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BLACK SEA ADVISORY COUNCIL
/BISAC/

CONSILIUL CONSULTATIV PENTRU MAREA
NEAGRA

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MINUTES

of an extraordinary meeting of the Executive Committee /27.05.2020/

On the 27th of May /Wednesday/ at 10:00 am, a videoconference meeting of the Executive committee of the BISAC was held with the following agenda:

Agenda

1. Stage of support to the sector in Bulgaria and Romania in COVID-19 situation.
2. Stage of development of the classification of the zones for capturing of bivalves and water monitoring.
3. Determining the place, time and date for holding the Annual Reporting General Assembly according to the previously announced agenda.
4. Setting new dates for working group meetings.
5. Miscellaneous.

In addition to members of the BISAC, the meeting was attended by representatives of the DGMARE of European Commission - Mr. Stylianos Mitolidis Head of Unit D2, Mrs. Pinelopi Belekou Unit D1, Mrs. Monika Adamova, and, Mr. Christian Badiou Unit D2. Mr. George Stefan, State Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture of Romania, Mr. Stoyan Kotov Director of the Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Directorate at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry (MAFF), Assoc. Prof. Galin Nikolov Director of Executive Agency of Fisheries and Aquaculture (EAFA), Burgas, from ANPA Constanta - Mr. Aurel Maxim, Mr. Konstantin Petrov - Coordinator of the GFCM Regional Office for the Black Sea.

The meeting was opened by Dr. Yordan Gospodinov, BISAC Chairman.

There was a quorum. Seven out of the ten members of the Management Board were present.

Under item 1 of the agenda: the floor was given to Mr. Stoyan Kotov to comment on the measures taken by the Bulgarian administration in support of the Fisheries Sector. He explained that about 2 months ago the EC proposed a package of measures to deal with

the COVID 19 pandemic. After the adoption of amendment of EMFF Regulation 508/2014, MAFF believes that it provides an opportunity to act in 3 directions.

- The first direction is related to the temporary cessation of fishing activity – EMFF Article 33, as the subject of support may be the fishing vessels with not less than 120 fishing days for the last two calendar years. On the basis of these criteria set out in the amended EMFF Regulation, the MAFF establishes that around 100 fishing vessels can be compensated for the temporary cessation of their fishing activities.
- The next measure is related to public health – EMFF Article 55 and is designed to support the aquaculture sector because of suspended or reduced production activities. Calculation of the losses of aquaculture farms is based on a decrease of at least 20% of the turnover per month (set in the terms of application under the measure) as compared to the average of the monthly turnover in 2019 or the arithmetic average turnover in the month of 2019, 2018 and 2017.. 560 affected aquaculture enterprises have been identified under this measure.
- The third measure is related to the processing enterprises – EMFF Article 69 of the amended EMFF Regulation. The method of calculation of those affected is identical to that of the measure for aquaculture.

The compensation under the three measures is based on principle “first come, first served” until the budget is exhausted and the maximum amount is BGN 80 thousand. This aid is for a fishing vessel, a processing enterprise or an aquaculture farm. Under the aquaculture and processing measure, the aid can be used for the purchase of goods, raw materials, for storage of products, as well as for overhead costs, costs for logistics services, costs for salaries and social security of staff. The total budget of the measures for Bulgaria is BGN 17 million, as funds have been drawn from the OP priorities 1, 2 and 4, and the budget under priority 3 has not been affected in any way. A public discussion is currently underway and the deadline for all associations in Bulgaria to give their opinions on the documents is May 28th. All measures are expected to be initiated on June 1. Applications for consideration will be accepted in the course of a month. A simplified application procedure has been elaborated and there is a possibility to pay the aid immediately after documents evaluation completion.

A statement by Mr. George Stefan followed: He asked if ANPA representatives from Bucharest had been invited. Mr. Aurel Maxim replied that his colleagues had been invited but were busy participating in other meetings. Mr. George Stefan explained that in Romania the amount of money for each measure is currently being discussed and by June 5 the Ministry expects to receive proposals and comments from the fisheries’ associations. Romania identifies its aquaculture sector as larger and more important than the fishing sector. There are 1000 aquaculture farms in the country. The method of evaluation of the measure for support of aquaculture farms will be the same as that in Bulgaria, but the comparison will be made between the period from March 16 to May 14, 2020 as arithmetic mean compared to the same period for 2017, 2018 and 2019. There are concerns that

aquaculture data may be inaccurate and great attention will be paid to the figures and criteria by which funds will be allocated to farms. As for the Black Sea fishing and freshwater fishing, the requirement is that fishermen have an activity of 120 days for the previous 2 calendar years (for freshwater), taking into account the periods of fishing ban, and for the Black Sea we will take into account the losses of fishermen from February 1, 2020, but this is still under public discussion. Regarding the processing sector - the method of calculation is much easier. The comparison will be of arithmetic mean data for 2017, 2018 and 2019 compared to 2020. Processors work with large chains and supermarkets, everything is transparent and data can be taken. The number of fish processors in Romania is not large.

Mr. Florin Lucian asked Mr. George Stefan to specify the number of days of activity of fishermen - for freshwater they were 120, but Mr. George Stefan did not specify the number of days for fishermen for the Black Sea.

Mr. George Stefan explained that as to the days of activity in previous years for fishermen in the Black Sea, where fishing is more complex, the Ministry in Romania expects the answers of all associations in the sector during the public discussion and has not yet specified the number of days. For freshwater fishermen it has been decided to require 120 days of activity in the previous 2 years, for the Black Sea fishermen a response is still expected from the sector, because due to COVID 19 the activity of these fishermen was stopped as early as February 1, 2020.

Mr. Florin Lucian asked whether auxiliary boats were included in Black Sea fishing vessels.

Mr. George Stefan - Fishermen from both sectors who meet the above conditions are taken into account.

Mr. George Stefan also commented on item 2 of the agenda regarding the classification of water in Romania. The procedure has been launched in Romania and the goal is to have it completed before the start of the tourist season in the country.

Mr. Dragos Buhai explained that the Ro-Pescador Association had taken on the task of taking samples from the Black Sea water and bivalves in order to complete the water classification procedure in close cooperation with ANSVSA. Sampling will continue for another month for the first designated zone and about another 4 months for the other two zones. The only assistance that the association receives from the state is to do laboratory tests of the samples taken. The remaining costs of sampling, namely the fuel used by the ship and the remuneration of the staff, are borne solely by the Ro-Pescador Association. Also, no other fishing association from Romania is involved in sampling.

Mr. George Stefan found out about this situation in February. By the end of 2020, the Ro-Pescador Association will be compensated for this activity. He also expressed a desire

to organize a tripartite meeting between the state administration of Bulgaria and Romania, with the participation of the EC to discuss fishing in the Black Sea.

Mr. Stylianos Mitolidis commented on item 1 of the agenda. As mentioned, the EC has adopted a package of measures to support the sector through modification of the Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Program in response to the situation with COVID 19. These measures include: - temporary cessation of fishing activities; - support for aquaculture farms; - support for processing enterprises. The amended EMFF Regulation provides great flexibility for reallocating financial resources available in the operational programme, as well as facilitating the simplified procedure for adopting and amending the operational programmes so that temporary measures in support of the sector can be included. The support is for the period from February 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020, as well as the costs incurred during that time period. On the administrative steps these are as follows: the Member State works closely with the EC, as well as with stakeholders, to calculate the methodology and the assistance they will receive. Consultations follow with the Monitoring Committee and then the Member State submits its proposal for an OP amendment to the EC. In parallel measures should be prepared. As explained by the colleagues from the state administration of Bulgaria and Romania, the Member States have already elaborated measures, which are the three ones mentioned above. During EC's contact with the Member States the methodology for calculating the compensations is also reviewed. The important issue is that the countries are expected to implement quickly the selected EMFF measures so that those affected could receive the aid more quickly. Subsequently the changes in the OP could be done. The EC's message is a single one: the EU has done its utmost to support the sector and it is now up to the Member States and stakeholders to implement. The EC will continue to work with the authorities of both countries to ensure that aid measures are implemented as required by the amended EMFF Regulation. There are other funding possibilities for the sector and other mechanisms that countries could set up. This is the so-called state aid framework, which was recently updated to meet the sector's needs in relation to COVID 19. A new EU aid instrument for small and medium-sized enterprises has also been developed to enable them to meet their needs.

At the suggestion of Mr. Yordan Gospodinov, the Secretariat of the BISAC is to prepare an inquiry to the Member States on the availability of such additional assistance mechanisms and whether they are applied in the respective country - Bulgaria or Romania.

Under item 2 of the agenda: Mr. Yordan Gospodinov clarified that it is a question of bivalves harvesting from aquaculture and from the wild nature. Bulgaria has been producing and capturing bivalves for several years. All farms have their own monitoring program and are subject to a state monitoring program. Unfortunately, the relevant Deputy Minister of the MAFF was not able to attend the meeting and make clarifications, as the Romanian Secretary of State did. In Bulgaria the European Regulations 852, 853 and 854/2004 are applied and there are written norms for harvesting of bivalves from the Black

Sea, as well as a national regulatory base. Mussels and water are tested in licensed laboratories and respective purification of mussels is done where they are not A class. All farms have well-defined GPS coordinates and intensive research is carried out to monitor the water class. Wild mussels must go through enterprises where all purification processes are carried out and the relevant batch is brought to compliance with the indicators required by the European market in terms of bacterial status and bio toxins. An initiative was undertaken by the BSAC, who gave a recommendation to the Bulgarian and Romanian Food Safety Agencies to classify the zones and EAFA to determine the coordinates of the wild mussel harvesting zones.

With regard to the water classification process, the floor was given to Mr. Aurel Maxim of NAFA Romania. He explained that zones for capturing bivalves in Romania have been identified and mapping is being done. There are three zones, from which samples of both water and bivalves are taken every week and sent for analysis. Water is being classified in these zones, but it is not known whether they will be able to complete the process by the start of the tourist season in Romania.

Mr. Dragos Buhai: As for the zones, there already is one in which it can be said that the initial classification has been made and it will be possible to sell categorized products from it within a month. It will most likely be of A class - the indicators in it are very good. For the other two zones, more analyzes are to be made for about 6 months, so that they can be categorized. During the first 3 months samples will be taken weekly, and in the remaining 3 months - every two weeks. The indicators of those two zones are also very good, but more time is needed to complete the procedure.

Mr. Yordan Gospodinov asked the members of the BISAC if they wanted any inquiries or recommendations to be made to the administrations of the two Member States related to water classification.

Mr. Dragos Buhai replied that it was not necessary. So far, the process is going very well and they have full cooperation of the Romanian administration. If in Bulgaria it is decided to make a classification of water, it should be known that there are precise requirements for sampling and for the point from which samples are taken. For example, in the beginning in Romania, samples were taken twice a week, and sometimes it took several hours to find bivalves at the specified point.

It was clarified that if the members of the BISAC want a letter to be sent to the institutions at a later stage, this will be voted in absentia by e-mail.

Mrs. Pinelopi Belekou welcomed and thanked for the information provided, recalling that classification issues related to bivalves for human consumption fall under the competence of the DG Health and Food Safety of the European Commission and relevant queries need prior consultation.

Under item 3 of the agenda: Discussions followed on when to hold a General Assembly of the BISAC, which was scheduled for March 2020, but due to the situation with COVID 19, could not be held.

Mr. Yordan Gospodinov proposed to keep the designated venue - Tulcea, Romania. However, if the situation shall not allow to travel and in order to avoid quarantining the people entering Romania, another proposal would be to hold a general meeting in each country separately - as the Bulgarians gather in Bulgaria somewhere, and the Romanian colleagues - in Romania and communicate with each other via video conference. In Bulgaria, it is already allowed for up to 20 people to gather in one place, but a certain distance must be observed. A third possible option is, if the Romanian colleagues would so like, the General Assembly to be held in Bulgaria.

Mrs. Mihaela Mirea explained that for now, if the Romanian colleagues travel, they will be quarantined. She proposes to keep the venue in the town of Tulcea for the end of June. In Romania, the COVID 19 measures are expected to be eased in June, but the Board should meet online a week before to clarify the situation.

Mr. Yordan Gospodinov proposed the date of June 16 for a video conference of the Board to make a final decision on the date and place, in compliance with the requirement of the BISAC Statute that there should be an interval of 14 days from the scheduling the General Assembly to the date of its convening.

Under item 4 of the agenda: Comments on how and when to carry out the working groups meetings set in the 2020 budget.

Mr. Yordan Gospodinov suggested that when the Board meets on June 16, to then decide when to hold the working groups, because they are very difficult to convene and translate in a video conference.

Mrs. Elena Peneva suggested that when a date is set for the General Assembly 2 of the working groups to be held in the days preceding it.

Mr. Florin Lucian expressed the opinion that it is too early to talk about the other meetings, it needs first to be seen how the situation will develop and then decide. One can always catch up.

The meeting closes.

Minutes taken by Mrs. Elena Peneva

Chairman of BISAC: Dr. Yordan Gospodinov