

Terra Madre Balkans 2018

Draft Conference Conclusions

presented at the Conference “Western Balkans’ potential for sustainable rural development as a driver to EU integration”

22 May 2018
European Parliament, Brussels

After four editions in Sofia (2010, 2012), Dubrovnik (2014) and Tirana (2016), Terra Madre Balkans (TMB) network has gathered at the heart of the European debate in a moment that is crucial for the definition of Europe’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) beyond 2020.

Over 100 delegates from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, FYR Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia represented the diverse potential of Terra Madre Balkans in terms of its rich biodiversity, food traditions and sustainable agricultural practices.

The co-hosting Members of the European Parliament from Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania¹ understand the regional specificities of the agricultural and rural development models in the Balkan region. The knowledge about the common history, rich biodiversity and natural resources together with the similar socio-economic challenges experienced in the region make it possible to transform the CAP into a tool-box, responding to the regional context.

To celebrate the International Day of Biodiversity, 22nd May, the conference brought together rural communities, small-scale food producers, chefs, activists, youth and academics from the region face to face with policy-makers from the EU institutions in order to demonstrate different means for valorization of the rich Balkan heritage as a source of innovation and social entrepreneurship in the region.

Future of the Western Balkans in the EU

Participants at the 5th edition of Terra Madre Balkans share the opinion that the integration of the Western Balkan countries to the EU is a major political goal that will ensure stability and development in the region which coincides fully with the most recent political security and economic agenda stated in the European Commission’s new strategy for “A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans”.

The EU perspective of the Western Balkans as a key objective of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU and the ambitious **Sofia Priority Agenda**, adopted at the **Western Balkan Summit** in Sofia, held on 17th of May, proved that the Bulgarian Presidency lives

¹ The conference was organized by the following MEPs from the EPP group in the European Parliament: Vladimir Urutchev and Andrey Kovatchev (Bulgaria), Adina-Ioana Vălean (Romania) and Dubravka Šuica and Ivana Maletić (Croatia).

up to the goal to be a Balkan Presidency. This momentum should not be lost and we remain positive that the succeeding Council Presidencies from the Balkans (Romania and Croatia) will continue the efforts for strong Balkans into the EU.

TMB 2018 is a strategic tool to raise the awareness that the European integration of the Western Balkans needs a **holistic approach** in order to ensure the peace, security and prosperity of this diverse region. In line with the Bulgarian Presidency objective for improving the region's **connectivity** in all its dimensions: transport, energy, digital, economic and human, TMB 2018 builds on the **human dimension** by demonstrating the potential of small-scale food producers and rural communities from the Balkans to be the **driving force** for fostering local growth and socio-economic development.

Sustainable Rural Development in the Western Balkans as a driver to EU integration

A recent survey of 10,000 small-scale farmers from across the EU was conducted by Slow Food with the aim to contribute to the debate on the future of CAP. The 11 recommendations that have emerged from that survey² highlight the need to integrate the policy processes affecting food systems with the aim to achieve a **transition to diversified agroecological approach** based on agrobiodiversity, lower dependency on external inputs, social relationships and short supply chains. Such recommendations are fully relevant for the Balkans, which host the vast majority of EU small-scale farmers, and at the same time, share immense agrobiodiversity and related traditional knowledge that can boost local economies and become the pillars of mitigation of and adaptation to climate change.

In addition to such approach, a reformed CAP should holistically encompass not just food production, farming and trade, but also food and environmental quality, health, resource and land management, ecology, social and cultural values. So conceived, CAP could truly deliver **sustainable rural development**, hence **contributing to a deeper EU integration**.

In view of the above-mentioned, the participants at the 5th edition of Terra Madre Balkans acknowledge the need for:

- reduced bureaucratic load, support for marginal and rural areas and young people;
- more flexible implementation of the hygiene rules and EU quality schemes to sustain artisan food producers in their efforts to preserve food diversity;
- dedicated funding schemes to map food diversity in the Balkans and better integrate its biological, ecological, social and cultural context in the sustainable development of rural areas;

We believe that economic prosperity of rural areas is a major driver to cooperation in the Balkans, hence for successful EU integration of the countries from the Western Balkan.

² www.slowfood.com/sloueuropa/wp-content/uploads/SF-survey-Food-Farming-2018.pdf