



**9TH MEETING OF THE MINISTERS
FOR FOOD, AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES of
THE MEMBER COUNTRIES OF CIHEAM**

Malta, 27 September 2012

**Welcome Addresses by the President of CIHEAM
Pr. Dr. Adel El-Beltagy**



THANKS

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of CIHEAM, let me say that it is a great pleasure and an honor to be here today.

I would like to welcome all the Ministers, the Commissioners, the Ambassadors, the member of Medias and all the Delegations. Your presence is a reflection for your commitment to the noble cause of the creation of CIHEAM

I would like to thank the organizers and the Maltese Authorities for their warm hospitality and their invitation.

I would like to thank especially the Hon. George Pullicino, Minister for Resources and Rural Affairs of Malta, who is a great supporter of Mediterranean Cooperation and of CIHEAM.

CIHEAM

Following the signing of the international treaty establishing CIHEAM 50 years ago, the founders of the Centre proceeded to lay the foundations of an unprecedented Euro-Mediterranean Institution.

This Institution involves no less than 13 Mediterranean-rim countries: thirteen countries that regard agriculture, food and the environment as important fields for regional cooperation.

CIHEAM offers its own teaching programme, which complements the teaching given in the national institutions of member countries. Over the past 50 years, about 27000 students have passed through the CIHEAM Education System (Master and Specialized Short Courses) and its 4 Institutes localized in Bari, Chania, Montpellier and Zaragoza.

More than 7000 lecturers or visiting professors (coming from more than 70 different countries) have participated in teaching in our Institution.

The second main mission of CIHEAM is to foster regional cooperation through support to research and promotion of networks, regional fora and debates on food, agriculture and environment. At CIHEAM, research-development is promoted as a partnership exercise involving experts from member countries and abroad.

This approach encourages synergies, galvanises the networks and greatly enhances CIHEAM's scientific standing in its own specialised fields, cooperating also with international and national institutions of the region.

Furthermore, CIHEAM contributes to facilitate the political debate on agricultural issues by organising some debates and especially this biannual meeting of the ministers of agriculture of our 13 member states.

Today, the one in Malta is the 9th ministerial meeting, after the first initiated in 1999 in Rome at the invitation of the Italian authorities. And I would like to thank Paolo De Castro who was the minister able to launch this ministerial meeting in the framework of CIHEAM.

While in 2012, total contributions from the 13 member countries amounts to 16 million Euros, but the harvests and the outcomes of the work of CIHEAM is far beyond this figure as a result of the synergies and the commitment of the countries.

MEDITERRANEAN CONTEXT & FOOD SECURITY ISSUE

In a changing Mediterranean World, we should support the transformations and adapt to them. As the first decade of the 21st century comes to a close, the Mediterranean Region is more than ever the focal point of great attention.

Agriculture is the basis of Mediterranean identity and essential for the region's societies. We are currently witnessing a major revival of the political debate in our Area, and the spectacular return of agriculture is a subject of major concern. The recent upheavals in food prices, financial markets and the global economy raise questions on food security, on the nature of price volatility and appropriate strategies for agricultural development. It is recognised by all today that Food security and pricing will continue to be one of the most critical challenges facing the World and the Mediterranean Countries over this decade.

In many Mediterranean Countries, the gap between local capacity for production and the region's growing population and its food demands remains problematic. All forecast scenarios carried out by different institutions suggest that many countries in the Mediterranean Area will be deficient in terms of available food per inhabitant. By 2020, demographic growth will mean the need to feed some 530 million people in the region, without any noticeable reduction in rural populations.

Most Mediterranean Countries actually depend on external markets. They must import increasing volumes of products, particularly staple commodities and especially cereals. The impact of food price volatility can be viewed at both the macroeconomic and at the individual (producer and consumer) levels. There is considerable heterogeneity across countries in terms of how increased price volatility could affect a given country.

Nevertheless, volatility has a greater impact on developing countries and on the poorer citizens, because it creates major import bill uncertainty. These dynamics result in greater food insecurity. Anger and frustration over food prices could spark riots and social unrest. Sometimes, the problem is not production or imports, but the accessibility to food.

Food security in the Mediterranean cannot, however, be based solely on securing food imports. A certain minimum level of self-sufficiency is necessary, in each country, in order to optimise public spending and to decrease dependence, signalling a call for measures adapted to the specific situation of Mediterranean countries, in particular to guarantee access and availability of safe and nutritious food for the most vulnerable groups.

It is imperative that such measures be accompanied by adaptation strategies at several levels. In a world dominated by scarcities and a global increase in food demand, reducing wastes and losses is now a very strategic imperative. States must reintroduce strong agricultural policies in order to guarantee a minimum of national food sovereignty and to contain rocketing bills in the agro-food trade. Regional cooperation must furthermore be promoted with a view to reducing hazards and developing good relations in the food field. Moreover, there will be no rural development in the Mediterranean region without dynamic agricultural policies and investments, and there can be no agricultural development without rural vitality and political will.

In addition, Climate Change is highlighting tensions over land and water resources. There is the need to increase agricultural production and productivity on a sustainable basis. Experts predict 50 million environmental refugees as a consequence of Climate Change in the World. The MENA Region is already a source of 20 million first generation immigrants. Half of them are in Europe. It is expected to increase with Climate Change and will impact Social and Economical Security in both sides of the Mediterranean.

Agriculture and Food security are absolutely interlocked with the broader issue of sustainability. Not one group or institution can respond to the challenge of food insecurity alone. Agricultural and food issues are so global and so complex that countries have to work together and cooperate.

This is the key message that has been delivered by Ciheam for 50 years. We are committed to deepening our collaboration with other institutions and we will welcome closer partnership with all of us here representing national authorities or multilateral organizations.

The way forward:

- Support the establishment of modern knowledge based on the agricultural system in the Arab Mediterranean Countries with massive capacity building programs to implement ;
- The Trade issue: we need to enhance the Mediterranean Agro-Trade Area;

- Cooperation in Research-Development programmes in the field of agriculture;

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

After 50 years of sustainable performance, CIHEAM is presently undergoing in a dynamic change to better respond to the global and the regional challenges and optimize its efficiency and efficacy.

By your good will, you can enrich and enhance the work of CIHEAM to fulfill its noble action for a peaceful and prosperous Mediterranean Area.

Time is running. We depend in your political will to expand the Mediterranean Cooperation and partnership to its true potential.

Thank you all very much