of the GAWB.
- Public debate and democratic inclusion of citizens - necessary for the topics included in the GAWB, substantially and objectively covered by media.



Impacts of Climate Change

- WB countries/territories - improve the availability of agricultural statistics and meteorological observations
- Farming systems - to be diversified to adapt the choice of varieties and cropping cycles, enable efficient resource use, soil-conserving cropping practices.
- Institutional frameworks - to be adjusted to incentivize nature-based solutions.



Agricultural policy Developments

- CAP - benchmark for agricultural policies; long-lasting period of pre-accession has a negative impact
- Improvements in the institutional setting - inter-institutional and inter-sectoral cooperation and simplification of the administrative and control systems for policy implementation
- Structural and rural development measures budget - to be more adequate to promote quality of life, employment, rural infrastructure, attract young people in rural areas
- Further alignment with EU policies - linking payments to cross-compliance standards
- Agri-food systems - transformation to eradicate poverty, improve food and nutrition security, and support rural development while protecting the environment
- Use of abandoned and uncultivated land, expansion of storage capacities, interventions in the food reserves, reduction of food waste
- Regional cooperation - to be enhanced to address cross-border challenges



Soil Management

- Serious threats to soil health - land use change, contamination, erosion, loss of organic carbon
- Need for investment in soil monitoring and enhancing policy coherence for the development of soil management practices
- Harmonize the WBs strategic documents goals with the requirements of the 2030 EU Soil Strategy
- Capacity building - for all stakeholders to increase the level of awareness for sustainable soil management practices
- Western Balkans Regional Soil Partnership - to be established for exchange of knowledge and best practices for soil protection from pollution and degradation.



Wine sector

- High energy and fertiliser prices - severe impact on the agricultural sector
- Additional challenges for the wine sector - scarce supply of glass bottles and other packaging materials, expected fall in demand
- High priority - improving competitiveness, reduction of the environmental impact of the wineries
- New fungus resistant grape varieties - available on the market, reduce the use of pesticides by up to 80%
- Promotion and information campaigns - to increase attractiveness for young producers and awareness of consumers about wine as part of healthy diet
- Access to research, innovation and knowledge - to improve quality
- In case of further negative market trends - specific tailor-made measures to be developed for small producers



Organic Production

- Export of organic goods - to be enhanced from WB to EU by accelerating adoption of action plans for the transposition, implementation and enforcement of Regulation 2018/848
- Existing group of operators - to comply with the requirements of the EU organic regulation ASAP
- Laboratories testing organic products - to strengthen capacity (pesticide residues)
- Incorporating the principles of the official control regulation as a stand-alone law or integrating it into organic law
- Domestic/regional organic market - to be developed by stimulating the demand, securing consumer confidence, promoting benefits of organic food, supporting local, small-volume processing, short supply chains

Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems

- Western Balkans authorities - to enable functional and integrated AKIS
- Transfer of knowledge - to address food security and climate change
- National AKIS action plans - TO BE ADOPTED, leading to enhancing existing and creating new structures, forms of networking, capacity building, knowledge exchange
- Level of farmers' awareness - to be raised on the benefits of knowledge, technology, innovation
- All financing mechanisms (including IPARD) - to be used

Sustainable Forest Management

- Climate change - significant risk in for sustainable forest management
- Multifunctional forest management - approach to fulfilling economical, ecological and social needs of the WB following international commitments (EU Forest Strategy, Forest Europe principles)
- Close to Nature Forest Management - main concept for improving conservation value of climate-resilient multifunctionally managed forest
- Creating regional platform - effective tool towards creating vital and resilient forest ecosystems

Rural Youth

- Rural youth - underutilized potential rural development Massive rural outmigration has been occurring, especially among the rural youth population.
- Creation and implementation of policies - to support rural youth to become more visible agents of change

Regional Cooperation

- Regional cooperation and solidarity - answer to all the above-mentioned challenges.
- Regional cooperation - the best mid-term operational mode for overcoming the challenges before the full accession of the WBs in the EU.
- WBs - dedicated cohesive added value to the current member states of the EU.
- The faster and deeper the internal cooperation and solidarity in the region, the more positive the impacts on the development and the expansion of the EU