



Project **VS/2012/003/0305**

“Informed and Experienced for Sustainable Agriculture” - Enhancing the information and consultation capacity of the social partners in sector of Agriculture for active participation in working life for sustainable Agriculture

Transnational Conference

“For better involvement and corporative social responsibility for sustainable agriculture and better and qualitative employment in Agriculture”

4th of July 2013, Sofia, Grand Hotel Sofia, Triadica Hall

Minutes

The Transnational conference was planned according to the Project plan proposed and agreed by the project partners during the Steering committee meetings PM1 in Sofia and PM2 in Skopje. Inspired by their work on the project goals and mission the partners decided the final event to be carried on under the motto ***“For better involvement and corporative social responsibility for sustainable agriculture and better and qualitative employment in Agriculture”***. The agenda was carefully planned and agreed so the event to have reflection in the public society, to attract the public interest to the social burning issues of the Agricultural sector in the light of ongoing debates on the new CAP after 2014. The conference aimed to present to the large audience the obtained project results, to debate the efficiency and opportunities of the social dialogue in the sector in the light of the information, consultation and participation of the employees and to promote the corporate social responsibility when it exists in the sector. Furthermore the conference was aiming to launch a political message on the will of the social partners to work closely for developing of the industrial democracy in the Agriculture by enhancing the rights for information and consultation and involvement of employees.

The participants were selected and invited as active partners in the project and also the partners from the member organizations from the network of EFFAT, all of them actively involved in the process of sectoral social dialogue.

Final revision check on the preparation of the Conference was made during the preparatory meeting of the project management and external exerts, closely involved in the all project process, held on 3th of July. The discussion covered also the press-conference, planned to be taken in the frame of the Conference, the political points to be raised and message to be launched to the media. The plan of the steering committee meeting PM3, planned for 5th of July was also discussed and final amendments were taken.

The conference was organized by Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Agriculture and held on July 4 at Grand Hotel Sofia. It was largely announced in the media, so a lot of media representatives attended it in order to follow the debate.

The conference started with a registration of the participants, guests and media representatives.

It was attended by 43 participants and 22 media representatives from central Bulgarian media. The final project forum got together 43 representatives from agricultural trade unions in Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Check Republic, Germany, Macedonia, Italy, Sweden, France - all of them actively working in the network of the European Federation of Trade Unions of agriculture, food and tourism - EFFAT for civilized industrial relations development and effective social dialogue in Agriculture. The participation of the representatives of the Bulgarian branch organizations – Association of Agricultural Producers in Bulgaria, Union of the processors of fruit and vegetables, Union of producers of vegetables and fruits, Regional council of cooperatives in Veliko Tarnovo, also working on sectoral social dialogue development was important signal for the willingness of the social partners to work on development of industrial democracy in Bulgarian agriculture.

The conference was welcomed by the President of FNSZ and manager of the project Mrs. **Svetla Vasileva**. She opened the forum by thanking all participants for their coming today and interest shown to the subject of today's debate and talked about the challenges in the agriculture sector today. She spoke with respect and gratitude for the efforts of the partners in this project during the last year, who have committed to make a step forward by the project work for more information, awareness and participation of workers in the sector, for the development of social dialogue in agriculture. She stressed on the constant position of unions that the increase of quality and potential of employees in agriculture, if we want to have better jobs, quality jobs, income and motivation to work, can only be done by ensuring the social security of the employees through effective social dialogue in the sector. ".. Only in a dialogue the social partners in the sector can influence and demand on adequate policy to be implemented in the sector, which reflects the specific needs of the sector, to ensure sustainable development, to implement the European model of multifunctional agriculture." (Full text of the exposé is attached.)

The Forum was addressed by the President of the KNSB - Plamen Dimitrov, agricultural secretary of EFFAT -Arnd Spahn and Deputy Minister of Labour and social policy - Mrs. Rossitsa Yankova, Hristo Tsvetanov - President of the Association of Farmers (BAAP), Ms. Svetla Boyanova - a leading expert on the CAP.

Deputy Minister **R. Yankova** stressed that the theme of the conference is very important for the Bulgarian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, because it shows great potential to reduce unemployment and increase employment in this sector. She assured participants that the MLSP and MAF will work towards the implementation of integrated horizontal measures for ensuring quality jobs, which inevitably requires the active participation of the sectoral social partners.

The Secretary of EFFAT Agriculture - Mr. **Arnd Spahn** - spoke of the need for effective tools for addressing the expectations of citizens and society in Bulgaria and in all Member States in these

difficult times. He stressed that FNSZ offers tools that should be encouraged. Information and consultation is a tool for supporting the dialogue between employers and workers for better working conditions, for better productivity and quality of the production, for cooperative corporate culture.

It is sad, that today the cooperativeness in Agriculture is not very common, so we should all support and encourage good examples in this area. External point of view is that there is a need to improve the framework political conditions for promoting access and distribution of the Common Agricultural Policy funds. The implementation of the CAP must integrate the information and consultation of workers, and that for a broad social dialogue and strengthening of cooperative work style is needed.

In his address to the Conference the President of CITUB Mr. **Plamen Dimitrov** pointed out that with this forum, as well as in everyday life, FNSZ proves that it has a vision and clear goals for the future.

Creating analysis of the socio-economic and political situation in the country today, he emerged that we are facing a crisis in the model, in moral and in society at the heart of which stands appalling social inequalities that put Bulgaria in last place in the EU. Years ago Unions have to battle against these inequalities by using allowed by the law approaches, namely collective bargaining and strikes.

“... Today we support the goals of the protest - for purification, catharsis and restore trust of the people in the institutions, for the belief that Bulgarian democracy is possible.” That is the reason why unions want from the government new election rules, giving more participation for citizens, specific economic measures supporting small and medium businesses in the country and clear social measures facing the needs of citizens. Development of mechanisms for information and consultation should lead to more effective dialogue and organizing of workers.

Hristo Tsvetanov, Chairman of the BAAP greeted FNSZ with the results achieved by this European project in which the Association of Agricultural Producers is a reliable and responsible partner. He stressed that, the social element has always been on the agenda in the work of the Association. With their work, farmers perform a complex function that contribute and add value to the environment, construction and maintenance of the social environment in the regions, supported rural life. The heavy administrative burden, which is responsibility of farmers – consumes up to 30% of their time - is impossible for the small and micro farmers. It is necessary to seek opportunities to promote information, consultation and social dialogue in the sector, in order to solve pressing issues in sector, related to regulated employment and sustainable and attractive jobs, insurance relations and prosperity of Bulgarian agriculture.

Svetlana Boyanova - expert on the CAP, made a brief summary of the important for the Bulgarian agriculture benchmarks in the context of the document signed yesterday - the Financial Framework for 2014-2020. She stressed that the plight situation in the agricultural sector is not only in Bulgaria, but stay sharp in all Member States and therefore the CAP after 2013 provides more targeted assistance to farmers' incomes to the medium and small farmers. Bulgarian interests must be protected in the political decision making by the Bulgarian

government for complying with solutions of pressing issues, such as land relations in the country, irrigation, rural depopulation, short chains “ produced goods-consumption “, how will the grant funds be allocated/distributed above a certain ceiling (which is still an opened question), etc.

The presented analysis of the status of information and consultation in the agricultural sector (conducted during the project) by experts Jean-Pierre Klapush and Patrick Kudron was a theme for debate, which included representatives of all trade unions in EFFAT. Outlined findings were confirmed and the participants stated categorically, that information and consultation is shared European value, which is at the heart of the European social model, for which unions have been fighting for 50 years and will continue to maintain and develop.

The Conference adopted its **final document - Position**, committed to distribute it to all stakeholders at national and European level. Social dialogue in agriculture, changes in the new CAP, corporate social responsibility, employment and quality jobs were some of the topics of discussion panel at the event.

During the conference, Bulgarian social partners FNSZ, BAAP and RSZKB - Veliko Tarnovo - all active in the European project “Informed and experienced for sustainable agriculture” - **signed a Framework agreement** to address pressing issues concerning labor and social security relations in agricultural production structures and the implementation of strategic objectives and priorities of the Common Agricultural Policy in favor of the Bulgarian sustainable agriculture.

Along the conference a special Press-conference with 22 journalists from central and mainstream media was held. The Federation, FNSZ presented a material with serious facts and figures on the state of Bulgarian agriculture, analysis that FNSZ makes in axis employment-jobs-funding support. The concerns of the union are also shared by employers in the sector and the need for strong and innovative measures in the sector is obvious, even screaming. The today-conference is an expression of public attitudes and opinions, in order to be taken seriously and corrective actions in the sector to be undertaken. The Conference was largely announced and popularized in the media - radio, online press, news papers, magazines.

These are just some of the issues, raised by FNSZ that affect the security and the prospect of workers in the sector.

... Despite the serious support from over 7 billion BGN for the Bulgarian Agriculture with EU funds, national schemes and payments for the period after 2007, it failed to overcome its basic structural flaws, but mostly it did not find any effect on job creation and labor income of those working in it.

... Only 11.1% employed in the sector (738,634 people) participate in the social security system in this country. Threshold of insurance for farmers and tobacco currently is 240 BGN. Provision on such income does not guarantee them the minimum retirement pension and age, although their state guarantees it in retirement. This leads to strong redistributive processes in the "Pensions", further straining the budget of the SSS.

In this specific sector most workers work with temporary employment contract - depending on campaign and seasonal work. They represent a large percentage of seasonal workers in the sector. Majority of workers in the sector operate solely on the basis of oral agreements, which deprives them of access to fundamental rights - creates discrimination, breach of health and safety, fair wages, etc. The incomes from this sector traditionally low and working condition are risky. Labor productivity is low and the age structure is highly problematic.

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