



ORGANIZATION OF THE BLACK SEA ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Permanent International Secretariat

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REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE BSEC WORKING GROUP ON AGRICULTURE AND AGRO-INDUSTRY

Thessaloniki, 7-8 October 2010

1. The Meeting of the BSEC Working Group on Agriculture and Agro-Industry was held in Thessaloniki on 7-8 October 2010.
2. The following BSEC Member States participated in the Meeting:

Republic of Armenia
Republic of Bulgaria
Georgia
Hellenic Republic
Republic of Moldova
Russian Federation
Republic of Serbia
Republic of Turkey
3. The representative of the Parliamentary Assembly of the BSEC (PABSEC) attended the Meeting as the BSEC Related Body.
4. The representatives of Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM) and the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania (MAICH) participated at the Meeting as Official Guests.
5. The List of Participants of the Meeting is attached as Annex I.
6. The Meeting was chaired by Mr. Pavlos PEZAROS, Director for Agricultural Policy, Ministry of Rural Development and Food of the Hellenic Republic.
7. The Draft Agenda of the Meeting was discussed and adopted. The Agenda, as adopted, is attached as Annex II.

STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION RESOLUTIONS, DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS RELATED TO AGRICULTURE AND AGRO-INDUSTRY

8. The Working Group discussed the ways and means of implementation of the Decision of the 22nd Meeting of the BSEC Council related to agriculture and agro-industry sectors, particularly with reference to the implementation of a 2-year Action Plan of the Working Group.

9. The Working Group acknowledged in general terms that the Action Plan is being implemented under the guidance of the Country-Coordinator and with the participation of the relevant institutions of the Member States.

10. The Working Group stated that the issue of food safety is being considered within the framework of the Working Group in cooperation with FAO.

11. Acknowledging the efforts of the Parliamentary Assembly of the BSEC and its specialized Committee in considering the issue of food security and adoption in this regard of the Recommendation 114/2010 “Food Security in the BSEC Member States” by the PABSEC General Assembly at its 35th plenary session in Belgrade on 2 June 2010, the Working Group took note of the PABSEC Recommendation and agreed to further consider it in a more thorough way at the next meeting with the view of elaborating concrete proposals and initiatives to be implemented within the Working Group and at national level in the BSEC Member States.

CONSIDERATION OF THE FINAL REPORT ON PDF PROJECT “A FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR VARIABLE RATE IRRIGATION IN THE BLACK SEA REGION: ECONOMICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS.”

12. In conformity with the Manual of Operations of the BSEC Project Development Fund (PDF) the Working Group considered and assessed the final report on PDF project “A feasibility study for variable rate irrigation in the Black Sea region: economical and environmental benefits”.

13. The Working Group concluded that the final report on this PDF project has been completed in conformity with the relevant provisions of PDF Manual of Operations and that it is in conformity with the adopted priorities of the BSEC Working Group on Agriculture and Agro-Industry.

COOPERATION AND EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION AND EXPERIENCE IN THE FIELD OF FOOD SAFETY AMONG CENTRAL COMPETENT AUTHORITIES AND NATIONAL REFERENCE LABORATORIES OF THE BSEC MEMBER STATES

14. The Working Group continued the consideration of the issue of food safety in conformity with the decision of the 22nd Meeting of the BSEC Council.

15. The representative of the Hellenic Republic made a presentation on “Structure of the laboratory network for food and feed safety in Greece according to EU legislation”. In the presentation he mentioned the general principles of food and feed legislation, including the relevant EC Regulations approved by the European Parliament and European Council. A reference has been made to the food safety network in Greece, which applies to all EU

member states, specifically to the distinction of community reference laboratories, national reference laboratories and official control laboratories and their requirements and responsibilities to achieve the high level of food safety control. The benefits from the establishment of the community and national reference laboratory networks have been identified alongside the measures to be taken in order to establish such networks. The presentation is attached as [Annex III](#).

16. The representative of Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) made a presentation “Harmonization of food safety monitoring and control strategies: focus of strengthening laboratories analytical capacities”. She described the role of science in standards setting and food safety regulation and pointed out to the obligations of the Member States under WTO SPS agreement to ensure that the sanitary and phytosanitary measures are applied only to the extent necessary to protect human, animal or plant life or health and that these measures do not arbitrarily discriminate between Member States and do not constitute a disguised restriction on trade. She also presented the system of risk analysis as a basis for strengthening the food control activities, components of risk analysis including risk assessment, risk management and risk communication. Detailed information on JEMRA activities and outcomes (Joint FAO-WHO Expert Meeting on Microbiological Risk Assessment) has been presented. She suggested that JEMRA guidelines and scientific advice are to be used in the application of risk analysis related to food safety hazards. The representative of FAO also suggested that the relevant capacity building at country level should be based on specific food safety needs, ensuring that at least one laboratory per country is capable to perform pertinent analysis of hazards in the food chain. The presentation is attached as [Annex IV](#).

17. Taking into account the importance of the issue of food safety for the Member States, and the necessity of joint actions with other international organizations, the Working Group recommended to initiate, in cooperation with FAO, a pilot project on promoting risk assessment of food hazards at country level and strengthening the analytical capacity of national laboratories in the BSEC Member States. This project proposal would include training and workshops for the food safety managers, inspectors and laboratory staff from the BSEC Member States. The possible synergy between MoniQA project (EU-funded Network of Excellence on Monitoring and Quality Assurance in the Food Supply Chain) and EU project “Better training for safer food” would be recommended to explore.

18. The representative of the Republic of Armenia informed the Group on the measures of the governmental agencies of Armenia aimed at ensuring the food safety of the agricultural products. He also presented information of the legislation and standards applied in his country concerning food safety and security. Laboratory network activities, their responsibilities in the country and at the borders, have been presented, as well as the measures for the modernization of the existing laboratories and training of personnel.

19. The representative of the Republic of Serbia provided information on the implementation of the Law on Food Safety in the Republic of Serbia. He stated that the process of implementing legislation in the field of agriculture in accordance with the needs and requests for its harmonization with the EU regulations which started in 2009 when 16 laws and the Law on Food Safety were adopted. He also briefed on the current problems in the implementation of the Law on Food Safety and proposals related to food safety given by the representatives of food business operators in the Republic of Serbia. The presentation is attached as [Annex V](#).

20. The Working Group recommended to the national relevant authorities to harmonize the official food inspection procedures and their frequency with EU practice for ensuring

transparency in production techniques and compliance with hygiene requirements for ensuring food safety for all.

21. The Working Group suggested that improvements in food inspection could be achieved through more coordinated actions by the relevant authorities and institutions dealing with food safety controls for two-fold aim: to diminish the burden on the producers and to better ensure the consumer protection.

CONSULTATION ON ELABORATION OF HARMONIZING THE LABELING STANDARDS FOR FOOD PRODUCTS AS AN IMPORTANT PART OF FOOD QUALITY AND SAFETY

22. The representative of the Hellenic Republic made a presentation on “Food labeling”. She informed of the existing EU directives of the European Parliament and the European Council related to food labeling and advertising of foodstuff. She also referred to the categories of ingredients which may be included in the food labeling and the quantity required. The new proposal for a Regulation for the European Parliament and the European Council on the provision of food information to consumers has been mentioned. She also mentioned the requirements for identification, nature of product, country of origin, commercial specifications and official control mark for fresh fruits and vegetables. The presentation is attached as Annex VI.

23. The Working Group stressed the importance of food labeling in facilitating the trade of agricultural products in the Member States and agreed to further consider this issue at its next meeting, including the topic of mutual recognition of Protected Geographical Indications, Traditional Speciality Guaranteed, Protected Designation of Origin in the Member States.

24. The Working Group recommended to explore ways of discouraging and prohibiting practices of using logos representing specific geographical or historical places for marketing purposes, that mislead the consumers in relation to the origin of food products.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

25. The Secretary General of the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM) made a presentation on the structure, mission and activities of CIHEAM in providing post-graduate education, complementary to the national educational programs, intended for public and private professionals. He stressed that food safety is a topic that is constantly on the agenda of CIHEAM and integrated in the educational programs of the Centre. The Secretary General stated that an increasing number of students from the BSEC Countries are being trained within CIHEAM. As an intergovernmental organization CIHEAM is working in partnership with numerous national and international organizations and taking into account the overlapping geographical and agro-economic dynamics between countries of the Black Sea area and those of the Mediterranean shores, the Secretary General suggested that BSEC and CIHEAM shall explore the emerging cooperation possibilities between the two organizations. The presentation is attached as Annex VII.

26. The representative of the Mediterranean Institute of Chania (MAICH), which is one of the four Institutes of CIHEAM, presented the activities of his Institution and stated that an overall number of 825 students from the BSEC Countries have been trained within MAICH.

27. The participants suggested to include into the Agenda of the next meeting the GMOs issue (genetically modified organisms) that would be a basis for further discussions in the framework of the PABSEC specialized committee.

EXPRESSION OF THANKS

28. In conformity with the Program of the Meeting on 8 October 2010 the participants paid a visit to “Boutari” winery and “Venus” processing company in the city of Veria. Practical application of the food safety standards and the labeling requirements for the products have been presented and explained in details to the participants.

29. The participants expressed their gratitude and appreciation to the Host Country of the Meeting, for the hospitality and excellent conditions extended to them during their stay in Thessaloniki.

DATE AND VENUE OF THE NEXT MEETING

30. The date and venue of the next Meeting of the Working Group on Agriculture and Agro-Industry will be communicated to the BSEC Member States through the BSEC PERMIS.

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

31. The Working Group adopted the present Report for submission to the next Meeting of the Committee of the Senior Officials of the BSEC Member States.