Agricultural Policy Forum 2011

"Policy Challenges in Agriculture and Rural Development in South-Eastern Europe - Global, European and Regional Dimensions"

October 12th to 15th, 2011 Split/Croatia

Split Agenda 2011 for Agriculture and Rural Development in South-Eastern Europe

South-Eastern European Countries in the recent years have experienced remarkable economic and social improvement. The transition period in the region in most of the countries is coming to its end. The period of peace and dialogue in the past decade had reestablished the political ties within the region, once broken, and created advanced and functional economic and social relations.

Some of the countries from the region are already members of the European Union – Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania and some will become EU members soon – Croatia. The rest of the countries of South-Eastern Europe are advancing their process of integration to the EU and are on their way to fulfill their main political agenda to become part of the unified Europe of equal partners.

In the course of the adopted Declaration of the Ministers of Agriculture of South-Eastern European countries formulated in Dresden in October 2007, representatives of nine countries of South-Eastern Europe have gathered in Split in October 2011 and discussed the following topics:

- Development of policies and programmes to facilitate sustainable development for the implementation of EU agriculture and rural development policy including issues of global and regional food and nutrition security;
- Analysis of the existing policies related to the agrarian reform and comparison with the preferred results within an enlarged EU;
- Cross-border cooperation through application of area based development approach in the rural areas of South-Eastern Europe;
- Necessary steps to meet the challenges related to the employment in the rural areas – overall economic and social wellbeing and related institutional and administrative preconditions.

In particularly, the following three major topics were elaborated in details through working group sessions:

– The future of the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance for Rural Development (IPARD);
– Integrating Food and Nutrition Security into Country Programming and Links to Agriculture Policies in South-Eastern European Countries;
– Area Based Development (ABD) Approach and the Development of Cross-border Areas: Opportunities and Challenges in South-Eastern Europe

The main objective of the Agricultural Policy Forum 2011 was to address policy challenges in agriculture and rural development in South-Eastern Europe taking into consideration global, European and regional dimensions.

Against this background, the participants of the Agricultural Policy Forum 2011 from the South-Eastern European countries, hereafter referred to as the “Forum”, are stating the following:

The Agricultural Policy Forum is a successful example of policy dialogue since its beginning and confirmed the need to continue to strengthen the cooperation within the regional initiative - the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) directed by a strategic overview and appreciation of the opportunities offered by the European integration.

The Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in South-Eastern Europe is recognized as a major institution for promotion of the future development of sustainable agriculture and rural development in the region.

The Forum congratulated the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Development of the Republic of Croatia for concluding the negotiation process with the European Union. The participants hold a strong believe that the Croatian experience gained through the accession process to the European Union will be available and useful for the potential EU candidate and candidate countries from the region.

The Republic of Croatia, in addition, within its own capacity will continue to support the process of EU integration of the countries from the region and will represent a strong voice of the region within the European Union and European Institutions.

The Forum strongly encouraged the governments of South-Eastern Europe to continue with the reform processes in the field of agriculture and rural development. In that respect, the Forum called upon the EU to accelerate the process of EU integration and to assure an adequate attention to the agriculture and rural development issues in South-Eastern Europe.

The participants of the Forum reiterated their statement towards the European Commission considering the existing Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance to support the development and implementation of targeted measures for specific cross-border rural areas in order to further promote regional cooperation.

The Forum took a note of the proposal of the future CAP 2014-2020 presented by the European Commission and advised the South-Eastern European countries to closely follow the reform and further assess the impact of this proposal on their economies.

The Forum expresses appreciation for the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on rural development and employment.

Following the results of the working groups, the Forum concluded on:

Future of IPARD

The pre-accession EU assistance (IPA) is useful tool in the process of preparation for EU membership. The support needs to be continued in the next programming period in order to prepare administrative capacities of the institutions as well as other stakeholders in agriculture and rural development.

Specific assistance to agriculture and rural development (IPARD) should be available to all countries in the region despite of their EU accession status.

Besides the measures offered in existing framework the emphasis should be on rural services, land consolidation, renewable resources of energy, afforestation and training of potential beneficiaries.

Overall simplification and transparency is needed: the volume of legislation should be reduced, accreditation process should be better guided - Technical Assistance and LEADER measures should be further elaborated.

A “Working Group on IPARD post 2013” under the framework of SWG should be established and supported by the EC in order to facilitate the exchange of experience and ideas for enhancement of the implementing systems.

Food and Nutrition Security

Further investment in the agriculture sector needs to be promoted to increase its competitiveness as a contribution to the reduction of the negative trade balances and the related import dependence on food products in the majority of the countries of the region.

Promote integration of food and nutrition security into agriculture and rural development strategies to formulate policies facilitating increase of income and thus contributing to reduce rural and urban poverty.

Promote sustainable land use with particular emphasis on reduction of land fragmentation to increase utilization of land resources and to increase agriculture production in the countries.

Develop food security monitoring systems including the promotion of dietary diversity and development of action plans at country level.

Develop measures to support vulnerable groups through social safety net measures.

Give specific support to the small farmers in the region and recognize their importance to regional food and nutrition security including increased access to financing instruments and markets.

Rural Cross Border Areas

Area based / territorial approaches are suitable for cross border areas in the South-Eastern European countries and need to be supported by the European Union and governments of South-Eastern European countries. These approaches allow the expression and valorization of endogenous capacities in these areas and favor ownership by local stakeholders of common and shared development objectives in these cross border areas.

Appropriate legal and institutional frameworks are needed, as well as sufficient time to build mutual trust and let the partnerships express themselves in order to implement successfully such approaches.

Local dynamic needs financial and practical support (national or external), even modest amounts in initial phases.

The positive experience in the Drina-Tara cross border area (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia) should be replicated in other suitable cross border areas in the region, and the established network of stakeholders in this pilot area should be supported in effective implementation of their plans.

Coordination among various ministries and rural sectors should be established in order to promote and support cross border cooperation and area based development.

Based on the stated conclusions, the Forum identifies and outlines the following next steps to be undertaken in the forthcoming period:

- On November, 11th in Skopje, Republic of Macedonia, the Split Agenda 2011 for Agriculture and Rural Development in South-Eastern Europe is to be presented and discussed at the 5th Annual working meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from South-Eastern Europe.

- The Split Agenda 2011 for Agriculture and Rural Development in South-Eastern Europe will be brought forward to the EU, UN and other international institutions.

- The twelfth Agricultural Policy Forum will be held in the Republic of Macedonia, as SWG presiding country, in autumn 2012.

The 2011 Agricultural Policy Forum was held under the joint auspices of the Croatian Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Development and the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG).

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