



Meeting of the CEI Working Group on Agriculture

Trieste, 29 April 2005

Executive Summary

A meeting of the CEI Working Group on Agriculture was held on 29 April 2005 at the CEI Headquarters in Trieste.

The meeting, co-chaired by Prof. Janina Sawicka of Poland and Mr. Sali Metani of Albania, was attended by representatives of the following countries: Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovak Republic and Slovenia.

Representatives of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the CEI Wholesale Markets Foundation (CEI WMF), Austrian Chambers of Agriculture, Bulgarian State Fund "Agriculture", Chamber of Commerce of Udine, CEI Executive Secretariat and Secretariat for CEI Projects also attended the meeting.

The discussions held during the meeting on the agreed Agenda items can be summarised as follows:

Agenda Item 2: Presentation of the project: "Promotion of Local Brands in Agro-industry and Handicraft in the CEI Region" (*Ms. Maria Lucia Pilutti and Mr. Omar Londero, Udine Chamber of Commerce, Italy*)

Promoters of the project will take into consideration suggestions expressed by the WG members and the CEI Secretariat (e.g. to enlarge the number of countries participating in the project). They are open to further proposals (for contact details please refer to the 204.007-05 *List of Participants*).

Agenda Item 3: CEI EastAgri Network – the first year of operations (*Mr. Emmanuel Hidier and Ms. Nada Zvekic, FAO*)

The FAO will provide all WG members with a user name and a password enabling them to access the EastAgri database. WG members will then be contacted by Ms. Zvekic and asked for useful links and/or focal point commitment within their respective ministries.

Extension of the project will be presented to the CNC as soon as the situation in the CEI Trust Fund would allow for the commitment of the requested contribution.

Agenda item 4: New activities of the CEI Wholesale Markets Foundation (*Mr. Zoran Krsnik, National Wholesale Markets Company, Croatia*)

The CEI confirms its assistance to the Foundation. Future financial support should be however dedicated to training activities, seminars and workshops while the managerial expenses should be borne from the Foundation's own resources or from donations of other sponsors.

Agenda item 5: Possible extension of the CEI micro-financing programme to Bulgaria and Romania (*Ms. Cinzia Pica, CEI-PS/EBRD*)

The CEI will make efforts to facilitate a training programme on agri-lending and access to EU funds dedicated to agriculture. The programme would be devoted to countries eligible to use the EU pre-accession funds (Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania).

Agenda item 6: Presentation of the project: "JABLE – CENTER OF EXCELLENCE": project's objectives, planned activities and possible areas of cooperation within the CEI framework (*Mr. Marko Verbic, Ministry of Agriculture, Slovenia*)

Slovenian Ministry of Agriculture and the CEI will prepare a position papers on possible cooperation within the Jable project. A common agreement could then be presented during the upcoming Conference of CEI Ministers of Agriculture.

Agenda item 7: Presentation of the project: "Expert meeting on Sustainable Rural Tourism – Gender and Community Perspective" (*Prof. Janina Sawicka, Warsaw Agriculture University, Poland*)

The project will be submitted for the approval of the Committee of National Co-ordinators at their upcoming meeting.

Agenda item 8: Presentation of the project: "Conference on sustainable development of rural areas – experience of EU member states and countries in transition" (*Ms. Marina Deur, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, Croatia*)

The project will be re-examined by the CEI Secretariat and comments will be sent to the proposer. The WG members will be asked to evaluate the project in its revised version in a written procedure.

Agenda item 9: Presentation of other co-operation activities to be submitted for CEI co-financing.

No other projects were submitted to the CEI Secretariat.

Agenda item 10: Activities of the Slovak Presidency 2005 in the area of agriculture (*Ms. Eva Kolesarova, Ministry of Agriculture, the Slovak Republic*)

Conference of CEI Ministers of Agriculture will be held on 3-4 November in Hotel Kaskady in Sliac, Slovak Republic (3 November – expert meeting; 4 November – ministerial roundtable). The WG members are asked to inform their ministers on the planned venue and date of the ministerial conference and the expert meeting. Updated information on the conference will be soon available on a website of the Slovak Presidency (www.cei.sk).

Agenda item 11: Creation of the CEI Chambers of Agriculture Network

Ten countries communicated an interest to join the Network, though, no strong commitment was expressed. Further discussion revealed that the chambers in CEI countries have no comparable structure (different status, roles, means of financing, etc.). Also, no country/ chamber expressed an interest to take a leading role in the Network and to provide related financial support (which is a case in the CEI Chambers of Commerce Initiative where the Italian chamber, Unioncamere, is a leading member and provides financial means for the network's activities). For the above mentioned reasons, creation of the Chambers of Agriculture Network will not be considered anymore this year. The initiative can be taken up in the future provided that one of chambers expresses an interest to become a leader of the Network.

Agenda item 12: CEI Know-how Exchange Programme (Mr. Adrian Keler, CEI-PS)

Member States are welcome to submit project proposals to be co-financed through the Know-how Exchange Programme. Further details and the KEP application form can be obtained from the CEI website: www.ceinet.org/KEP.



Meeting of the CEI Working Group on Agriculture

Trieste, 29 April 2005

Chairman's Summary

(full text)

A meeting of the Working Group on Agriculture of the Central European Initiative was held on 29 April 2005 at the CEI Headquarters in Trieste.

The meeting, co-chaired by Prof. Janina Sawicka of Poland and Mr. Sali Metani of Albania, was attended by representatives of the following countries: Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovak Republic and Slovenia.

Two countries that had to cancel their participation at the very last moment – Moldova and Romania – submitted to the CEI Secretariat their position on selected agenda items.

Representatives of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the CEI Wholesale Markets Foundation (CEI WMF), Austrian Chambers of Agriculture, Bulgarian State Fund "Agriculture", Chamber of Commerce of Udine, CEI Executive Secretariat and Secretariat for CEI Projects also attended the meeting.

The meeting was opened by Prof. Janina Sawicka and Mr. Sali Metani, who made introductory remarks and gave the floor to Amb. Kreid, CEI-ES Director General.

First of all, Amb. Kreid emphasized the need of a higher involvement of the representatives of the CEI countries in special need in the CEI structures and then he briefly summarised the salient features of the CEI. Amb. Kreid also informed the WG members on the structures and current situation of the CEI funds:

- CEI Trust Fund at the EBRD (underlining the amplification factor)
- Solidarity Fund for the countries in special need
- Co-operation Fund, financed by the CEI member states (active since 2002)

Amb. Kreid also informed the WG members on the 2 networks created by the CEI:

- Science and Technology Network
- CEI University Network

Finally, Amb. Kreid stressed the importance of the Know-how Exchange Programme (KEP) and the Funding Unit (the total value of the project the CEI participated thanks to the Funding Unit is 5 million EUR).

The discussions held during the meeting on the agreed Agenda items can be summarised as follows:

Agenda Item 2: Presentation of the project: "Promotion of Local Brands in Agro-industry and Handicraft in the CEI Region" (*Ms. Maria Lucia Pilutti and Mr. Omar Londero, Udine Chamber of Commerce, Italy*)

Ms. Maria Lucia Pilutti and Mr. Omar Londero, from the Udine Chamber of Commerce presented the project "Promotion of Local Brands in Agro-Industry and Handicraft in the CEI Region", which was approved as the CEI Co-operation Activity.

Amb. Kreid requested a clarification on "brands" mentioned and on the target audience of the event.

Ms. Pilutti clarified that the "brands" are not specific ones, but the term referred to the general denominations of a product. The participants will include anyway specific producers who will be able to promote their local products at the simultaneous fair (an exhibition area will be available).

Prof. Sawicka inquired on how to get into contact with the organisers to participate to the event.

Ms. Pilutti informed the WG that the operational details will be discussed in June during a meeting with the Chamber of Commerce of Slovakia. On that occasion a list of invitees and promotional activities for the event will be fixed.

The representative from Slovakia, Eva Kolesarova, suggested:

- to consider the difference in the legislation between EU and non-EU countries in organising the event.
- to involve the Slovak Chamber for Agriculture and the Slovak Food Research Institute.

The representative from Slovenia, Mr. Marko Verbic, mentioned the existence of a joint programme between Slovenia and Italy on a similar topic and suggested to the project promoters to invite experts from the Offices of Recognition within the Ministries of the CEI countries.

Amb. Kreid suggested to enlarge the number of countries involved in the event.

Ms. Pilutti clarified that the list of countries should not be considered as a restriction to a wider participation (first consideration – as indicated in the application – was given only to the countries bordering Slovakia, only because they are closer to the venue).

Conclusions: Promoters of the project will take into consideration suggestions expressed by the WG members and the CEI Secretariat (e.g. to enlarge the number of countries participating in the project). They are open to further proposals (for contact details please refer to the *204.007-05 List of Participants*).

Agenda Item 3: CEI EastAgri Network – the first year of operations (*Mr. Emmanuel Hidier and Ms. Nada Zvekic, FAO*)

Mr. Emmanuel Hidier presented the achievements of the EastAgri Network as summarised below.

Within the EastAgri framework 3 workshops have been organised:

- on the sugar sector in Serbia
- on the oil seed sector in Ukraine
- on food retail in Bosnia

The EastAgri Annual Meeting took place in Rome and during the meeting additional funding has been promised by the World Bank for a workshop on the co-ordination in the supply chain.

A video-clip on the EastAgri mission and structure was shown during the meeting.

The EastAgri officer, Ms. Nada Zvekic, identified as a major difficulty to implement the project due to the insufficient flow of information from the Ministries of the CEI countries.

Mr. Hidier also presented a request for the extension of the programme.

Ms. Cinzia Pica, CEI-PS, underlined the value of the EastAgri database and highlighted the fact that all the WG members have free access to all the information on the website. Ms. Pica also pointed that, due to the limited funds available in the CEI Trust fund at the EBRD, the extension of EastAgri could not be financed from the Fund in the short term, but that the project was nevertheless presented to the WG to check the interest of the CEI countries in the programme.

Conclusions: The FAO will provide all WG members with a user name and a password enabling them to access the EastAgri database. WG members will then be contacted by Ms. Zvekic and asked for useful links and/or focal point commitment within their respective ministries.

Extension of the project will be presented to the CNC as soon as the situation in the CEI Trust Fund would allow for the commitment of the requested contribution.

Agenda item 4: New activities of the CEI Wholesale Markets Foundation (*Mr. Zoran Krsnik, National Wholesale Markets Company, Croatia*)

Mr. Zoran Krsnik presented the results of the CEI WM Foundation in the past 12 months. Two meetings have been organised:

- in Croatia, with 60 participants from 9 CEI countries
- in Romania, where the financial situation of the foundation has been discussed.

In the past year Wholesale Markets from Albania joined the Foundation and interest has been shown in joining by Bulgarian wholesale markets.

Also the position of the Foundation towards the World Union of Wholesale Markets (WUWM) has been discussed. The Foundation is contemplating to join the World Union, but maintaining its own identity. A decision will be taken on the matter during next CEI WM Foundation meeting in June in Rome.

Regarding the funding situation for the Foundation, the CEI Trust Fund is providing funds for 2005 activities. From 2006 the CEI will be able to contribute to the Foundation only co-financing ad hoc events through the co-operation activities or the KEP programme. In this context, Mr. Krsnik indicated that the Foundation's members agreed to increase the annual membership fee in order to reach self-sustainability. It is expected that soon the Foundation will be able to cover its operational expenses from its own resources.

Amb. Kreid inquired about the impact of the EU enlargement on the wholesale markets in new EU member states.

Mr. Krsnik said that he did not yet have comprehensive knowledge on that issue but he expected to obtain relevant information from the members during the upcoming Foundation's meeting in Rome. Nevertheless, Mr. Krsnik said that the director of the Bronisze Wholesale Market in Poland, Mr. Bylinski, had already reported on some positive trends in Bronisze market after Poland's accession to the EU.

Finally, Mr. Krsnik stressed that all the markets (from EU and non-EU countries) are constantly growing, despite the strong competition from the supermarket chains.

Conclusions: The CEI confirms its assistance to the Foundation. Future financial support should be however dedicated to training activities, seminars and workshops while the managerial expenses should be borne from the Foundation's own resources or from donations of other sponsors.

Agenda item 5: Possible extension of the CEI micro-financing programme to Bulgaria and Romania (*Ms. Cinzia Pica, CEI-PS/EBRD*)

Ms. Pica summarised briefly the document on the micro-financing activities of the EBRD in Bulgaria and Romania.

The Bulgarian representative, Ms. Slava Spasova, thanked the CEI for the information received on the activities of agri-lending in Bulgaria and agreed that the lack of information exchange between government structure and private sector in the countries remained a main difficulty.

Moreover, it was agreed that the CEI could only finance technical assistance while the actual lending was reserved to the banking sector. However, the pre-accession countries could also benefit from training programmes or the know-how exchange programme to learn how to access existing financial sources (e.g. SAPARD programme).

Amb. Kreid supported the suggestion of the CEI acting as a facilitator to help the countries to access funds available from other sources and launched the idea of a seminar/training on the topic.

Mr. Verbic underlined the time constraint for the pre-accession countries to access EU funds and the necessity to act fast to obtain results.

Finally, the FAO representative, Mr. Hidier, promised to send to Ms. Spasova a report conducted by FAO on agri-lending in Bulgaria ("Bulgaria: Expanding ProCredit's Operations in Rural Areas").

Conclusions: The CEI will make efforts to facilitate a training programme on agri-lending and access to EU funds dedicated to agriculture. The programme would be devoted to countries eligible to use the EU pre-accession funds (Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania).

Agenda item 6: Presentation of the project: "JABLE – CENTER OF EXCELLENCE": project's objectives, planned activities and possible areas of cooperation within the CEI framework (*Mr. Marko Verbic, Ministry of Agriculture, Slovenia*)

Mr. Marko Verbic presented the project "Jable – Center of Excellence" and suggested possible areas of co-operation with the CEI.

Amb. Kreid asked clarification on the real role of the project, and Mr. Verbic clarified that the project was still in the initial phase and the Slovenian Government was open to suggestions. He also indicated three types of activities to be soon carried out in Jable:

- Project management (to find the most effective way of managing the Center and the farm)
- Biomass (exchange of experience on "green energy")
- Eco-remedy

Amb. Kreid and other WG members asked in which sense Jable was a center of excellence.

Mr. Verbic explained that the Jable project was still in its initial stage of implementation. Thus, it could not yet be called a "Center of Excellence". However, as reported by Mr. Verbic, to gain such status was one of the main objectives of the project.

Furthermore, Mr. Verbic explained that Jable was meant not only for Slovenian "domestic" events but could host international activities, too.

Amb. Kreid expressed a great interest towards the project. It was agreed that the CEI and the Slovenian Ministry of Agriculture would consider closer collaboration, e.g. to evaluate the possibility of labelling Jable with a CEI logo and using it as a CEI training center in the area of agriculture.

Conclusions: Slovenian Ministry of Agriculture and the CEI will prepare a position papers on possible cooperation within the Jable project. A common agreement could then be presented during the upcoming Conference of CEI Ministers of Agriculture.

Agenda item 7: Presentation of the project: "Expert meeting on Sustainable Rural Tourism – Gender and Community Perspective" (*Prof. Janina Sawicka, Warsaw Agriculture University, Poland*)

Prof. Sawicka presented the project "Expert meeting on Sustainable Rural Tourism – Gender and Community Perspective".

Amb. Kreid expressed certain reservations since the project was organized by an FAO body (Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development). Amb. Kreid said that the National Coordinators could express objections if the CEI should co-finance activities of FAO structures.

Prof. Sawicka explained that during the event the CEI would be given the same visibility as FAO. She also pointed out that the requested CEI contribution of EUR 5.000 was entirely meant to enable participation of CEI countries in special need.

The WG members approved the project.

Conclusions: the project will be submitted for the approval of the Committee of National Co-ordinators at their upcoming meeting.

Agenda item 8: Presentation of the project: "Conference on sustainable development of rural areas – experience of EU member states and countries in transition" (*Ms. Marina Deur, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, Croatia*)

Ms. Marina Deur presented the project "Conference on sustainable development of rural areas – experience of EU member states and countries in transition".

It was explained that the project reached the CEI Secretariat only a few days before the Working Group meeting. Thus, the content of the project and its budget had not yet been evaluated by the Secretariat. Also, it was underlined by the CEI staff member that the project was submitted to the CEI after the official deadline of 1 April.

Amb. Kreid said that the project's budget needed to be reconsidered and that the requested CEI contribution of EUR 40.000 was beyond the allowed maximum donation for Cooperation Activities which is EUR 30.000.

Conclusions: The project will be re-examined by the CEI Secretariat and comments will be sent to the proposer. The WG members will be asked to evaluate the project in its revised version in a written procedure.

Agenda item 9: Presentation of other co-operation activities to be submitted for CEI co-financing.

No other projects were submitted to the CEI Secretariat.

Mr. Sali Metani of Albania took the opportunity to report briefly on the successful implementation of the project "The Farms' Development – a key component for sustainable economical development of hill and mountainous areas – results and dissemination of experiences between the CEI countries".

As stated by Mr. Metani, the conference that was approved last year as a CEI Cooperation Activity took place on 25-26 March 2005 and brought a good number of participants. At the meeting, the CEI and its activities in agriculture were presented by Mr. Murra, Albanian National Coordinator.

Agenda item 10: Activities of the Slovak Presidency 2005 in the area of agriculture
(*Ms. Eva Kolesarova, Ministry of Agriculture, the Slovak Republic*)

Ms. Eva Kolesarova informed that the Conference of CEI Ministers of Agriculture would be held on 3-4 November in Hotel Kaskady in Sliac, Slovak Republic.

Ms. Kolesarova explained that the ministerial roundtable was to take place on 4 November and would be preceded by an expert meeting on 3 November. Both ministerial and expert meetings would cover the same topic: "The sustainable development of agriculture – exchange of know-how". Within this topic, Ms. Kolesarova indicated four areas of special attention:

- sustainable forest management in the Central European region
- exploitation of technologies oriented towards minimalization of a negative impact on the environment and orientation at safe foodstuffs with a preventative positive effect on the health of the customer
- preservation of agricultural activities in rural and less favoured areas
- support of the environmental activities protecting the environment and preservation of the environmental values

While official invitations will be sent through CEI embassies in the Slovak Republic, Ms. Kolesarova asked WG members to inform their ministers and encourage them to come to the conference. As explained by Ms. Kolesarova, the Member States would be asked to nominate representatives to the expert meeting, too.

Amb. Kreid suggested that copies of the invitation should be sent to CEI National Coordinators and a draft Final Document to be circulated among the WG members a few weeks before the conference.

Ms. Pica praised good organization of the last year's ministerial meeting organized by the Slovenian Presidency and suggested to Ms. Kolesarova to use the experience of Slovenian colleagues.

Ms. Kolesarova took the opportunity to present briefly another event of the Presidency "Conference on Food Quality and Health Safety Controls". As stated by Ms. Kolesarova, the project had recently been approved by the Committee of National Coordinators and was to take place on 15-16 September 2005, in the Castle Mojmirovce, Slovak Republic.

Conclusions: WG members are asked to inform their ministers on the planned venue and date of the ministerial conference and the expert meeting. Updated information on the conference will be soon available on a website of the Slovak Presidency (www.cei.sk).

Agenda item 11: Creation of the CEI Chambers of Agriculture Network

"CEI Chambers of Agriculture Network" initiative was briefly introduced by Mr. Adrian Keler, CEI-PS.

According to the statements of the WG members present at the meeting and previously submitted declarations, the ten following countries expressed interest to join the Chambers of Agriculture Network: Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Slovak Republic and Slovenia.

The CEI Secretariat proposed that the first meeting of the Network could take place in November during the Summit Economic Forum.

Ms. Kolesarova of Slovakia expressed her concerns as regards the proposed venue. She said she needed to contact the Slovak chamber to confirm if they were ready to host the meeting.

Mr. Eder, Austrian Chambers of Agriculture, said that Austria was very keen on joining the Network and then he briefly informed on the structure of Austrian Chambers of Agriculture.

While some WG members had comments to the Network's *Guidelines and Rules of Procedure*, it was agreed that the document would be examined in details by the representatives of chambers at the Network's first statutory meeting.

Conclusions: Ten countries communicated an interest to join the Network, though, no strong commitment was expressed. Further discussion revealed that the chambers in CEI countries have no comparable structure (different status, roles, means of financing, etc.). Also, no country/ chamber expressed an interest to take a leading role in the Network and to provide related financial support (which is a case in the CEI Chambers of Commerce Initiative where the Italian chamber, Unioncamere, is a leading member and provides financial means for the network's activities). For the above mentioned reasons, creation of the Chambers of Agriculture Network will not be considered anymore this year. The initiative can be taken up in the future provided that one of chambers agrees to become a leader of the Network.

Agenda item 12: CEI Know-how Exchange Programme (Mr. Adrian Keler, CEI-PS)

Mr. Adrian Keler presented co-financing opportunities available through the CEI Know-how Exchange Programme (KEP).

Mr. Verbic asked if the KEP was meant for bilateral projects only or could support multilateral programmes as well. Since KEP proposals should always be submitted by a donor institution, Mr. Verbic wanted to know if any official letter of involvement was required from a beneficiary. Other WG members inquired if there was a special application form for KEP projects.

Mr. Keler explained that the programme was meant mainly for bilateral projects, however, there were not obstacles to support multilateral proposals. Furthermore, Mr. Keler said that no letters of intention were required from beneficiaries but obviously beneficiaries should be fully committed to the absorption of know-how and such commitment should be made clear in the application.

Mr. Keler informed that the application form could be downloaded from the CEI website from the following address: www.ceinet.org/KEP. He also urged WG members that KEP projects required more complex structure than typical co-operation activities and could not be limited to a single event like a seminar or a workshop.