

BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN GREECE AND OTHER COUNTRIES IN AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL SECTOR

EUROPEAN COUNTRIES - MEMBERS OF THE EU

1. BULGARIA

The bilateral relations of cooperation between the two neighbouring countries have a long history and they were particularly intensive. The lack of a latest institutional framework between Greece and Bulgaria for cooperation in the agricultural sector did not stand as an obstacle to undertaking common initiatives in the frame of both various Mixed Intergovernmental Committees and Working Groups for collaboration in the agricultural sector.

Our country and the Ministry of Rural Development and Food supported by all means and since the early stages, the strategic target of Bulgaria for its integration into the European Union; support that was expressed factually, not only in the frame of Community negotiations but also with the transfer of know-how via Community programs.

In particular, the Government of Bulgaria had assigned a Twinning Program between the homologous Ministries of Greece and Bulgaria for drawing up and prepare the application of the Special Pre-Accession Aid for Rural Development (SAPARD) as well as a program for improving the production process and control of seeds and adaptation of the relevant national legislation to the corresponding Community one.

The accession negotiations of the two Balkan countries, Bulgaria and Romania) with the EU were completed in December 2004. The integration of Bulgaria, as well as Romania, in the European Union included the harmonisation of the development and modernisation of the political, economic and social structures of the said Balkan states in line with the development of the European political and economic completion.

After the full integration of Bulgaria in the EU in 2007, the homologous Ministries of both our countries acquired a more essential step of collaboration in Community henceforth level.

Indeed, regarding the agricultural sector, , the Bulgarian positions in a variety of community issues, as they were expressed in the Council of Ministers for Agriculture the last two years, coincided with those of our country. However, there were also cases in which there was a divergence of interests and opinions between the two Ministries (e.g. the last reform of wine regime and the use or not of sugar for the enrichment of wines).

The relations of our country with Bulgaria on issues of veterinary interest are also particularly close, as long as the two countries frequently face common threats (foot and mouth disease, bluetongue decease etc). On this issue, a Tripartite Committee of experts between Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey operates permanently, dealing with the policies applied on veterinary fields

but also with commercial questions arising between the neighbouring countries. Moreover, a Program of Technical Collaboration between Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey also operated for a better monitoring and control of exotic diseases against productive animals in regions of common borders of the three countries.

Regarding the transfer of know-how, regular exchanges of Greek and Bulgarian experts and consultants take place for exchanging information on issues like tobacco cultivation, Common Organisations of Market, harmonisation of veterinary legislation with Community regime, fishing management, Common Fisheries Policy, prevention and repression of forest fires. In addition, in the frame of the Greek Development Aid Programme (DAC), several scholarships were assigned to Bulgarian students and experts to study in the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania (MAICH), while specific seminars were organised in favour of Bulgarian experts on issues of the Common Rural Policy.

In terms of the bilateral agricultural trade balance between Greece and Bulgaria, it is pointed out that, while it was negative for Greece in the period 2003-06 it turned to be a positive one in 2008, as mentioned in the [relevant analysis of our Directorate](#).

(Updated:October 2009)

2. CYPRUS

The long-lasting relations between Greece and Cyprus for collaboration in the agricultural sector are conditioned by a bilateral Agreement between the two Governments since 1988, ratified by the Greek Parliament with Law 2016/20.02.1992 (Governmental Gazette [A]' 31/1992). Article 4 of the Agreement provides for biennial Programs of Collaboration between the two homologous Ministries of Greece and Cyprus.

During the whole pre-accession period, the bilateral relations were particularly intense and they continue to be exceptionally good. The excellent collaboration of the two Agricultural Ministries is characterized by stability and effectiveness.

A mixed expert committee of Planning takes place alternatively in Athens and in Nicosia, in principle annually. It processes and forms annual Programs of Activities, based on the proposals of the agricultural administrations of both countries for the implementation of the above mentioned Programs of Collaboration.

Collaboration is implemented through mutual visits of experts, personnel training, information exchange, facilitation of farmers visits, on issues of agricultural research, forestry, fishery, water management policy, veterinary services and agricultural insurance.

The last biennial program of collaboration, agreed for the period 2006-2008, was fully implemented. In the current phase, the services of both homologous Ministries are in close contact for preparing the signature of the new biennial program which will be in effect the period to follow.

(Updated:October 2009)

3. CZECH REPUBLIC

Up to date, the Greek-Czech co-operation is regulated by the «Agreement between the Ministry of Agriculture of Greek Republic and the Ministry of Agriculture of Czech Republic for economic, scientific and technical co-operation in the field of agriculture» (Prague, 16.11.2000). Even so, no activity between the two countries has been developed in the framework of this Agreement.

The Czech Minister of Agriculture visited the 20th International Exposition «AGROTICA» in Thessaloniki, responding to the Greek Minister. Discussions were primarily focused on areas of common interest, with a view to expanding the bilateral relations of the two countries in the field of agriculture, especially after Czech Republic has become full member of the EU (01.05.2004). High priority was given to the sectors of agricultural research, plant production, animal husbandry, sanitary controls, food safety and agricultural processing industries.

It is also important to mention that two suggestions were put forward, on which both parties agreed and concluded:

- a) Bringing together and strengthening the co-operation between Greek and Czech businessmen acting in the field of agriculture and food
- b) Forming a joint work-group of experts from the Ministries of both countries in formulate a time-schedule for the plan of the future co-operation.

4. FRANCE

Greece and France share excellent bilateral relations since the formal establishment of the Greek State in 1833. Since 1981, the Franco-Greek relations in the agricultural sector are arranged within the EU Policy framework, without any specific cooperation agreement on a bilateral basis.

French economy is the second, after Germany, largest in EU countries. As regards the **agricultural sector**, France is the second, after USA, larger exporter of agricultural goods world wide. Indeed, at international level, France is the largest wine exporter, while is ranked 2nd and 3rd as a cheese product and butter exporter respectively. Further, France is one of the largest exporting countries of pork and beef meat internationally

France is considered, among other countries, a constantly major contributor of **Foreign Direct Investment** towards our country. During the last decade, French Direct Investment is mainly directed towards the food and beverages sector as well as towards services (e.g. banks, insurance companies).

On the other hand, regarding the food sector, only few Greek companies have invested on French enterprises.

At the European Union level, and for the agricultural and food sector, France and Greece share common interests and pair with each other on issues relevant to: the maintenance of the Common Agricultural Policy; the need for support and protection of the EU agricultural sector; WTO negotiations on agriculture; support and protection of Mediterranean agricultural and food products; issues related to EU Mediterranean Policy. Accordingly, the collaboration between officials and experts of the Greek Ministry of Rural Development and Food and officials and experts of it/s French counterpart has been excellent on both political and technical matters.

On the 8-9/10/2007, the French Minister of Agriculture Mr. Michel Barnier visited our country and had bilateral consultations with the political leaders of the Greek Ministry of Rural Development and Food. Among other issues, Mr. Barnier expressed the French concern for the severe agricultural and environmental problems of our country, caused by the extensive firestorms of the 2007 summer period.

During the last 20 years, the cooperation between the Greek Ministry of Rural Development and Food and the agricultural/economic attaches of the French Embassy was continuous and fruitful on all relevant issues.

Recently, on the 21/09/2009, two members of the European Studies program run by the French school for public administration (E.N.A.) visited the Greek Ministry's Directorate for Agricultural Policy. During this visit an exchange of experts' opinion took place regarding the CAP future, as well as future financial perspectives and policy coherence.

The [agricultural trade balance](#) between Greece and France appears steadily in deficit for Greece the last few years. This is an important element, given that for both countries, the agricultural balance constitutes a significant part of their total trade balance.

(Updated:November 2009)

5. HUNGARY

The excellent bilateral relations between the two countries are extended in-depth time. Since 1980 there has been signed a bilateral Agreement for the improvement of their economic, industrial and technical collaboration (Athens, 24.09.1980), on the basis of which they were realised nine Mixed Interministerial Committees in Athens and Budapest alternately, with no concrete engagement in the sector of agriculture.

In June 2001, the two homologous Ministries initialized a draft Agreement for the economic, scientific and technical collaboration in agricultural sector. However, the final signature of the said Agreement was not realised, taking into account that Hungary was fully integrated as a member of the European Union in 2004 and since then, the collaboration of the two Ministries develops in the frame of Community procedures and consultations.

In July 2003, two representatives of the Hungarian Ministry realised a visit in Athens and they received information by the competent services on the structure and the operation of Payments Organisation (OPEKEPE).

In May 2007, a large Hungarian delegation consisting of members of the Administration and the Hungarian organization of "Rural Credit Guarantee Foundation" paid a visit to our Ministry. The members of the delegation had the occasion to be fully informed and discuss with the Ministry's experts about the current situation of the Greek agriculture and the Greek experiences out of the Greek integration process, as well as CAP and rural development issues of common interest.

At Community level, the two homologous Ministries have a common stance in a range of important issues of common interest, like the level and the measures of support in agricultural production, their negative stance on the authorisation and placing on the European markets of products from genetically modified organisms, etc.

(Updated:October 2009)

6. MALTA

The bilateral relations for cooperation in agriculture between Greece and Malta were upgraded by the beginning of 2004, after the full integration of this small Mediterranean country in the European Union.

At the initial stage of integration of Malta, the Greek Ministry of Rural Development and Food undertook its representation, after a request of the homologous Ministry, in the working groups of the Council on issues of crop products and on the Aegean Islands. Since then, a constant communication and collaboration had been promoted between the competent services of the two Ministries in a range of issues of common interest, like organic agriculture and rural development.

On the 1-4/06/2004, the Ministry corresponded to a request of the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment of Malta, organising a training visit of a Maltese expert on issues of reforestations, management of mountainous waters, and desertification.

In February of 2006, representatives of the Maltesian Organization APS Bank visited the Ministry and were informed by the competent services about the establishment and operation of the Agricultural Advices system established in Greece.

In July of 2009, the Greek Ministry, corresponding to a relative request of the homologous Ministry of Malta, organised and realised a three-day informative visit of a Maltese expert on issues of olive cultivation, the process of adoption of Community legislation, the system of controls applied in the sector, as well as the existing legislation and controls on quality products (Nominations of origin, Geographical Indications, etc).

(Updated:October 2009)

7. POLAND

The bilateral relations for cooperation in agriculture between Greece and Poland are based on the Agreement between the two homologous Ministries for the economic, scientific and technical collaboration in the sector of agriculture and the food economy, signed on the 7th of September 1995 in Athens by the two Ministers and ratified by the Greek Parliament, [Law No 2389/20.03.1996 \(Governmental Gazette \[A\] 52/2006\)](#).

During the pre-accession period of Poland and for the implementation of this Agreement, the bilateral contacts between the two Ministries were intensified either directly or via their Commercial Attaches, while Greece organised at MAICH (13-22/12/1999) a training seminar on issues of EC interest. The seminar was attended by 25 executives of the Polish Ministry of Agriculture and Foods, at the expense of the Greek side.

Poland is a country with an intense agricultural sector. The structures of Polish agriculture are similar to the Greek agriculture, a fact that elects common interests of the two Ministries in line of several problems facing by the agricultural sector. Greek investors have demonstrated a particular interest in Poland on certain sectors of production such as sugar, tobacco, and meat industry

Since 2004, when Poland was integrated as a full member of the European Union, the two Ministries are in harmonious collaboration in the frame of Community procedures and consultations. Occasionally, Poland asks for support from our country in a number of issues of common interest such as dealing with problems arising from the massive imports of fruits and vegetables (eg strawberry), the need for measures to support the markets of cereals and dairy products, state aids issues, etc.

In 2006, the National Institute of Agricultural Research (NAGREF), supervised by the Ministry, was selected as the main Organisation for the implementation of the Community Twinning Project: "Evaluation of existing active substances and registration and surveillance of biocidal products".

In May 2007, a delegation of Polish Co-Operative Movement (National Cooperative Council of Poland) representatives visited the Greek Ministry in Athens and the Pan-Hellenic Union of Agricultural Cooperatives (PASEGES) in Thessaloniki, in the frame of a Polish programme for the "Promotion of establishing Agricultural Producers' Groups". The aim of the visit was for the participants to exchange views and experiences with the administration and members of the Greek co-operatives on issues of mutual interest, while contacts were realised between the Polish delegation and the Greek producers organisations.

The last few years, [the trade balance of agricultural products between Greece and Poland](#) develops at the expense of our country. During the three-year period of 2005-2007 the agricultural balance was in surplus for Greece but since 2008 it has changed to a deficit.

(Updated: October 2009)

8. ROMANIA

In February 1998, the Greek Deputy Minister of Agriculture paid a formal visit to Bucharest and the two sides agreed on a Draft Agreement of co-operation in the agricultural sector, which has not yet been signed.

During the 17th Session of the Joint Ministerial Committee (Athens, 10-11.07.2000), the two sides expressed the wish to strengthen their co-operation in the sector of agriculture and to pursue the signing of the final Agreement between the competent Ministries.

The Greek-Romanian co-operation has been developed satisfactorily in the sector of agricultural research through the implementation of the following programmes:

- Improving the diagnostic methods for several ruminants' diseases
- Alternative methods in the horticultural cultivation under shelter
- Effective use of nitrogen in the forestry species *Abies cephalonica* and *Abies alba*

As far as the transfer of know-how, Greece has granted several post-graduate scholarships to Romanian students, while seminars on the Common Agricultural policy have been organised in the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania.

Finally, a four-person Romanian delegation visited the Greek Ministry of Rural Development and Food, in February of 2004 and the two sides held consultations on the way of planning, setting and operating a Payment and Control Agency for Guidance and Guarantee Community Aid.

9. SLOVENIA

During the formal visit of the Greek Prime Minister in Slovenia, an Agreement for bilateral co-operation in the sector of agriculture was signed (November of 2001).

This Agreement reflects the overall policy of Greece to support co-operation with the Balkan countries, being in transition, facing institutional weaknesses and in need of scientific training.

It is worth mentioning that Slovenia considers itself a Central-Mediterranean European country and not a Balkan one. Even so, trying to avoid isolation from its neighbour Balkan countries, it participates to relevant Organisations as an observer.

Slovenia is a member of the International Council of Olive-oil and attains a very active attitude towards the development of olive-cultivation through new plantations.