



ACTION PLAN 2017

Towards an integrated programme and an interregional initiative to achieve the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in the Balkan Peninsula

17th of June 2017, Vlasti Kozani

Goals and expected impacts of the 1st Round table:

- Establish a regional network that will have a sustainable effect and can be considered as a significant contribution towards a regional implementation of Group on Earth Observations [[GEO](#)] vision in the area through the establishment of a GEOBALKAN initiative
- Set up a capacity building programme to leverage existing expertise, and scale up existing capabilities throughout the region so that Earth Observations and Information and Communication Technology applications take a leading role into the national decision making mechanisms
- Establish a new interregional funding scheme among the participating countries for the development of efficient services that promote innovative solutions to better address societal needs and enhance the national economies
- Identify and set up a network among the participants that will have a key role in the engagement and collaboration with user stakeholders that would significantly benefit from using Earth observations to ensure the implementation and monitoring of SDGs

The 1st Round table highlights the main pillars that underpin the implementation of recognized challenges and needs in the Balkan Peninsula:

Earth Observation systems and technologies in agri-food sector

The increasing importance of Earth Observation technologies for enhanced productivity and sustainability of agriculture, improved management practices and for adaptation and mitigation strategies in the context of climate change outlines the importance of global initiatives [[GEOGLAM](#) & [GEOGLAM-RAPP](#)] to be disseminated in the Balkan countries that contribute to the enhancement of Earth Observation services regionally. The Earth Observation potential can increase the quality and quantity of productivity and improve business opportunities in rural areas across the countries of Balkan Peninsula.

In the light of the above, GEOGLAM RAPP considered the establishment of a European co-leader office as very desired and impactful outcome for GEO vision, in order to act as the main contact for the several stakeholders and provide know-how and best practices in Europe as well as in the Balkans. Moreover, GEOGLAM and GEOGLAM RAPP endorse close cooperation by their intention to establish one or more pilot sites in Balkan Peninsula to promote beneficial synergies. Moreover, the initiative aspires to leverage Earth Observation services activities and encourage data integration into agricultural oriented applications acting as a pathway for relevant national organizations and as an interface for GEOGLAM in the region of Balkans (GEOGLAM Balkan).

Focal Points; Research collaboration and knowledge-sharing

The Focal Points in Balkans that will act as technology brokers and advisors are already established in the frame of [GEO-CRADLE](#) project and have received Earth Observation expertise by national [[i-BEC](#), [NOA](#)], European [[ESA](#)] and global [[NASA](#), [CSIRO](#), [GPSDD](#)] Organizations. Focal Points need to continue their work on the mapping and analysis of existing gaps, challenges and knowledge.



The GEO participants aim to establish and update focal points in Balkans to ensure the appropriate flow direction of further exchange of know-how and best practices. In this context, i-BEC acting as the regional co-coordinator of GEO-CRADLE and as the accelerator of GEO in Balkans will start an open dialogue with GEO principals in the region to develop more concrete links with a critical mass of key EO players acting as a catalyst for a more efficient and coordinated approach of GEO and other initiatives.

Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Sustainable agriculture contributes significantly to achieve a wide range of Sustainable Development Goals, including through its links to food security, improvement of quality of life of workers, business growth, economic development, climate change and the environment. In this context, Organizations as NASA & GPSDD can contribute technically and in the field of know-how for achieving the agriculture-related goals [especially SDG 2] in order to promote sustainable and modernized agriculture, and support the achievement of the relevant water-related goals [SDG 6] to improve water quality and increase water use efficiency.

To this end, NASA and i-BEC will take action to contribute to the SDGs on the national level, advocate for the SDGs within the framework of a bilateral cooperation and contribute to the promotion of sustainable development by a common work related to Earth observation-derived monitoring and methodologies for SDG 2 that will be presented during the [GEO-XIV Plenary Session](#).

Cooperation and coordination related to regional challenges

In order to succeed in the tackling of Balkan agri-food sustainable development challenges, many actions should be taken. First of all, Balkan Regions have to contribute on shifting from the individuation of solutions to sustainability problems to their effective implementation within a context of regional cooperation.

In this line, Regions, through their strategic operational programs can promote coordinated actions and policy for long term planning and investments in technologies that will manage agriculture's impact on water supplies to ensure sufficient quality and quantity. Simultaneously, in the context of Balkan integration aspirations, the countries should pay special attention to a practical content of cooperation via the several EU funding schemes and explore the opportunities to establish a new interregional funding scheme (EGTC) for the development of efficient services that promote innovative solutions to better address societal needs and enhance the national economies.

Additionally, international organizations and institutions such as IBEC and Aristotle University of Thessaloniki [AUTH], representing points of reference on Balkan agri-food innovation, could play a crucial role in fostering cooperation on sustainable development issues among Balkan countries.

In this sense, multiplier and network effects of AUTH should be leveraged to maximise the impact of the initiative and effectively scaled in the region.

There is a definite need for a coordination mechanism at the regional level, building interfaces with GEO, fostering the exploitation of best practices by potential new GEO members and reflecting the local, national, and regional interests for short and long-term planning, development, and implementation of the Balkan GEOSS. Balkan GEOSS provides the regional perspective within the GEO implementation plan reflecting the national and regional interests for development of GEO activities in the region while contributing to the implementation of the vision for a EUROGEOSS.



The effective integration of EO capacities in the region is the key enabler towards the realisation of informed decision-making. In this line, the need for the establishment of Balkan network of Earth Observation networks, both at regional and decentralized level, is highlighted in order to undertake a concrete integration of EO capacities prioritizing the Sustainable Development Goals. Along this vain, key enabling tools such as CEOS Data Cube and ESA's Thematic Exploitation Platforms are becoming available that enable better use of EO capabilities to overcome regional challenges.

EO Stakeholder ecosystem

The strengthening of agricultural sector's profile and reliability and the promotion of responsible agricultural investment are important for progress towards sustainable agricultural development and inclusive economic growth. There is a need for consistent efforts by the private sector and other stakeholders to engage in dialogue and exchanges. In this line, chambers and business associations can transfer market needs to agro-cluster and/or EO SMEs, having received guidelines from the Focal Points, leading to new innovation business opportunities and market exploitation.

Establish an effective liaison network to motivate the complete stakeholder ecosystem via the development of engagement strategies in order to organize a Round Table on EO entrepreneurship in Balkans, the upcoming October, focusing on engagement with a view to long-term operational integration of Earth Observation applications solutions to promote low-carbon farming practices in the Balkan region towards the production of certified labelled agro-products. This effort will be developed in close cooperation among the national chambers. Moreover, the chambers reaffirmed that should have regular meetings of the complete Balkan Earth Observation Ecosystem focusing on technology and stakeholder advances updates.