



SWG-RRD

Boban ILIC

Secretary General

Honorable Ministers, Your Excellency, Mr. El Bouari, please accept my congratulations on your recent appointment.

*Madam President of the CIHEAM's Governing Board, Ms. Krifca,
Mr. Secretary General, Professor Miano,
distinguished Ministers,
Heads of Delegation and
esteemed colleagues from International Organizations,*

On behalf of the Standing Working Group for Regional Rural Development in Southeastern Europe, I would like to express my gratitude to the Moroccan authorities, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Minister himself, as well as our colleagues from CIHEAM, for the invitation to participate in this 12th meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture from CIHEAM member countries.

The Standing Working Group for Regional Rural Development represents the network of Ministers of Agriculture from the Western Balkan region, specifically Albania, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, and Moldova. On their behalf, I offer sincere congratulations for the ongoing cooperation with CIHEAM partners. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the directors of the Institutes across the CIHEAM network, Mr. Realí, Mr. Dupeuble, Mr. Baourakis, and I invite the Director of the Zaragoza CIHEAM Institute, Mr. Compés, to further strengthen our cooperation in the future.

The Standing Working Group for Regional Rural Development is an international regional organization dedicated to achieving the primary political objective of the Western Balkan countries: integration into the European Union. We are committed to facilitating the adoption of all legislation within the communautaire AKIS framework and pursuing the necessary reforms related to the EU integration process.

In this regard, I would like to invite the representatives and ministers of the EU member

states – Spain, Malta, Portugal, Italy, and France – to support our efforts to ensure the swift integration of the Western Balkans into the European Union. At the recent meeting of the Ministers of the Western Balkans and Moldova held in Skopje last month, a declaration was adopted, promising the fulfillment of the communautaire AKIS legislative package by 2030. Furthermore, we are committed to pursuing the policies of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, ensuring food security and the relative autonomy of our agricultural production, as well as promoting generational renewal within the agricultural sector.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Minister Lollobrigida for mentioning the Western Balkans and all Balkan countries in his address, and for his assistance in our efforts. Special thanks are also extended to the European Commission, the European Union, and all the Directorates-General involved in this process. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to all the CIHEAM member countries.

The Western Balkan countries maintain friendly relations and seek to expand economic, political, and agricultural cooperation with all of you. Therefore, in collaboration with our colleagues from CIHEAM, Professor Miano, and Ms. Krifca, we will actively explore avenues to broaden our cooperation.

On a personal note, I would like to address the representative of Lebanon. Coming from the Balkans, we understand the devastating impact of conflict, having endured it ourselves thirty years ago. My generation also suffered. Our hearts and thoughts are with the people of Lebanon. I offer my deepest empathy and, on behalf of all our member countries, express our hope for a swift end to the suffering and a rapid cessation of hostilities.

Thank you.