



ITALIE / ITALY

Francesco LOLLOBRIGIDA¹

Minister of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forests

*Dear Colleagues, Ministers of Agriculture,
Representatives of International Organizations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

First of all, I would like to thank the President of the CIHEAM Governing Board, Frida Krifca, and the Secretary General, Teodoro Miano, for having relaunched, after the last edition in 2016, this meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture, which represents a great opportunity to discuss current topics of fundamental importance such as food sovereignty and sustainable food systems.

I would like to particularly thank the Minister Ahmed EL BOUARI who is hosting this event, which is so relevant for the Mediterranean region, both for its social, economic, and food aspects, as well as for the worsening climate change phenomena that characterize the area.

Let me recall that at the end of September, as the Italian Presidency of the G7, the meeting of the G7 Agriculture Ministers was held in Syracuse, and a shared Communiqué was adopted that touches on topics of great relevance such as sustainable and resilient agriculture, science and innovation in agriculture for mitigation and adaptation to climate change, the role of young people, fishing, and cooperation in Africa.

I would like to emphasize that in this context I invited the members of the G7 to talk about food sovereignty, a topic that has thus landed for the first time at the attention of the summit.

¹ Speech delivered in Italian. Unofficial translation.

In this regard, the Mediterranean approach to food sovereignty is based on the centrality of local communities and the preservation of culinary traditions. Family farming, small farms and local markets are fundamental pillars of this model, as they allow maintaining a direct link between producers and consumers, strengthening the resilience of communities and preserving the richness of traditional crops.

Equally fundamental to ensuring food security and the health of the planet are sustainable food systems. It is a set of practices that allow minimizing the environmental impact, while promoting the well-being of people and the conservation of natural resources. The concept of food sustainability is therefore closely linked to that of food sovereignty, which underlines the right of communities to independently decide their own agricultural and food systems, respecting the environment and local cultures.

To build sustainable food systems in the long term, it is essential to integrate public policies that support the transition to greener agricultural practices. This requires collaboration between governments, local communities and international organizations to ensure that food sovereignty remains a priority, not only for the Mediterranean.

An excellent example of a sustainable food system is the Mediterranean diet, which represents not only a food model but also a lifestyle that has developed in the countries of the Mediterranean basin.

UNESCO in 2010 recognized the Mediterranean diet as an intangible heritage based on criteria that assess the importance of food tradition as an expression of the culture and identity of communities.

As I also stated during the G7 Agriculture which I led in Sicily, cooperation with Africa represents a crucial opportunity to promote agricultural development, food security and sustainability on a global scale.

In this regard, let me mention the Mattei Plan proposed by the Italian Government, which is designed precisely to strengthen relations between Europe, Africa and the Mediterranean. A peer-to-peer cooperation that must bring results for everyone, to grow together. With the Mattei Plan, Italy intends to **systematize all cooperation projects to ensure their synergy, not only with Italian initiatives, but also with those of other countries in the same sector.**

I am convinced that Africa must be supported in the development of its agricultural capacities, promoting equal partnerships and sustainable cooperation projects. The goal is to improve access to innovative agricultural technologies and transfer skills that can make African countries more autonomous in producing their own food and optimizing the use of their natural resources, enhancing local resources, thus ensuring sustainable agricultural development in the long term.

It is no coincidence that many of the projects and actions that **the Italian Government undertakes** in the field of international cooperation in agriculture, fisheries, natural resources and forests, innovation, **are entrusted to CIHEAM**, an intergovernmental organization that the Italian Government recognizes as a useful tool to guarantee the implementation of multilateral and regional cooperation programs.

I would like to underline, in particular, the importance of the MEDIET project that CIHEAM has launched in the legume sector. It is an ambitious project involving 17 Mediterranean countries on the theme of fresh and dried legumes, and aims to establish a system of relations and exchanges between stakeholders, capable of gathering widespread information and knowledge on legumes and their use.

The Italian Government is committed to supporting this initiative which will tend to gather the interest of all CIHEAM countries and those of the Mediterranean more generally, international institutions and their specific knowledge heritage, producer associations, consumers, the private system in all its forms.

Finally, in reiterating my appreciation for the relaunch of this meeting of the CIHEAM Ministers of Agriculture, which I hope can return to being hosted in Italy in the future, let me highlight **the crucial role of this Center** which is growing year after year as number of interventions, exchange of students and researchers, products of higher education.

In this regard, I believe that CIHEAM should concretely **evaluate an enlargement process**, in order to welcome new countries as members with particular attention to the Balkans, and to those countries that have already joined the European Union or have started the process of alignment with it.

Today more than ever it is essential to recognize the central role of the Mediterranean as a starting point and not an arrival point. The Mediterranean represents an invaluable source of biodiversity, agricultural traditions and food wealth. For this reason, our commitment must be aimed at protecting and enhancing this unique heritage to ensure a sustainable future in which local communities can thrive.

Thank you for your attention.