

Cork 2.0 Conference

– Speech by Slovak Minister of Agriculture & Rural Development Gabriela Matečná

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, let me thank Phil for inviting me to this conference.

The first conference of this kind took place in Cork in 1996, when a 10-point declaration was adopted – The rural development programme for the European Union. Through this, the participants signed up to making sustainable rural development an EU priority and to preserving businesses operating in rural areas. Rural development policy should be

- made more responsible to future generations,
- based on partnership and cooperation,
- and aiming for a simpler legislation and its implementation.

Already 20 years ago it was clear that there was a need to improve synergies between financing from public and private sources, removing financial barriers for small and medium businesses, as well as the involvement of the banking sector. Equal emphasis was given to the need of research and innovation.

Why am I repeating the contents of this declaration? Policy, and in particular our Common Agricultural Policy, has since then moved forward significantly. Since 1996, thirteen new Member States have joined the EU. However, the message from Cork remains topical also today.

Of course, there is still room for improvement. Sustainability, research and innovation, or attracting private investment in rural areas and the use of financial instruments are challenges that resonate even more in the present day. Another issue in the spotlight today is the simplification of the CAP and, within it, Rural Development. We are now also starting to reflect on its future. The aim of our discussion on where the CAP is going should be to

- design conditions able to react to the challenges of environment and food security in a better and more flexible way,
- increase efficiency of current set of greening measures,
- and support employment and sustainable growth of rural areas with a focus on small and medium-sized enterprises.

I believe that the six EU priorities under the current rural development programming period will contribute to the EU 2020 strategy, in close cooperation with other CAP instruments and EU policies, such as the cohesion policy and the common fisheries policy.

The debate at this conference could formulate new conclusions and thus indicate the future direction of rural development policy in order to contribute in a more effective way to

- increasing the competitiveness of the agri-food sector,
- the sustainable management of natural resources, and
- the economic development of rural areas, including the creation and maintenance of jobs in the whole European Union.

In conclusion, let me wish us all a fruitful discussion during the workshops that I hope will bring many good and useful ideas.

Thank you for your attention.