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MINISTRY OF FOREIGN TRADE AND
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Agricultural Policy Forum 2024

Reassessing of Agricultural and Rural Development Policy in South Eastern Europe and challenges ahead: Food Sovereignty, Climate Change Impact, Demographic Renewal of rural areas

04 - 07 June 2024
Jahorina, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Jahorina Agenda 2024 for Agriculture and Rural Development in South Eastern Europe

The 24th Agricultural Policy Forum (APF), titled “Reassessing of Agricultural and Rural Development Policy in South-Eastern Europe (SEE) and Challenges Ahead: Food Sovereignty, Climate Change Impact on Agriculture, Demographic Renewal of Rural Areas”, hereafter referred to as the “Forum”, gathered more than 120 policymakers, researchers, academia, civil society, private sector and other stakeholders from 17 countries across Europe in Jahorina, Bosnia and Herzegovina on 05th and 06th of June 2024.

The main objective of the Forum is to address policy challenges in agriculture and rural development in SEE, taking into consideration global, European, and regional dimensions related to: Food Sovereignty and Security, Climate Change Impact on Agriculture and Demographic Renewal of rural areas.

The Forum in details elaborated and addressed the following topics:

- *The EU Green Deal and Farm to Fork Strategy within a broader context in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and IPARD¹ Programme.*
- *Action Plan for the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (GAWB) and its implementation and challenges for the future as a crucial process for advancing sustainable development and environmental protection in the region.*
- *Berlin Process Initiative as a regional ‘fora’ for EU Integration of the Western Balkans and Inclusion of Food and Agriculture sector.*
- *Climate Change Adaptation in agriculture and forestry in the SEE: Challenges, Status and Prospects and strategic approaches.*
- *Demographic Renewal of Rural Areas - prospects and policies for rural regeneration in SEE.*
- *Global and EU Food Security Trends, Land Use Pressures and Sustainability Challenges.*
- *Recent trends of Agricultural Policy Developments in the Western Balkans.*
- *Implementation of the LEADER approach and enhancing the livelihoods in SEE.*
- *Soil protection challenges, focusing on EU and the Western Balkans.*
- *EU Policy developments on organic production and Strategy for fostering further development of the organic farming in SEE.*

¹ IPARD - The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural Development

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- *BIOEAST Partnership including the Western Balkans - an opportunity to support the sustainable transition.*

Additionally, the following three topics were elaborated in detail through working group sessions:

- *The role of soil and water in climate change adaptation, food security and social services.*
- *Adaptation of crop and livestock management to climate change.*
- *Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) and Agricultural Policy Development.*

The Forum provides a comprehensive collaborative effort to address the complex climate-related challenges facing agriculture and rural development in SEE, with the overarching goal of building more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable food systems in the region.

Against this background, the APF “Jahorina Agenda 2024” highlights the outcomes, recommendations and calls for actions related to the following policy topics:

EU Accession Progress

The Forum acknowledges the recent progress made by several SEE countries in the EU accession process and the positive contributions of various program support, like that of IPARD. It expresses the hope that this positive momentum will continue and will accelerate under the new EU leadership. The Forum invites all relevant institutions to support the efforts of SWG and related Regional Expert Advisory Working Groups.

Green Agenda for the Western Balkans

The Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (GAWB) has provided significant impetus for a coordinated and strategic approach to agricultural and rural policy. While progress has been made in its implementation and regional cooperation is strengthened in several areas, many important topics remain unaddressed and commitments in the GAWB Action Plan are unlikely to be met. The Forum calls SWG constituents to increase efforts to harmonize policies in remaining areas and urges EU and international partners to increase their support for the implementation of the GAWB Action Plan.

EU approximation process

Forum appeals for a strong commitment from all SEE countries/territories to fully harmonize national legislation related to food, agriculture, forestry, and rural development (Chapters 11,12 and 13), with respective EU *acquis Communautaire* by 2030.

Berlin Process Initiative

The Berlin Process offers an opportunity to elevate the importance of food, agriculture and forestry for the region and increase visibility of the efforts to address the policies related to food security, climate action and generation renewal of rural areas at the highest political level. Given the crucial importance of the sector, the Forum recommends the preparation and adoption of a joint Declaration of WB Ministries of Agriculture setting binding targets and a clear roadmap for agrifood system transformation in the context of European integration and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. It calls upon the

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national leaders to include this Declaration into their political agenda at the Berlin Process Summit and support the Declaration. It urges economic and civil society partners of the Berlin Process to extend their political efforts to the area.

Regional Food Security and Strategic Autonomy

In response to multiple crises, achieving relative food autonomy and security has become essential for agricultural and rural development in SEE region. Recent experiences (COVID-19 and war in Ukraine) highlight the need to reduce dependencies and to diversify supply chains, while emphasizing the importance of stronger cooperation and solidarity through free trade within the region and with the EU.

Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

Addressing climate change is a top priority for the region's agricultural and rural development. SEE is disproportionately affected by climate change, facing rapidly changing climatic conditions, disease pressures and extreme weather events. The Forum recommends further policy design which must address these challenges and integrate the best available knowledge, along with a coordinated approach to prepare national Strategic Road Maps and Action Plans for climate change adaptation in agriculture and related fields.

Agroecology and Sustainable Farming

Agroecology provides a set of principles which promote sustainable farming practices that work with nature, supports climate adaptation and food security. While SEE's agricultural systems in general respect agroecology principles, further efforts are needed to promote circular practices, reduce external inputs and preserve agrobiodiversity. The Forum calls upon SEE countries/territories while creating and designing agricultural policies to consider all of the thirteen principles of agroecology as a dynamic concept for transforming the food systems by applying ecological principles to agriculture and ensuring regenerative use of natural resources and ecosystem services.

Sustainable and Multifunctional Forestry

Sustainable Forest Management and Forest multifunctionality is essential to maintain the productivity, health, and sustainability of forests. Close to Nature Forest Management presents a promising model for the SEE region. Forest fires pose an existential threat and require a coordinated policy response. Agroforestry can significantly contribute to climate mitigation and adaptation. The Forum encourages policy makers in SEE to design policies and measures that could combat climate change impacts in forests. The Forum strongly recommends closer cooperation among SEE countries/territories to address climate change in the SEE region, thus achieving synergy amongst policy makers, researchers and forest practitioners in the SEE countries/territories.

Wine Sector Cooperation

The Forum highlights that the wine sector in SEE should serve as a model for regional cooperation. In the past years new formats are being developed to exchange practices on climate change adaptation, such as fungus-resistant varieties and viti-photovoltaics. Given the declining global wine demand the Forum advises that SEE countries/territories focus on production of high-quality wines encompassing the rural heritage of the region and strengthening "eco & oeno-tourism". The Forum emphasizes the

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need to further continue accelerating the process of harmonization and legal definition of climatic zones in accordance with EU requirements as one of the priorities for viticulture and wine production in SEE in the upcoming period.

Generational Renewal and Rural Women's Empowerment

Generational renewal of rural areas and the empowerment of rural women as a common European challenge, is particularly pronounced in SEE. While many young people have a positive attitude towards rural life, few see themselves as future independent farmers. To address this reality the Forum calls for adoption of policies focusing on inheritance law, access to farmland, gender equality, early retirement, tax exemptions, investment incentives, and financial support instruments for young farmers and women. Attracting young people to rural areas requires a holistic approach, including advanced infrastructure and services, fast internet, and multifactor incentives to reverse the exodus trend.

LEADER Policies

The Forum calls for SEE countries/territories to promote and strengthen the bottom-up approach and align with the EU LEADER policy while institutionalizing it in the context of National Rural Development Programmes and IPARD. Governments of SEE should build upon the work done by the civil society, rural development networks and the Balkan Rural Development Network (BRDN). The Forum recommends enhancing the utilization of the Technical Assistance measure within IPARD in order to build the capacities of public institutions (Ministries of Agriculture, Paying Agencies) and Local Action Groups (LAGs) engaged in the LEADER process.

Organic Production

The Forum encourages SEE countries/territories to complete harmonization with the new EU Organic Regulation 2018/848 and to develop the organic market. National and regional Organic Action Plans, inspired by best practices in Europe, should address issues such as procurements, taxation, and other incentives for organic products. The Forum recommends the creation of new and strengthening of existing national and regional organic stakeholder platforms. Organic farming policies in SEE countries/territories should be designed to contribute to the EU target to achieve 25% of agricultural land under organic production. SEE countries/territories should take all efforts to ensure continued access to the EU Common Market beyond 2025.

Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS)

Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) are crucial support factor to achieve green transition and improve productivity, ensure food security and sustain farm incomes in the region. While national and regional Strategic Documents and Action Plans in SEE countries/territories have been developed, their implementation lags. AKIS needs to align with climate adaptation efforts, calling for private sector involvement, and coordinated donor support, including cooperation with other interested parties and organizations active in the region.

Western Balkans Regional Soil Partnership

Healthy soil is crucial for the resilience of the agricultural sector to climate change in the Western Balkans, as well as for supporting ecosystem services and biodiversity. Developing and disseminating

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a high-resolution knowledge base to political level representatives, policy makers and practitioners requires an efficient transnational effort in the region. The Forum welcomes the establishment and encourages the Western Balkans Regional Soil Partnership to provide insights and understanding of the soil functions and inform the decision makers and general public about the danger of current soil degradation and implementation of the sustainable soil and land management solutions.

BIOEAST Partnership

The Forum supports the establishment of European research and innovation partnership relying on BIOEAST initiative, that focuses on Central and Eastern European regions on soil health, freshwater resilience, food system security and biomanufacturing. This initiative aims to accelerate and improve the implementation of the Green Deal goals across Europe and to contribute to more efficient utilization of EU Research and Innovation Framework Programme funds facilitating the integration path of the Western Balkans in the EU and enhancing cooperation with Eastern Partnership Countries.

SWG - regional platform for cooperation

The Forum recognizes the positive role of SWG in providing a regional cooperation platform that improves relations among SEE countries/territories, EU and its member states, and other international organizations. SWG should continue to broaden its regional and thematic scope and deepen political dialogue, including non-constituent ministries, regional and international institutions. More effort is needed to include the private sector. The Forum calls and encourages EU and international partners to support SWG, including broadening its mandate and developing its structures as a representative and proactive partner in the EU integration process.

The Forum agreed that:

- The Jahorina Agenda 2024 will be presented and discussed at the 18th Annual Working Meeting of Ministers of Agriculture from South Eastern Europe in September 2024 in North Macedonia. The foreseen aim of the Ministerial Meeting should be adoption of Joint Declaration, that should be taken into consideration at the Berlin Process Summit.
- This Agenda will be conveyed to the EU institutions, UN agencies and other relevant national and international institutions and organisations.
- The 25th Agricultural Policy Forum will take place in the autumn of next year in North Macedonia, which will hold the SWG Presidency for 2025.

The Agricultural Policy Forum 2024 was held under the joint auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in SEE.

The participants of the Agricultural Policy Forum 2024 highly appreciated the support provided by the convening institutions and organisations: European Commission (DG Agriculture and Rural Development), German Government (Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture - BMEL, Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development – BMZ), German Agency for International Cooperation – (GIZ), Italian Government (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation) and International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM).

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