

Regional Expert Advisory Working Group on Food Safety and Trade

Consultative Meeting of the Food Safety Authorities of the Western Balkans

Agricultural Products Trade Facilitation in the Western Balkans

REPORT



Tirana, Albania

25 April 2017

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Introduction

With the purpose of facilitating trade of agricultural products in the Western Balkans and as per the initiative of the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration of the Republic of Albania and the Minister H.E. Edmond Panariti, the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group in SEE (SWG) organized a consultative meeting of the food safety authorities of the Western Balkans.

The meeting took place at the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration of the Republic of Albania, in Tirana, Albania, on 25 April 2017.

Food safety delegations from 5 countries/territories of the Western Balkans participated in the meeting, as well as representatives from the CEFTA Secretariat, GIZ ORF and GIZ SARED. Serbian authorities were invited, but did not send a delegation to the meeting. The full list of participants is given in Annex 1.

The aim of the meeting was to discuss and possibly agree on:

- Trade of agricultural products in the Western Balkans: situation and trends;
- Issues and obstacles in agricultural products trade in the Western Balkans;
- Measures and provisional action plan for agricultural products trade facilitation in the Western Balkans.

Official addresses

Mr. Roni Telegrafi, Deputy Minister moderated the meeting, and officially addressed the participants on behalf of the host, the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration of the Republic of Albania. Ms. Dori Pavloska – Gjorgjieska gave an official address on behalf of the organizer, the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group in SEE (SWG).

Trade of agricultural products in the Western Balkans: situation and trends

Situation and trends of the trade with agricultural products in the Western Balkans was presented by SWG in order to give an introduction to the topic of the meeting. The main findings are that the Western Balkan countries/territories are important trade partners, and there is a lot of room to improve the mutual trade. The presentation is given in Annex 2.

Elaboration of issues and barriers in agricultural products trade in the Western Balkans per country/territory (input from each team)

- Albania

The Albanian delegation pointed out their issue with exporting agricultural products to Macedonia. Even though the same products are exported without problems to other countries, the export to Macedonia is very complicated mainly due to the required lab tests. There is also an example of a discrepancy of the results between the Macedonian and Italian lab for the same products originating from Albania.

Macedonian representative presented the level of sophistication of the equipment in their lab, which was the reason for the very accurate results and high standards applied. The discrepancy in the lab result was explained by the Montenegrin representative as a normal phenomenon when sending two different units of the same type of product to two labs in different locations.

- Bosnia and Herzegovina

The representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina described the trade barriers with Serbia and Albania. Serbian authorities apply a very high frequency of checks on the consignments, and do not recognize the results from the accredited lab from BiH, which significantly prolongs the export procedure. In addition, there is a problem of a different interpretation of the same regulation that both countries have already transposed. The problem with Albania is that BiH is not included in the list of countries from which Albania can import live animals.

Albanian representatives will provide the response to the raised issue in a due course.

- Macedonia

According to the Macedonian delegation, the main barriers to trade are:

- Phytosanitary Certificate (PhC)
- Recognition of PhC (standardization, method/s)
- Certificate of Conformity (CCy)

Some of the measures that the Macedonian authorities have been implementing in the past 3 years in order to improve the trade and maintain the standards in order to ensure safer products:

- More frequent controls
- Larger number of controls on a regular basis
- Customs procedure are facilitated (shorter & cheaper than earlier)
- Strengthening of the SPL facilities, enhanced cooperation with the SAI and FVA, low prices (only real material costs).

The full presentation is provided in Annex 3.

- Kosovo*

The issue of Kosovo* is the long time that it takes Macedonian authorities to visit Kosovo* processor that intends to export to Macedonia. This mainly refers to the meat processors.

- Montenegro

According to the Montenegro delegation Albanian trade legislation is not in line with CEFTA and WTO, and needs to be revised. One of the barriers is the very high excise duty in Albania, which prevents Montenegro wine producers to sell to Albania. Due to the technical barriers to trade Montenegro wineries are giving up of selling to Macedonia, too. Western Balkan countries should use the CEFTA bodies to solve the trade issues.

Albanian Deputy Minister stated that measures had been taken to address the excise duty issue, and it is expected that it would be reduced soon.

The full presentation can be found in Annex 4.

* 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

Available CEFTA mechanisms for agricultural products trade facilitation

Ms. Zamira Xhepa from the CEFTA Secretariat presented the CEFTA mechanisms for agricultural trade facilitation with a special focus on the Additional protocol 5, which will enter into force in 2018. It is expected to expand and deepen regional cooperation, strengthen trade-economic relations in the region and improve security in the trade in goods. It should contribute to simplification and facilitation of trade in CEFTA through

- acknowledgment and implementation of most WTO TFA articles
- emphasising importance of the EU alignment process.

The next meeting of the CEFTA sub-committee on Agriculture will be held in Tirana, on 10 October 2017.

The full presentation is given in Annex 5.

Proposals for further steps

The participants discussed issues and proposals for solutions, to be presented in a possible Ministerial Meeting in Albania tentatively in June. The proposals discussed by the participants are the following:

| Issues and proposals | Comment |
|--|---------|
| Recognition of results from laboratories which are using accredited methods | |
| Standardization of lab procedures across the region | |
| Use referent laboratory in a case of a dispute | |
| Reduce the time for conducting a visit by the commission from the country of import to the processor in the country of export | |
| Revise regulations on excise duties | |
| In cases of differences in interpretation of the same regulations seek for interpretation from CEFTA Secretariat | |
| Ask CEFTA sub-committee on agriculture and SPS measures to initiate preparation of a program for solving the non-resolved cases | |
| Define channel for urgent communication among the SPS authorities of the region | |
| Avoid unnecessary sampling at the border – positive results should not be generalized to the entire country | |
| Capacity building for producers who do not meet the required standards | |
| Conduct timely visits and make assessment of the producers of live animals and animal origin products, which are or are not on the EU list | |
| Exchange of know-how and inter-laboratory testing among the SPS authorities | |



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Next events that address the issue of agri-food trade facilitation:

9 – 10 May – Meeting on GMO in Vienna, with presence of the Agricultural Ministers from the region, to be used to initiate the discussion on agri-food trade facilitation

June – Ministerial Meeting on Trade Facilitation to be scheduled in Albania (tentative)

10 October – CEFTA sub-committee on agriculture and SPS in Tirana

11 – 12 October – SWG Agricultural Policy Forum in Podgorica

16 – 17 November – SWG Ministerial Meeting in Bosnia and Herzegovina