



NEWSLETTER 4

WORKING GROUP I
AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Preparatory activities

First preparatory meeting

The Working Group 1 Program Council held a meeting on July 17, 2019, attended by Maja Lazareska-Joveska, Vasko Hadzievski, Aleksandra Martinovska-Stojcevska, Biljana Petrovska-Mitrevska, Ana Simonovska, Mileva Gjurovska, Nikola Todorovski, Slavica Markovska and Nikola Jazadziski; at the meeting discussions were held on the possible topics for the next session and the date of its holding - at the end of August, i.e., at the beginning of September, which was considered by many to be a better option. Opinions were exchanged and the manner in which the activities of WG 1 should be presented in the Book of Recommendations for the two-year activity of NCEU-MK was determined.



Second preparatory meeting

The WG 1 Program Council held a meeting on 4 September, attended by Aleksandra Martinovska-Stojcevska, Biljana Petrovska-Mitrevska, Maja Lazareska-Joveska, Vasko Hadzievski, Ana Simonovska, Mileva Gjurovska, Nikola Todorovski, and Nikola Jazadziski. The topic and schedule of the Sixth Session, the agenda, the list of keynote speakers and the list of invited participants were agreed on. Given the exchange of views on possible current topics at previous meetings and guided by the attention given to the issue of the impact of climate change on the common agricultural policy in the EU, it was determined that the debate should be devoted to this extremely important issue.

Sixth Session of Working group 1 – Agriculture and Rural Development

CLIMATE CHANGE CHALLENGES IN AGRICULTURE

The sixth WG 1 Session on Climate Change Challenges in Agriculture was held in the MP's Club on 12 September 2019 in Skopje. The session aroused considerable interest with the participation of about 60 participants from relevant state institutions, non-governmental organizations in the field of agriculture, professors from the Faculty of Agriculture, experts from the country and abroad, foreign diplomats and journalists. It should be noted that the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy Trajan Dimkovski delivered the introductory address, while many provincial farmers, as members of the National Farmers' Federation, also took part in the lively debate.

National Coordinator of NCEU-MK **Mileva Gjurovska**, in the opening address, noted that climate change is one of the most pressing problems globally affecting agriculture significantly, by causing a series of unusual consequences. For a number of reasons, agriculture is one of those areas that are a particularly serious part of our accession to the EU. It is evident by numerous indicators, from under-developed infrastructure to depopulation of rural areas, that our agriculture is indeed in crisis.

To that end, WG 1, over the two-year period, has devoted itself to defining a range of topics that have been followed by open and fruitful debates, free of partisan and political connotations. The debates were significantly enriched by a contribution that was consistently received from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy (MAFWE), in accordance with the signed Memorandum of Cooperation.



Minister **Trajan Dimkovski** expressed satisfaction with the previously organized NCEU-MK sessions, which, according to him, were followed by great interest by relevant stakeholders in the agriculture and rural development sector. This was also the characteristic of the session on challenges in agriculture at a time when climate change is causing serious damage to agricultural production, which ultimately affects the overall economy as well. Since 2015, damage inflicted by weather storms has reached 100m euros, while farmers have been paid 15m euros as compensation.

The Republic of North Macedonia is located in the region of Southeast Europe where large climate changes are expected to happen, and so impose serious consequences on the overall food production in the country. To that end, the Government established the National Committee on Climate Change, which includes representatives from the government, academia, the private sector, and civil society organizations.

MAFWE has undertaken a number of activities to tackle and mitigate the negative impacts of climate change on agriculture production such as: protection and expansion of forest cover, agricultural diversification, water management, support to farmers for climate change adaptation, funding programs for safety nets and other change adaptation technology, preparation for aircraft cloud seeding for weather disaster prevention, agricultural insurance reform and so on.

In collaboration with FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), the government has been working to support the management of an effective national mechanism for the Green Climate Fund. According to the Minister, in order to have successful dealing with climate change, Macedonian agriculture should focus on four key factors: co-operation, integration, innovation, and partnership.

Professor at the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences and Food **Ordan Cukaliev** presented findings, facts, and recommendations from his decades-long monitoring of climate change in the country and the region. He first clarified that climate change is a change in the statistical distribution of meteorological conditions over a long period of time, as expressed in variation in some of the meteorological parameters.



He considered the effects of the fight against climate change in our country to be small and insignificant. Adaptive capacities were also limited because we have one of the lowest yields in Europe of major farm crops. The problem was also that farmers are not able to raise their awareness that they themselves need to adapt to climate change, but rather do believe that the damage by weather disasters should be compensated by somebody else. Many institutions have tried to support adaptive measures; however, they neglect the fact that they are not the producers but it is the very farmers who are the producers. Someone has to train the farmers, but the system fails, while there are also stereotypical behaviors by farmers that only involve loss compensation.



Even more unfavorable conditions can be expected as agro-ecological zones move to the north globally. In our country, production is limited by water scarcity, while conditions are exacerbated by climate change.

Serious steps need to be taken to strengthen the databases and broadly engage all stakeholders in understanding the problem and preventive action. Of particular concern is that we do not have the data of our institutions but we use the data of EU and international organizations in our scientific research and analysis. Therefore, for example, it is not possible to say how much the frequency of drought or hail has increased, or to say which measures should be applied with the change of the phenotypes of crops. Lack of data can make it difficult to formulate an adequate policy and there is a persistent underperformance of the expected results.

Director of the Department of Agriculture and Services of the Slovak Chamber of Agriculture and Food **Jan Barsvari** noted that climate change is among the most current topics in the EU. They have been treated at the highest level, while the recommended measures for prevention have been divided into two main groups: those that directly affect farmers and require their involvement, and those concerning institutions and the taking of measures at the state level. This means that one operates at two levels - state compensation, in case of need, but farmers must also do whatever is necessary to save their agricultural products.



Ad hoc 2017 compensation to farmers was paid out in 2019 totaling 17 million euros. For the 2019-2023 period, the annual compensation is projected to be up to 65% of the losses. The Slovak expert pointed to several models that are used in his country to deal with risks of different nature. Thus, in context of the shortage of seasonal and permanent workers of a certain profession, the following elements have been applied: 1) mechanization, automation and robotics; 2) dual education and changes in the secondary education system; 3) facilitation for the employment of foreigners. By ending his presentation, he pointed out that the risk of climate change is increasing and has a significant economic impact on both plant and animal farm production. The elimination of risks has been associated with significant additional costs. Risk management cannot be left to farmers alone - as food production is a social concern, while agriculture should be one of the priority sectors of each country's national economy.

The introductory remarks prompted more comments, replies, and suggestions that deserve attention. **Vaska Mojsovska**, Chair of the National Federation of Farmers, noted that climate change is not what we expect to happen tomorrow, but what is happening to us today here and now. All crops that are grown outdoors have been at risk. The biggest losses have been noted in grapes, wheat, apples, peppers, tomatoes, but also in animals such as sheep and cattle. Drought, hail, early and late frosts have been causing damage, which in context of some vineyards has gone to 100% in 2018.



A farmer from Resen, **Ljube Panfilovski**, noted that, according to their experience, the biggest problem has been the way of managing and efficiently charging for the use of local irrigation systems. Hence, Resen local farmers have been forced to solve the problem individually by applying alternative sources. In this sense, drip systems have not been suitable for all crops.

In the Kavadarci region, such irrigation systems and charging for their use have proved to be an adequate solution, but the problem is the maintenance of such systems by the very farmers.



Zunica Georgieva, from MAFWE, informed that preparations are underway for a new Rural Development Regulation, which must include additions on the impacts of climate change. To this end, it was advised to set up a separate working group as well as to use the Agricultural Council as an appropriate broader forum. Several participants in the discussion pointed out that the new Law on Rural Development should provide for preventive action (Professor Cukaliev), and it was extremely important to consult the farmers themselves who have to deal with and have to solve the emerging problem (expert Petrovska-Mitrevska).



WG 1 Co-Chair, **Vasko Hadzievski**, paid attention to the potential benefits and consequences for Macedonian agriculture by joining the EU. We need to know, in conditions of climate change, what are the crops by which we can survive in the medium term, and which crops, although traditionally grown, should be abandoned as such. The question, also according to Slovak expert Barsvari, was not only to increase production but also to make production competitive in the market.



National Climate Change Coordinator Dr. **Teodora Obradovic-Grncarovska** stressed that the EU Directives on climate change speak of shared responsibilities, given that agriculture is also a producer of greenhouse gases. As many as 76 indicators were on the list of activities in agriculture that adversely affect climate change (uncontrolled pesticide use, inappropriate waste disposal, etc.). The latest directives also point to the need to integrate the energy sector with climate change context and predict the transposition and elimination of adverse climate fuels by 2050.

Further discussion raised a number of questions to supplement the Draft Recommendations, or raised as an initiative for future NCEU-MK activities such as: improving communication and data exchange among information holders regarding agri-environmental indicators; forests as a factor for nature conservation and the emergence of their devastation; conditions in beekeeping that suffers not only from abrupt climate change but also from uncontrolled pesticide use, with losses reaching 50-80%; the necessity, when it comes to adaptation, to add, as per the European directives, a climate change mitigation; the need, in addition to the Climate Change Strategy and other adopted documents, to develop a comprehensive climate action policy in line with the EU-2030 framework.

The draft recommendations were grouped into three parts: 1. Building capacity to tackle climate change in agriculture; 2. Targeting policies to mitigate and adapt to climate change; 3. Institutional aspects. They fully reflected the debate in their content and were adopted with some clarifications and additions. During the session, slides of the 2017 catastrophic flood in the Skopje region (followed by soil devastation and numerous human casualties) were presented, showing and warning of the destructive effects of climate change.

