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MINUTES FROM THE MEETING OF IPARD III MONITORING COMMITTEE Minutes number 7 Minutes from the SEVENTH meeting of the IPARD III monitoring committee 28 May 2026 - Hotel Hilton, Podgorica
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I. List of participants (attached to Minutes):

Meeting was attended by the IPARD III monitoring committee members, as well as the representatives of the European Commission and EU Delegation in Montenegro. The meeting was not attended by the members of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management - Directorate for Forestry, the Ministry of Spatial Planning, Urbanism and State Property, Environmental Protection Agency, the Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management - University of Montenegro, the Chamber of Crafts, Association of trout producers of Montenegro, the Association of olive and olive oil producers Bar, the Network for Rural Development of Montenegro, the Regional Development Agency for Bjelasica, Komovi and Prokletije and the Association „Marikultura“. The members who did not participate announced their absence to the representatives of the IPARD Managing Authority.


Result:

Quorum was fulfilled, so the meeting could be held and decisions can be taken (25 members or their substitutes with voting rights were present out of 35 members with voting rights).

Attachment: Apart from the short list of the participants explained in Minutes, attached is the list of participants divided as:

1. Voting members (concluding with number 35.);
2. Non-voting members (from number 36 to 39);
3. Representatives of the European Commission with advisory role and observers (from number 40 to 45).

II. Agenda

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Agenda of the meeting

AGENDA


Seventh meeting of the IPARD III monitoring committee

Date: Thursday, May 28, 2026.
Time: 10:00 a.m.
Place: Hotel Hilton, Podgorica


No. items	Provisional time	Content	Informative /Need agreement /Need approval /Need opinion of the IMC members	Responsibility
1.	10:00-10:10	Opening of the meeting; Approval of the Agenda Information on changes to the Decision of the IMC; Rules of procedure of the IMC	Need approval	Andrijana Rakočević, Head of the IPARD Managing Authority/Director General of Directorate for Rural Development
2.	10:10-10:20	Short introduction by European Commission (DG AGRI)	Informative	Vincent Cordonnier, deputy Head of Unit G4 - Neighbourhood, enlargement and pre-accession assistance of DG AGRI/European Commission
3.	10:20-10:25	Adoption of the minutes of the previous IPARD monitoring committee (IMC) meeting (attached to the Agenda) and information on the implementation of	Need approval	Andrijana Rakočević, Head of the IPARD Managing Authority/Director General of Directorate for Rural Development

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		decisions taken at the previous IPARD III monitoring committee meeting		
4.	10:25-10:35	Short introduction by European Commission (DG AGRI)	Informative	Dick van Dijk, programme manager/desk officer AGRI.G4 – Neighbourhood, enlargement and pre-accession assistance
5.	10:35-10:45	State of play of the implementation of IPARD III	Informative	Andrijana Rakočević, Head of the IPARD Managing Authority/Director General of Directorate for Rural Development
6.	10:45-10:55	Presentation on the state of implementation of the first IPARD public calls for Measure 7, sub-measures 7.1 and 7.2, Measure 1, Measure 3 and Measure 9	Informative	Marko Radonjić, acting Director of Agency for payments in agriculture, rural development and fishery / IPARD Agency
7.	10:55 - 11:05	Modification of the IPARD III program ver.1.4 Proposal for modification of IPARD III program in line with Letter of Government of MNE	Informative/ Need approval	Miloš Kusovac, Head of the Division for Programming Andrijana Rakočević, Head of the IPARD Managing Authority/Director General of Directorate for Rural Development
	11:05 - 11:20		Coffee break	

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8.	11:20-11:30	Information on audit(s) by the Audit Authority	Informative	Ksenija Barjaktarović, Auditor General of the Audit Authority of Montenegro
9.	11:30 - 11:40	Presentation of Annual Implementation report for 2025 IPARD III program	Need approval	Zoran Irić, Head of the Division for Monitoring and Evaluation of IPARD
10.	11:40-11:50	Realization of the Plan of visibility and communication activities - Annual List of Actions – 2026.	Informative	Ana Mitrović, Senior Advisor for coordination and Public Relation of Rural Development
11.	11:50-12:00	Adoption of the amendment of the Action Plan for 2026 – Measure 9 Technical Assistance	Need approval	Nina Jakić, Head of Division for Technical Assistance and Public Relations (PR) of Rural Development
12.	12:00 – 12:10	Presentation on the results of the agricultural census	Informative	Nataša Vojinović, Director Assistant of the Sector for Statistics of Agriculture, Fisheries, Business Statistics and Environment and Forestry of the Statistical Office of Montenegro-MONSTAT
13.	12:10-13:00	Discussion		
14.	13:00	Proposals for a date and the Agenda of the next meeting	Informative	

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	<p>13:00-14:30</p>	<p>Lunch</p>
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III. Result of the IPARD III meeting

In accordance with point 1 of the Agenda: Opening of the meeting; Approval of the Agenda; Information on changes to the Decision of the IMC


- **Andrijana Rakočević, Head of the IPARD Managing Authority/Director General of Directorate for Rural Development, chairperson**, opened the meeting and presented the Agenda (with an indication that there were changes due to the presentation in point 13 and that the representatives of the Network for Rural Development of Montenegro are absent for justified reasons and will not present the conducted survey on the IPARD programme) to which there were no objections and the changes to the Decision of the IMC and Rules of procedures of the IMC.

Decision no.1

- Agenda was adopted.
- The amendments of the Rules of procedures of the IMC was adopted.
- All 25 members with voting rights voted YES for adoption.

In accordance with point 2 of the Agenda: Short introduction by European Commission (DG AGRI)

- **Vincent Cordonnier, deputy Head of Unit G4 - Neighbourhood, enlargement and pre-accession assistance of DG AGRI/European Commission**, emphasized the importance of the continuous and successful implementation of the IPARD III programme, underlining that it represents a key instrument for preparing Montenegro for the implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) upon accession to the European Union. He particularly highlighted the importance of further strengthening administrative capacities, ensuring the timely implementation of planned activities, and maintaining high-quality cooperation between national institutions and the European Commission. At the beginning of his remarks, he congratulated Montenegro on the 20th anniversary of its independence. He expressed consideration for Montenegro to become a new Member State of the European Union within the next two years. He recalled that, during the morning meeting with the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, Mr Vladimir Joković, discussions focused on Montenegro's EU accession process. It was acknowledged that significant results had been achieved and important steps taken; however, further reforms and additional efforts remained necessary to successfully complete the accession process. Referring to the agricultural sector, he stressed that the implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy represented a major challenge even for EU Member States, making high-quality and timely preparations of crucial importance. He noted that Minister Joković had assured him of his full support for the preparation process related to the future implementation of the CAP and emphasized that the European Commission would continue providing continuous support to Montenegro in this regard. According to his statement, the best way to prepare for the future implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy was through the successful implementation of the IPARD programme, including the introduction of new measures. In this context, he drew particular attention to the administrative and human resource capacities of the IPARD Managing Authority and the IPARD Agency. While the existing system is functioning adequately, he stressed the need for its further strengthening and improvement, especially in view of the planned accreditation of new measures and the increasingly demanding obligations ahead. He emphasized that the time available for preparations was limited, while human

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resources remained one of the greatest challenges. Therefore, recruitment processes and capacity-building activities should commence as soon as possible to ensure that institutions would be fully prepared for their future responsibilities and workload. He further highlighted the need to continue developing the IPARD Agency into a fully functional Paying Agency, which represented one of the key steps in Montenegro's EU accession process. He encouraged the national institutions to address the remaining outstanding issues as soon as possible in order to facilitate the accreditation of new measures and make them available to recipients. He noted that the strong interest shown in the IPARD III programme confirmed its importance for the agricultural sector and expressed expectations that its successful implementation would continue until 2030. At the same time, he referred to certain challenges affecting the programme, particularly delays in the contracting process under Measure 1. He stated that representatives of the national institutions would provide more detailed information on the reasons for these delays and the actions being taken to address them during the meeting. In conclusion, he wished all stakeholders continued success in the implementation of the IPARD III programme and emphasized the importance of the active participation of all relevant actors. He also encouraged potential recipients to prepare and submit the required documentation in a timely manner in order to facilitate the efficient processing of applications. He concluded by stressing that Montenegro and its institutions could continue to rely on the full support of the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Commission (DG AGRI) throughout all stages of programme implementation and preparations for EU membership.


In accordance with point 3 of the Agenda: Adoption of the Minutes from the previous meeting of the IPARD III Monitoring Committee (annex to the Agenda) and the report on the follow-up of the decisions made at the previous meeting of the IPARD III Monitoring Committee

- **Andrijana Rakočević, Head of the IPARD Managing Authority/Director General of Directorate for Rural Development, chairperson**, informed the members that the Minutes of the previous meeting had been circulated to all members of the IPARD III Monitoring Committee within the prescribed deadline. All comments received were duly incorporated, following which the Minutes were signed and redistributed to all members. Regarding the implementation of conclusions adopted at the previous meeting, she stated that the IPARD Managing Authority had fully implemented all obligations undertaken. Committee members were provided with a link containing the list of recipients of IPARD III support, the final ex-post evaluation reports, and the translated presentation delivered during the sixth meeting of the IPARD III monitoring committee. In addition, in order to ensure compliance with data protection regulations, information on personal data protection was distributed to all members together with the agenda for the current meeting. She further noted that the presentations delivered during the present meeting would also be translated into Montenegrin, published on the IPARD website, and distributed to all Committee members.


Decision no.2

- Minutes from the previous meeting of IPARD III MC were approved.
- All 25 members with voting rights voted YES for adoption.

In accordance with Agenda Item 4

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- Dick van Dijk, DG AGRI / European Commission, programme Manager for Montenegro**, presented an overview of the implementation of the IPARD III programme 2021–2027 across all beneficiary countries. He outlined the allocation of funds by individual measures in Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Türkiye. The largest share of funding in all countries is allocated to Measure 1 – Investments in Physical Assets of Agricultural Holdings. Under this measure, North Macedonia allocates 30.1% of its total budget, Serbia 30%, Albania 28.1%, Montenegro 27.5%, and Türkiye 23.7%. These figures demonstrate that farm modernisation, machinery acquisition and production improvements remain the primary priorities of all beneficiary countries. The second most important area is Measure 3 – Investments in Physical Assets Concerning Processing and Marketing of Agricultural and Fishery Products. Albania allocates as much as 27.1% of its budget to this measure, North Macedonia 26.8%, Montenegro 23.4%, Serbia 21%, and Türkiye 16.3%. The objective of these investments is to improve product quality, strengthen the food processing industry and facilitate compliance with EU standards. Significant resources are also allocated to rural infrastructure development through Measure 6. Serbia and Türkiye allocate the highest shares, 18% and 18.1% respectively, while Albania allocates 10.7%, Montenegro 9.1%, and North Macedonia 9.5%. This measure covers investments in roads, water supply systems, wastewater systems and other infrastructure essential for rural communities. Measure 7, relating to Farm Diversification and Business Development, is particularly significant in North Macedonia, which allocates 27.1% of its budget to this area. Türkiye allocates 21.6%, Montenegro 20.1%, Albania 19%, and Serbia 18%. The objective of this measure is to create new jobs and support additional economic activities in rural areas, including rural tourism and small enterprises. Under Measure 5 – LEADER Approach and Local Development Strategies, Türkiye allocates the highest share of funding at 10.5%, followed by Serbia with 5%, Albania with 3.9%, North Macedonia with 1.7%, and Montenegro with 1.5%. This measure encourages local communities to actively participate in planning the development of their rural areas. A smaller portion of the budget is allocated to Technical Assistance and Advisory Services. For Technical Assistance, Albania allocates 1.7%, Montenegro 2%, North Macedonia 2.5%, Serbia 3%, and Türkiye 2.3%. Advisory services are financed with 2.2% in Albania, 1.1% in North Macedonia and 4.2% in Türkiye. In addition, allocations for afforestation and forest protection amount to 5.4% in Albania and 7.9% in Montenegro. Mr Van Dijk also addressed the status of entrustment of the measures. Türkiye has the highest percentage of approved measures, at 95.8%, followed by North Macedonia with 86.5%, Montenegro with 73%, and Serbia with 72%. The colour coding in the presented table indicated measures already accredited, measures not yet accredited, and measures for which accreditation requests have been submitted. Finally, an overview of public calls by country was presented. The rules governing pre-financing were also explained: pre-financing may amount to a maximum of 30% of the average allocation from the previous three years, while at least 50% must be paid as the first instalment, subject to budget availability. For the 2023 allocation, the N+3 rule applies, meaning that expenditure remains eligible for EU co-financing if paid by 31 December 2026. An overview of the implementation status in all beneficiary countries after the first quarter of 2026 was also presented, providing an up-to-date picture of progress under the IPARD III programme. In concluding his presentation, Mr Van Dijk stressed that payments themselves are not the ultimate objective; rather, the goal is the implementation of high-quality projects in full compliance with EU rules. He expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to participate in the meeting and looked forward to the discussions on achievements, challenges and opportunities for further improvement.


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In accordance with item 5 of the Agenda: State of play of the implementation of IPARD III

- **Andrijana Rakočević, Director General of the Directorate for Rural Development, Head of the IPARD Managing Authority**, informed participants about the progress achieved in the preparation of accreditation packages for the remaining measures under the IPARD III programme. She stated that, in parallel with the implementation of existing measures, intensive work is being carried out on expanding the programme through the introduction of new measures designed to address sectoral needs and broaden the scope of support available. She reported that the accreditation process for Measure 4 – Agri-environment-climate Measures and Organic Farming is ongoing and that implementation is expected to commence in the second quarter of 2026. The measure will provide support for organic production, sustainable pasture management and the conservation of genetic resources. The methodology for calculating payments has already been agreed with the European Commission. With regard to Measure 5 – LEADER Approach, she noted that preparatory activities have been launched in cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), including the preparation of the accreditation package, secondary legislation and the establishment of Local Action Groups (LAGs). Amendments to the relevant legislation are currently being introduced to provide a legal basis for the registration of LAGs. She informed participants that the draft law is currently under parliamentary procedure and that there are presently eight LAG initiatives, each of which has already prepared a Local Development Strategy extending until 2030. She expressed confidence that implementation would be successful once the measure is accredited and the first public call is launched. Regarding Measure 6 – Rural Public Infrastructure, she stated that the accreditation process and external audit are ongoing as prerequisites for the conferral of management. Local self-government units will be eligible recipients, while support may cover up to 100% of investment costs for local infrastructure projects. Concerning Measure 11 – Establishment and protection of forests, she acknowledged that progress has been limited due to challenges in the forestry sector, particularly those related to the implementation of the new Forestry Law. Nevertheless, work continues in cooperation with colleagues from the Directorate for Forestry, and more concrete progress is expected during the following year. She further informed participants that the 2026 implementation plan foresees the publication of public calls for Measure 4 and Sub-measure 7.2 during the second quarter of the year, while public calls for Measure 3 and Sub-measure 7.1 are planned for the third quarter. In conclusion, she emphasized that information and promotional activities relating to the IPARD III programme are being implemented continuously through awareness-raising campaigns and direct communication with recipients, with the objective of improving project preparation and ensuring more efficient absorption of available funds.

In accordance with point 6 of the Agenda: Presentation on the state of implementation of the first IPARD public calls for Measure 7, sub-measures 7.1 and 7.2, Measure 1, Measure 3 and Measure 9


- **Marko Radonjić, acting Director of Agency for payments in agriculture, rural development and fishery / IPARD Agency**, presented the current status of implementation of the first IPARD public calls, including the number of applications received, the status of administrative processing and the dynamics of project contracting. Under Measure 1 – Investments in Physical Assets of Agricultural Holdings, 498 applicants currently meet the eligibility requirements of the first IPARD III public call. Of these, contracts can presently be concluded with 130 recipients, while approximately EUR 7.3 million in additional funding would be required if all eligible applicants were to sign contracts. To date, 89 contracts have been signed, while an additional 20 recipients are expected to sign contracts

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shortly. Regarding tractor procurement, available funds currently allow support for 82 recipients. Further contracting dynamics will depend on whether applicants who are not eligible for support for tractor purchases decide to proceed with the remaining parts of their investment projects, provided that the investments remain functional without the tractor component. Mr Radonjić noted that applications were submitted for a total of 375 tractors that met the eligibility requirements. The highest number of contracted applications was recorded in the municipalities of Nikšić (26), Bijelo Polje (19), Pljevlja (10) and Podgorica (5). By type of investment, the largest share of applications related to production modernisation, equipment procurement and the upgrading of production capacities. These categories also accounted for the highest levels of eligible expenditure and financial support, demonstrating recipients' strong focus on increasing productivity and competitiveness. The highest number of applications was recorded in the fruit, vegetable and arable crop sectors, as well as in the dairy and meat sectors, confirming their importance within the overall investment portfolio. Within the framework of the IPARD III programme, 20 final payment requests, 5 interim payment requests and 18 advance payment requests have been paid to date. The total value of investments excluding VAT amounts to EUR 13,343,696.91. Total public support paid amounts to EUR 9,601,272.83, of which EU support accounts for EUR 7,200,954.54. Under Measure 3, 14 final payment requests, 3 interim payment requests and 5 advance payment requests have been paid. The total value of investments excluding VAT amounts to EUR 12,903,281.98, total public support amounts to EUR 8,725,425.58, and EU support amounts to EUR 6,544,069.14. Under Measure 7, Sub-measure 7.1, 3 final payment requests, 2 interim payment requests and 13 advance payment requests have been paid. The total value of investments amounts to EUR 384,542.38, total support amounts to EUR 836,736.47, and EU support amounts to EUR 627,552.32. Under Sub-measure 7.2, 3 final payment claims have been paid. The total value of investments amounts to EUR 55,872.55, total support amounts to EUR 39,110.78, and EU support amounts to EUR 29,333.08. Regarding the absorption of funds during 2026, Mr Radonjić reported that EUR 0.645 million of EU funds had been spent during the first quarter. During the second quarter, EUR 1.33 million had already been paid, with an additional EUR 1.66 million expected by the end of the quarter, bringing total planned expenditure for the second quarter to EUR 2.99 million. Planned expenditure for the third quarter amounts to EUR 1.45 million of EU funds, while expenditure of EUR 4.32 million is planned for the fourth quarter.

Discussion – main conclusions

Vučko Pešić, president of the Rural tourism association “Tourism in villages”, recalled that during previous meetings, as well as two years ago in Žabljak, he had repeatedly pointed out that the amount allocated to Montenegrin agriculture was insufficient and could not adequately address the challenges facing the agricultural sector. He noted that the current situation, in which there are insufficient funds available under Measure 1, confirms these concerns. He further emphasized that Montenegro faces specific challenges related to poor infrastructure and the remoteness of rural settlements, which limits the possibility of shared use of agricultural machinery. He appealed to both the European Union and the Government of Montenegro to identify a solution for finding the missing funds.


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Milko Živković, President of the Union of livestock breeders of Northern part of Montenegro, stated that this meeting had been characterized by more negative sentiment and more challenges than any other meeting he had attended since the establishment of the Committee. Referring to the allocation of funds among measures and the financing of tractors, he recalled that he had raised serious concerns at the time, based on his knowledge of the situation on the ground, arguing that the allocated funds would be insufficient to improve the competitiveness of domestic producers and preserve local agricultural production. He stressed that it was not realistic to expect Brussels to finance the entire process and that the Government of Montenegro must also contribute. He expressed hope that a constructive solution would be found and that a message of encouragement could be sent to farmers, many of whom currently feel disappointed and misled.

Ivica Bokovac, representative of the Agricultural Cluster of Montenegro, expressed hope that the approximately EUR 7 million in missing funds would be secured in order to support all eligible investments under Measure 1. He referred to his own IPARD application, which had not been deemed eligible, and noted that some applicants had applied for tractor financing despite already owning two or three tractors. He emphasized that he fully understood that IPARD is a development instrument rather than a social support programme. Mr Bokovac also supported the organization of an additional meeting where farmers and other interested stakeholders could receive further information regarding the accreditation process for Measures 4, 5 and 6. In his view, these measures are of great importance for agricultural producers and rural development, making it essential that all stakeholders are informed in a timely.

Marko Radonjić, acting Director of Agency for payments in agriculture, rural development and fishery / IPARD Agency, provided an explanation of the financial allocations for each measure under the IPARD III programme. He informed participants that preparatory meetings had been held with representatives of the European Commission prior to the session, as well as a joint meeting with Minister Joković, during which it had been clearly stated that funds could not be transferred from non-accredited measures. He noted that Measure 7.1 still contained available funds (slightly more than EUR 6 million), and that a question had been submitted to the European Commission as to whether these funds, or a portion thereof (approximately EUR 3 million), could be allocated to Measure 1, with the remaining amount to be provided by the Government of Montenegro. According to Mr Radonjić, the Commission indicated that it would consider the proposal and provide feedback in due course.

Dick van Dijk, DG AGRI / European Commission, programme Manager for Montenegro, stressed that securing the missing funds was primarily the responsibility of the Government of Montenegro rather than the European Union. He emphasized that the European Commission had provided EUR 39 million under IPARD II and EUR 63 million under IPARD III and therefore could not be accused of failing to fulfil its commitments. He further underlined the importance of safeguarding the available funds and avoiding decommitment, i.e. the loss of funds due to non-utilisation. With regard to support for tractor purchases, he recalled that the same rule applies to all IPARD beneficiary countries, namely that no more than 20% of the funds allocated to measure 1 under the IPARD programme may be used for this purpose. He pointed out that, towards the end of the implementation of the IPARD II programme, there had been a significant number of applications for


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tractor financing exceeding the available budget. At that time, thanks to the flexibility shown by the European Commission, part of the funds from the IPARD III programme had been reallocated to address the issue. However, as a consequence, the number of tractors that can be financed under IPARD III is now more limited. Mr van Dijk emphasized that IPARD is not an instrument capable of meeting the needs of all recipients. He also noted that the European Commission had received complaints concerning the duration of the contracting process, stressing that a period of two years to conclude contracts was unacceptable and that this issue must be addressed. He reiterated that DG AGRI will not agree to the transfer of funds from non-accredited measures. As an example, he referred to a proposal to reallocate funds from the forestry measure. He further clarified that the reallocation of funds from Measure 7 to Measure 1 is currently not permitted in any IPARD beneficiary country. Consequently, it is unrealistic to expect substantial additional financial support from the European Union to resolve this issue. While acknowledging that there is room for discussion and exchange of views regarding possible solutions, he recalled the exceptional concession made by the European Commission during the implementation of IPARD II, emphasizing that such exceptions may only be granted on an exceptional basis and cannot become standard practice. He added that even if a reallocation towards Measure 1 were eventually approved, the rule limiting tractor financing to 20% of the available budget would remain applicable.

Vincent Cordonnier, deputy Head of Unit G4 - Neighbourhood, enlargement and pre-accession assistance of DG AGRI/European Commission, provided a broader overview of the purpose and significance of the IPARD programme. He emphasized that its primary objective is to enable candidate countries to gain practical experience and prepare for the implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) following accession to the European Union. He pointed out that even after obtaining EU membership status and benefiting from significantly larger budgets than those available under IPARD, it would still not be possible to satisfy all needs. He stressed that IPARD is not intended solely to increase farmers' incomes and support investments, but also to facilitate the implementation of agri-environmental measures, the development of advisory services and the achievement of other rural development priorities. In this context, he explained that the European Commission insists on preserving the budgets allocated to measures that have not yet been accredited, as the objective is for national institutions to accredit these measures and gain practical experience in their implementation. According to Mr Cordonnier, this constitutes an important component of preparations for EU membership, when national authorities will be required to manage a significantly larger number of measures and a more complex support system.

He also referred to Mr van Dijk's earlier remarks regarding tractor financing, noting that this is one of the reasons why the European Commission is reluctant to approve further reallocations of funds. He emphasized the importance of maintaining a balance between the various objectives and priorities of the programme in order to ensure that candidate countries develop the capacity to implement all measures that will become available upon accession to the European Union.

- **Andrijana Rakočević, Director General of the Directorate for Rural Development, Head of the IPARD Managing Authority**, recalled that approximately EUR 17 million has been allocated to four non-accredited measures under the IPARD III programme. She emphasized that this figure further confirms that the largest share of the available funds is dedicated to Measure 1 – Investments in Physical Assets of Agricultural Holdings, clearly demonstrating that support to agricultural producers


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remains one of the key priorities of the programme. She underlined that the IPARD Managing Authority maintains continuous communication with agricultural producers, closely monitors their needs and the challenges they face, and is simultaneously engaged in intensive discussions with representatives of the European Commission with the aim of identifying the best possible solutions within the existing programming and financial framework. Ms. Rakočević stressed that all activities are implemented in full compliance with the rules and procedures laid down in the IPARD programme and the relevant European Union regulations, which are binding for all recipients of pre-accession assistance. She further noted that amendments to the IPARD III programme constitute a necessary precondition for the publication of new calls for applications and that intensive efforts are currently being undertaken to prepare and align these amendments with the European Commission. The objective is to ensure continuity of support to recipients, while fully respecting programme rules and available financial resources, thereby creating the conditions for launching new calls and continuing the successful implementation of the IPARD III programme.

In accordance with item 7 of the Agenda: Modification of the IPARD III program ver.1.; Proposal for modification of IPARD III program in line with Letter of Government of MNE

- **Miloš Kusovac, Head of the Division for Programming**, informed the participants that, within the framework of the amendments to the IPARD III programme, Version 1.4, technical corrections would be introduced throughout the programme document to reflect the change in the designation of the IPARD Paying Agency (PA). He further stated that the programme text would be updated with the latest available statistical data contained in Annexes A and B. He went on to explain that amendments to Chapter 8.1 are planned, relating to requirements applicable to all measures. These amendments include the introduction of ranking criteria to be applied prior to the detailed administrative assessment, the obligation to implement activities foreseen in the business plan following completion of the investment, the introduction of a harmonised definition of a young farmer, and further clarification of the term “investments in mountainous areas” (Annex II). He then presented the proposed amendments concerning Measure 1 – Investments in Physical Assets of Agricultural Holdings, which include the alignment of specific eligibility criteria, the introduction of fruit production in greenhouses as an eligible sector, as well as improvements to the selection criteria and modifications to the implementation approach aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of the measure.

With regard to Measure 3 – Investments in Physical Assets Concerning the Processing and Marketing of Agricultural and Fishery Products, he explained that the proposed amendments include the exclusion of the tobacco and hemp sectors, the reduction of the minimum lease period from 10 to 7 years, and improvements to the selection criteria and implementation approach in order to facilitate more effective implementation of the measure. Referring to Measure 4 – Agri-environment-climate Measures and Organic Farming, he noted that additional adjustments to the measure are envisaged, including the introduction of a support calculation methodology through Annex IV and the inclusion of Annex IX concerning livestock units. He also informed participants about the planned amendments under Measure 5 – Implementation of Local Development Strategies (LEADER Approach), which relate to the support intensity and the European Union co-financing rate. With respect to Measure 6 – Investments in Rural Public Infrastructure, he stated that the proposed amendments include a clearer definition of eligibility criteria, the introduction of advance and interim payment options, the possibility of combining different eligible investments within a single project, and the establishment

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of a minimum investment value of EUR 200,000. Speaking about Measure 7 – Farm Diversification and Business Development, he explained that the proposed amendments focus on a clearer distinction between Measures 7 and 3, a more precise definition of the investment location, amendments to specific eligibility criteria in line with the applicable legislation, and improvements to the selection criteria and implementation approach aimed at increasing the efficiency of the measure. Regarding Measure 9 – Technical Assistance, he informed the participants that a reallocation of the budget within the measure itself is planned for the period 2024–2026. With respect to Measure 11 – Establishment and Protection of Forest, he stated that the text of the measure would be updated in line with the latest available statistical and legal information. In conclusion, he informed participants about the planned amendments to the financial allocation, which envisage the reallocation of funds within Measures 1 and 9 for the period 2024–2026.

Andrijana Rakočević, Director General of the Directorate for Rural Development, Head of the IPARD Managing Authority, presented a proposal for a technical amendment to the IPARD III programme concerning the withdrawal limit, noting that the current ceiling of EUR 3,000,000 in public support per recipients under the IPARD II and IPARD III Programmes provides the basis for considering an increase of this threshold. She explained that the proposal includes three possible options: increasing the limit to EUR 5,000,000 without additional conditions; increasing the limit to EUR 5,000,000 with eligibility restricted to strategically important projects (such as advanced processing facilities, export-oriented capacities, and value chain integration projects); and increasing the limit to EUR 8,000,000 for large-scale “anchor” investments expected to generate broader impacts on the sector. She further stated that, under Measure 1, it is proposed to increase the maximum amount of eligible expenditure from EUR 650,000 to EUR 2,000,000. In this regard, she noted that the European Commission had indicated that a ceiling of EUR 2 million may be considered too high in view of the programme’s primary focus on small and medium-sized agricultural holdings and agri-food enterprises. Ms Rakočević also conveyed the position of the European Commission that the proposal should first be discussed within the framework of the IPARD III monitoring committee, after which the Commission would formulate its final position on the proposed amendments. In conclusion, she emphasized that the proposed amendments should be viewed in the context of the further improvement of the programme framework and the provision of more targeted support to recipients under the IPARD III programme.

Discussion – main conclusions


Mensura Nuhodžić, representative of the Association of Private Forest Owners, emphasized that in the process of designing, i.e. defining Measure 11 – Establishment and Protection of Forests, the Association of Private Forest Owners should be more significantly involved, bearing in mind that approximately 50% of forests in Montenegro are privately owned.

Vučko Pešić, President of the Rural tourism association “Tourism in villages”, stated that the amendments proposed under Chapters 2.1, 3.1, 3.2 and 3.6 were of a minor and largely technical nature, whereas the results of the Agricultural Census demonstrated that the actual situation on the ground was considerably less favourable. He noted that the proposed amendments under points 7, 8 and 9 were not acceptable and should remain unchanged. With regard to point 14, he proposed

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that, in the existing Table 44, criteria 3, 5 and 7 be reduced by five points each, and that a new criterion concerning the continuity of agricultural activity be introduced with a maximum score of 15 points. Regarding point 18 and the existing Table 48 under Measure 3, he proposed reducing criterion 2 by five points and reallocating those points to criterion 7. Under point 21, he requested additional clarification regarding the provision related to the assumption of commitments under the operation type concerning meadows and pastures. Regarding point 23, he stated that only land supported by proof of ownership or a valid lease agreement should be considered eligible. He further noted that Measure 4 could not be accredited unless data from the Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) were accepted or ownership issues in the cadastre were resolved, given the difficulties associated with concluding lease agreements. He also requested additional clarification regarding the obligation to record and report veterinary-related matters in accordance with the Veterinary Law. Referring to point 46 and specific criterion 8.3.5.7, he stressed that road infrastructure investments should connect areas where agricultural production is carried out. Regarding point 50, he stated that the proposed amendments to the ranking criteria contained in Table 56 were not acceptable, as northern municipalities would receive fewer points, particularly in relation to road infrastructure, where the score would be reduced from 65 to 45 points. With regard to point 52, he clarified that recipients under Measure 7 should be natural persons who are holders of registered agricultural holdings located in rural areas. Regarding point 53, he emphasized that the existing requirement should remain in place, namely that beneficiaries under sub-measures 7.1 and 7.2 must have qualified for direct payments at least once per year over the five-year period preceding the publication of the call for applications. He also raised the question of whether the purchase of a delivery vehicle would be eligible under sub-measure 7.2. Concerning the proposed amendments to ranking Tables 59, 60 and 61, he suggested reducing criteria 6 and 7 by five points each, introducing a new criterion awarding 10 points to holdings located above 600 metres above sea level, and amending criterion 7 so that holdings with less than 50% fulfilment would receive 10 points, those between 50% and 75% would receive five points, and those between 75% and 100% would receive one point. These proposals also applied to ranking criteria related to support for on-farm processing investments and the development of rural crafts.

Milko Živković, President of the Union of livestock breeders of Northern part of Montenegro, emphasized that proposals put forward by agricultural producers are often insufficiently recognised and taken into consideration. He pointed to the discrepancy between the actual needs on the ground and the current structure of measures and budgets, noting that representatives of farmers had already raised these concerns during the adoption of the IPARD III programme. He stressed that Measure 1 should remain the primary priority, as it serves as a key mechanism for retaining producers and population in rural areas, which is essential for the survival of villages and the sustainability of agriculture. Drawing on his extensive experience in the field, he appealed to the Government to do everything possible to support ordinary farmers and preserve domestic production. He further noted that agricultural representatives had repeatedly warned of the risk of insufficient funding and financing challenges, resulting in a situation where many farmers now feel disappointed and neglected. He particularly highlighted the ongoing depopulation of rural and mountainous areas, emphasizing that once people leave their place of origin and abandon life in mountain regions, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to attract others to continue living and working there. He added that greater investment in infrastructure, roads, market organisation and


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stable purchasing arrangements is necessary to provide people with sufficient incentives to remain on their farms and continue engaging in livestock farming and agriculture. In conclusion, despite the numerous challenges, he expressed his belief that sustainable solutions could still be achieved through joint efforts by institutions and producers.

Ivica Bokovac, representative of the Agricultural Cluster of Montenegro, expressed agreement with the previous speakers, noting serious concerns that additional funding and large-scale projects could once again be implemented without producing tangible results on the ground, as had allegedly occurred in the past. He stressed that greater attention should be given to initiatives originating directly from producers and local communities, as those living and working in rural areas are best placed to understand the actual challenges and development needs of those communities. He also highlighted the need to ensure greater transparency in the allocation of funds, stronger monitoring of project implementation, and a more balanced regional distribution of support, particularly with regard to the central region of Montenegro.

Anka Kujović, senior advisor in the Department for Diversification of Tourism Products, expressed support for prioritising agricultural producers at the present stage, taking into account the challenges currently faced by the sector. She pointed out that the existing legislative and regulatory framework has not adequately defined the area of rural tourism, which has created uncertainties and hindered the development of this segment of the tourism offer. She noted that the new Tourism Law, together with the accompanying by-laws currently under preparation, aims to address these shortcomings and establish a clearer regulatory framework for rural tourism development. In particular, she emphasized that the new regulations will comprehensively regulate rural households by defining clear conditions and standards for their operation. She recalled that the new legislative framework defines rural households as entities primarily engaged in agri-tourism and agricultural production on their own holdings, while also providing accommodation services and other tourism-related activities connected to rural life and farming practices. She further highlighted the importance of complementarity between such facilities and agricultural activities, a principle that is also recognised within the IPARD programme.

Dick van Dijk, DG AGRI / European Commission, programme Manager for Montenegro, proposed that efforts be made to reach consensus on specific amendments to the IPARD Programme so that the proposed changes could continue through the prescribed procedures. He reminded members that they should come to meetings well prepared and familiar with the documentation circulated in advance, noting that he himself had reviewed all materials twice. He further pointed out that the current support ceiling per beneficiary under the IPARD II and IPARD III programmes is limited to EUR 3 million and stressed that any modification of this limit must be based on consensus. He also recalled the established procedure whereby all amendments to the IPARD III programme must first be examined and agreed upon by the IPARD III monitoring committee before being submitted for further approval. Mr van Dijk emphasized that increasing the support ceiling per recipients could result in a greater concentration of funds among larger agricultural producers, which, in his view, would not be fully aligned with the objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which primarily seeks to support smaller producers and promote balanced rural development. He added that implementation experience to date, particularly under Measure 1, clearly demonstrates the

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structure of needs in the sector and that directing a larger share of funds towards major recipients could reduce the availability of support for other agricultural producers.

Vincent Cordonnier, deputy Head of Unit G4 - Neighbourhood, enlargement and pre-accession assistance of DG AGRI/European Commission, recalled that a significant increase in the number of applicants under the IPARD programme had been recorded compared to 2023, when the relevant decision had been adopted. He also referred to the previously presented positions of the European Commission regarding the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), emphasizing that one of the key priorities of its future development remains a strong focus on small agricultural producers. In this context, he stressed that this strategic orientation had already been presented on several occasions, including during the previous year, and that support for small farms would remain at the core of the future development of the CAP and European Union policies in the field of agriculture and rural development.


Andrijana Rakočević, Director General of the Directorate for Rural Development, Head of the IPARD Managing Authority, expressed openness to all proposals submitted by members of the IPARD III monitoring committee. She additionally emphasized that the proposed amendments are essential for the launch of Measure 4, which will provide support for organic farming, sustainable pasture management and the conservation of genetic resources. She noted that she had proposed removing the part related to cadastral issues in connection with sustainable pasture management; however, this proposal also failed to achieve consensus among Committee members.

Marko Radonjić, acting Director of Agency for payments in agriculture, rural development and fishery / IPARD Agency, pointed out that recipients under Measure 1 are already required to submit lease agreements where applicable and argued that recipients under Measure 4 should be subject to the same requirements, as all are IPARD recipients. He stressed that these requirements should not be confused with direct payment schemes financed through the Agri-Budget. He invited members to jointly consider the benefits of Measure 4, recognise its importance and identify a common interest in adopting the proposed amendments and commencing the implementation of the measure.

Decision no.3

Andrijana Rakočević, Head of the IPARD Managing Authority/Director General of Directorate for Rural Development, chairperson, Chairperson of the Committee, reminded members of the provisions of Article 12 of the Rules of Procedure of the IPARD III monitoring committee, which stipulate that decisions are to be adopted primarily by consensus, while in cases where consensus cannot be reached, the respective issue is referred to a dedicated working group for further consideration, after which an additional attempt is made to reach consensus.

Referring to Agenda Item 7 concerning Amendments to the IPARD III Programme, Version 1.4, the Chairperson noted that, during the discussion on the proposed amendments, including those submitted in the letter from the Government of Montenegro, a large number of views and arguments had been presented, but that it had not been possible to achieve consensus among the members of the Committee.


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During the voting on the proposed amendments to the IPARD III programme, Version 1.4, 21 members voted in favour, two members voted against, and two members abstained. With regard to the amendments proposed by the Prime Minister, two members voted in favour of their adoption, while 23 members voted against.

Given that consensus had not been reached, the Chairperson stated that, in accordance with Article 12 of the Rules of Procedure, a working group would be established to further examine the outstanding issues and attempt to harmonise the positions of all relevant stakeholders. The results of the working group's work will be subsequently communicated to the IPARD III monitoring committee, after which a renewed attempt will be made to achieve consensus on the proposed amendments. Should consensus still not be reached following this procedure, the voting procedure by the Rules of Procedure shall apply, under which the decision shall be adopted if supported by at least three quarters of the members present at the Committee meeting or their alternates.

In accordance with point 8 of Agenda: Information on audit(s) by the Audit Authority

Ksenija Barjaktarović, Head of the Audit Authority of Montenegro, presented an overview of the audit activities carried out under the IPARD II and IPARD III programmes, noting that all standard audits under the IPARD II programme have been completed. According to the Annual Audit Report of March 2026, out of a total of 122 findings issued during the implementation of the IPARD II programme, seven findings remain open, representing 6% of the total. The Audit Authority continuously monitors the implementation of these findings and regularly reports on progress to the European Commission. She further noted that the remaining activities under IPARD II relate to the audit of ex post controls conducted by the IPARD Agency, covering 10 recipients, with the results to be presented in the framework of the 2026 system audit. She also highlighted that the Audit Authority has been monitoring the implementation of the European Commission's recommendations in the area of information security, and that out of a total of 28 findings issued by the European Commission, only two remain open, representing 7%. With regard to the IPARD III programme, she stated that a system audit report was issued in December 2025, identifying 12 findings. For expenditure declared in the third and fourth quarters of 2025, a transaction audit was carried out on a sample covering 20% of payments executed during the year, resulting in four findings, one of which led to a financial correction. In addition, a clearance of accounts audit was conducted, covering the verification of annual reports, advances, debts, and the declaration of the National Authorising Officer for the IPARD III programme, within which two findings were identified. Due to the low volume of payments in the first quarter of 2026, no transaction audit was carried out; instead, the Audit Authority is awaiting the completion of payments for the second quarter in order to commence administrative and on-the-spot checks of projects. A particular focus was placed on strengthening the institutional capacity of the Audit Authority. In this regard, the implementation of the Twinning Light project "Enhancement and Strengthening of the Administrative Capacities of the Audit Authority for the Audit of the IPARD III programme and Preparation for Future Certification Activities under the EAGF and EAFRD Funds" was highlighted. The project was implemented from September 2025 to April 2026 with the support of experts from Croatia and Austria. One of the most significant outputs of the project was the development of control checklists for the Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS), which will serve as an important foundation for the future certification function. It was emphasized that, in order to ensure the successful preparation of the Audit Authority for assuming the role of Certification Body upon Montenegro's accession to the European Union, it will be necessary to

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secure observer status and timely access to all future systems of the IPARD Paying Agency. It was concluded that a highly demanding period lies ahead in terms of preparations for the establishment of the Paying Agency and the future management of funds under the Common Agricultural Policy, and that close cooperation among all involved institutions is essential for the successful achievement of the objectives set out in the Implementation Plan.

In accordance with point 9 of Agenda: Presentation of Annual Implementation report for 2025 IPARD III program - due to the lack of quorum, the item was submitted to a written procedure.

Decision no. 4

Andrijana Rakočević, Director General of the Directorate for Rural Development and Head of the IPARD Managing Authority, Chairperson, informed the participants that some members had in the meantime left the meeting, as a result of which the required quorum for decision-making was no longer present. She reminded that Article 12 of the Rules of Procedure of the IPARD III monitoring committee stipulates that decisions may be taken only if at least two-thirds of the Committee members are present, including the Chairperson and Deputy Chairpersons.


Since this condition was not met, the Chairperson announced that the Committee was unable to proceed with decision-making on the Annual Implementation Report of the IPARD III programme for 2025 (agenda item 9), as well as on the amendments to the 2026 Action Plan under Measure 9 – Technical Assistance (agenda item 11).

In accordance with Article 13 of the Rules of Procedure, which provides for the possibility of a written procedure for matters that do not justify convening a Committee meeting or require urgent decision-making, the Chairperson proposed that the aforementioned items be considered and adopted through a written procedure.

In this regard, the relevant documents will be submitted to all Committee members under the written procedure, together with an explanatory memorandum, after which members will have a period of 10 working days to submit their opinions and express their views on the documents circulated.

In accordance with point 10 of Agenda: Realization of the Plan of visibility and communication activities - Annual List of Actions – 2026.


Ana Mitrović, Senior Advisor for coordination and Public Relation of Rural Development, at the seventh meeting, under the agenda item “Publicity – Information,” she informed the participants about the activities implemented so far in the field of information and visibility of the IPARD III programme, recalling that the Annual Activity Plan for 2026 had been adopted at the previous meeting. She highlighted that within the “Video materials and advertising” activity, a promotional video had been prepared, combining and presenting existing materials from around 20 successful IPARD recipients stories, in cooperation with the Delegation of the European Union. She stated that a unified four-minute promotional video had been produced, with a value of €851.19, and that it was premiered during the IPARD Open Day held on 29 April 2026. She further informed the participants that the results of public calls are regularly published, including information on the number of applications, budgets, and

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recipients, and that on 30 April a preliminary ranking list for Measure 1 – Investments in physical assets of agricultural holdings was published. She emphasized that the official IPARD programme website and social media channels (Instagram and Facebook) are continuously updated, and that a dedicated e-mail address for citizens' inquiries has been established, through which a total of 89 inquiries have been received since the beginning of the year. She also noted that seven press releases had been published during the year, along with numerous promotional activities, including a workshop held in Petrovac (15–17 April 2026) dedicated to strengthening the capacities of local self-governments, with a focus on Measures 5 and 6, in cooperation with relevant institutions and the "Municipalities for EU" project. She particularly highlighted the "IPARD Open Days" event held on 29 April 2026, which gathered a large number of participants from the public and private sectors, including institutions, advisory services, consultants, and programme recipients. During the event, the 2026 Public Call Plan was presented, information stands were organized by measure, and the first contracts under Measure 1 were signed. For promotional purposes, materials such as brochures, roll-up banners, and visual elements ensuring EU co-financing visibility were produced. She also emphasized the continued publication of the newsletter "IPARD FOR YOU," with 13 editions published so far, as well as the participation of IPARD institutions in marking Europe Day through promotional activities and trade fair appearances by beneficiaries. Additionally, she noted that a total of 200 media publications were realized during the year, including newspaper articles, TV reports, and online portal coverage. At the end of the presentation, she concluded that all these activities aimed to strengthen the visibility and transparency of the IPARD III programme, bring the programme closer to potential recipients, and promote results and successful examples from practice. A video showcasing IPARD success stories was then presented to the members present.

In accordance with point 11 of Agenda: Adoption of the amendment of the Action Plan for 2026 – Measure 9 Technical Assistance - due to the lack of quorum, the item was submitted to a written procedure.

In accordance with item 12 of the Agenda: Presentation on the results of the agricultural census
Ms. Nataša Vojinović, Director Assistant of the Sector for Statistics of Agriculture, Fisheries, Business Statistics and Environment and Forestry of the Statistical Office of Montenegro-MONSTAT, presented the results of the Agricultural Census, providing an overview of the key statistical indicators and trends in the agricultural sector, with particular emphasis on developments and changes compared to the 2010 Agricultural Census. The presentation covered data on the number of agricultural holdings, land use, livestock population, agricultural machinery, and labour force engaged in agriculture. According to the final results of the 2024 Agricultural Census, a total of 26,711 agricultural holdings were registered in Montenegro, utilizing 248,279.6 hectares of agricultural land. Compared to the 2010 Census, the number of agricultural holdings has decreased, while the average size of holdings has increased, indicating a trend towards the consolidation of agricultural production. The highest number of agricultural holdings was recorded in the municipalities of Bijelo Polje (3,933), Nikšić (3,187), and Pljevlja (2,769). It was emphasized that the Agricultural Census represents the most comprehensive statistical survey in the field of agriculture and provides an important evidence base for the development of sustainable agricultural policies and the planning of future agricultural development in Montenegro. Ms. Vojinović's presentation has been published on the IPARD website and is available in both Montenegrin and English.

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In accordance with point 13 of Agenda: Discussion - Overview of key conclusions from the discussion: Carried out after agenda items 6 and 7.

In accordance with point 14 of Agenda: Proposals for date and agenda for the next meeting

- **Andrijana Rakočević, Director General of the Directorate for Rural Development and Head of the IPARD Managing Authority, Chairperson,** suggested that the date for the next IMC meeting be agreed upon in internal communication with the representatives of the EU Commission, about which the members of the IPARD III monitoring committee will be informed in a timely manner.

Signatures

CHAIRPERSON OF IPARD III MC	FOR SECRETARIAT:
Mrs. <i>Andrijana Rakočević</i>	Mrs. <i>Andrijana Rakočević</i>
<i>Position: Head of the IPARD Managing Authority, General Director directorate for rural development</i>	<i>Position: Head of the IPARD Managing Authority, General Director directorate for rural development</i>
Signature: 	Signature: 
Date: 24.06.2026.	Date: 24.06.2026.

Attachment: List of participants

