

Communiqué

Foundation of the Western Balkan Subregional Soil Partnership (WBSP)

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia

The undersigned Ministers of agriculture/Heads of Delegations of the Western Balkans create this partnership to preserve, protect, and restore the soils in the Western Balkan region. This partnership aims to mobilize and involve thus unite all stakeholders and institutions in the region,

- to identify and restore degraded soils to improve productivity and the provision of ecosystem services; in particular, the role of soils to secure healthy and sufficient food, to contribute to social stability, water resources, protection of biodiversity, and adaptation to climate change
- to improve national/regional technical capacity, in particular, soil monitoring and advisory
- to enhance public awareness about the importance of soil while ensuring broad stakeholder involvement, to successfully implement soil-related actions related to the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans

Guiding principles for this partnership are received from the following initiatives:

- the 'Green Agenda for Western Balkans' (GAWB), building on the Sofia Declaration 2020, and the Action plan for the implementation of the GAWB Brdo pri Kranju 2021, addressing the challenges to safeguard healthy soils for the Balkan region
- the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) tackling land degradation
- the Global Soil Partnership (GSP), its revised World Soil Charter and the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable soil Management

This Communiqué agrees to, and supports, the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) as attached to this Communiqué. The MoU has been developed by the Regional Expert Advisory Working Group (REAWG) on Soil Protection, under the auspices of the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group in South-Eastern Europe (SWG); it describes the content and structure of how the WBSP will operate.

We, the ministers of the involved countries, create this partnership with the expectation that our national institutions dealing with soil research, education, analytics and advisory, are the catalyzers to initiate action based on a 5-year implementation plan. This partnership shall be enlarged as a participatory open network. First action shall involve the identification of the extend of soil degradation in the Western Balkan region through soil monitoring, the development of knowledge for land practitioners as well as for future policy making, targeting to promote sustainable soil management. Cross-border exchange of practical experience, joint research initiatives, the development of public data bases and knowledge platforms will be highlights of this partnership. We the Ministers/Heads of Delegations entrust the SWG to realize all the activities necessary for setting up and operationalize the WBSP.

The content of this communiqué and its MoU will guide priority setting in our respective institutions and promote the awareness and support by practitioners and our citizens, about the importance of healthy soils in our region.

Signatures

(Present Ministers/Heads of delegations sign the document)

*This designation is without prejudice to positions on the status and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.