

INTERVIEW: Association of the Plant Protection Industry of Bulgaria (ARIB) positions a new behavioral model

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Interview with Veselin Petkov, Chairman of the Board of the Plant Protection Industry Association Bulgaria (ARIB), Country Manager for the Balkan Hub, DuPont Plant Protection

Mr. Petkov, what are the current key objectives of ARIB, the association of leading multinational companies in the pesticide trade on the Bulgarian market? Does the association have the ideas, energy, and toolkit to influence the processes of intensification and modernization of our national plant protection?

The new pace and realities necessitate a new way of thinking and a change in the behavioral model. This dynamic process requires creativity, positivity, competence, and activity. I will try to elaborate on these introductory words. ARIB has concentrated its professional potential on implementing three structurally defining projects. **The first** is combating the illegal import of plant protection products, **the second** is the safe use of pesticides, and **the third** is waste management, specifically used packaging.

The illegal trade in plant protection products is a highly sensitive topic here. The consequences of this criminal business are multi-faceted. The actions taken so far against this large-scale threat have not yielded results. You mentioned that ARIB is initiating a new concept to tackle this major challenge.

ARIB has launched a pilot project with ECPA to combat the illegal import of pesticides. The coordinator of this entirely new initiative is Mr. Garvin Boulogne, a leading expert on the topic at ECPA.

The more observant will notice – this special mission involves as many institutional partners as possible – the plant protection administration and business, politicians, customs, police, State Agency for National Security (DANS), agricultural branch organizations. This highly motivated group facilitates real-time information exchange and defines methods of counteraction. The platform creates a link between different people and institutions, accumulates feedback based on various interactions.

I definitely believe we have managed to mobilize a broadly committed team. An indication that this is a fact was also the training we organized together with the Bulgarian Food Safety Agency (BFSA), "Plant Protection" department, at the end of March at the border checkpoints Lesovo and Kapitan Andreevo with customs and police officers. We also developed a special Manual, which regulates the measures and interaction of the individual participants in each operation. These priorities are based on strict compliance with legal provisions. I mean the laws on trademark protection, plant protection, customs laws, the Penal Code, etc.

The association also signed a basic contract with a reputable international detective agency, which is committed to investigating signals for illegal pesticide imports submitted by ARIB members, with all obligations to comply with antitrust rules. Part of ARIB's activity on this current topic is also the proposal to criminalize the illegal trade in plant protection products, which is underway, in an atmosphere of political will to include this strict measure in the Penal Code.

In short: this is the formula that I strongly believe will work successfully. Zero tolerance is the only adequate response to this criminal business! Bulgarian agriculture is interested in putting an end to its dependence on parallel "black" imports.

The next initiative, a sign that ARIB is actively participating in the large-scale transformation of plant protection in Bulgaria, is the issue of safe use of PPPs. What are the components and parameters of this

measure with clearly outlined ecological and health priorities?

This idea is being implemented in close cooperation between ARIB and the BFSA, "Plant Protection" department. Good practices involving the safe use of pesticides are being introduced. One of the characteristics of this project is its large-scale visualization, its identity, and recognizability.

Which means...

All possibilities are used to inform a wide range of interested parties and individuals - technical presentations by the teams of the companies, ARIB members, with farmers, meetings organized by the BFSA with plant protection specialists in the 28 administrative regions of the country, printing brochures, guidelines, media presence... This large-scale campaign raises the level of competence of all participants in ensuring environmental and health requirements and rules.

ARIB's third project – managing the activity of destroying used PPP packaging, is the next proof that multinational agrochemical companies are investing in eco-friendly technologies. They demonstrate commitment and responsibility towards this topic, with a strong social aspect.

Last year, a pilot scheme was launched in Northeastern Bulgaria, which includes three steps – proper washing and rinsing of used packaging, storage in a safe place, and handing it over to collection points. The collection of this unnecessary packaging is completely free for agricultural producers who have signed a contract with the implementing company, and is currently financed by BASF, Bayer CropScience, Syngenta, DuPont, Dow AgroSciences, and Eftimiadis. Monsanto will join the group this year. Several results. Last year, 30% of all packaging used in the country was collected in this region, with 100% energy efficiency. ARIB initiated an amendment to the Law on Hazardous Substances – the material from which the packaging is made to be recognized as non-hazardous waste. If this happens, and it is on track to happen, following the example of other EU countries, these plastic packages will not be incinerated as before, but will be recycled to produce pipes and other construction materials.

This is the place to mention that according to ECPA's assessment, Bulgaria is the country where this project is developing most successfully within the EU. The European Crop Protection Association is personally committed to its implementation in Bulgaria, with two of its experts monitoring and providing instructions for each next step.

In 2015, the Bulgarian project operator – the company Skalar ECO, will continue expanding the territory to another 9 regions in Central and Northwestern Bulgaria. This way, the project will be applied throughout Northern Bulgaria. In this regard, I want to inform the agricultural community that already in the autumn, the Yambol region will be included in the project, which will mark the beginning of its implementation in Southern Bulgaria as well.

ARIB has deposited its proposal for the project logo with the Patent Office. After its registration at the patent office, all companies financing the project will include it on the labels of their packaging.

Does this exhaust the dynamics of this project?

I use this platform to say that every commercial pesticide company in Bulgaria, whether a member of ARIB or not, can join the project. The results will serve us to once again argue before the Ministry of Environment the harmlessness of the packaging and its inclusion in the non-hazardous waste category.

In other words: we activated a concept, tested it, and are proving it works.

The results of ARIB's activity are a fact! And part of these results are the fruit of effective and numerous partnerships. Is this assessment correct?

ARIB demonstrates a dialogic approach, communicativeness, and positive attitudes. This corporate philosophy successfully generates good results, winning supporters for the cause of innovative, multifunctional, and safe plant protection in Bulgaria.

Mr. Petkov, thank you for your kindness and willingness to share important aspects of ARIB's activities with our readers.

ARIB

ARIB is part of the European Crop Protection Association (ECPA). Full members of ARIB are the representative offices of the multinational agrochemical companies in our country: BASF, Bayer CropScience, Syngenta, DuPont, Dow AgroSciences, and very soon Monsanto. Associate members are Adama, Chemtura, Summit Agro, and Eftimiadis.