

Beirut, September 24, 2025

Introductory speech - Teodoro Miano

Their Excellences,

The Minister of Agriculture, Dr. **Nizar Hani**

The Minister of Information Technology & Artificial Intelligence

Dr. **Kamal Shehadi**,

Mrs. **Frida Krifca**, President of the CIHEAM GB

Mrs. **Wafaa El Dikah Hamzé**, Delegate of Lebanon, & VP of the CIHEAM GB

Esteemed panelists and colleagues,

Dear CIHEAM Alumni,

It is a true honor and a personal joy for me to be here today in Beirut, a city that holds a special place in the heart of CIHEAM, and in mine personally. During my long-standing commitment with CIHEAM, I have had the privilege of being in close contact with the Lebanese community across various levels, academic, scientific, and in the field of international cooperation. I have also been in Lebanon several times for meetings, projects and cooperation programs. Allow me to say this clearly and sincerely: Lebanon has always been among the most active, dynamic, and committed partners of CIHEAM and its Institutes.

We have always been delighted to welcome Lebanese students and trainees, to work alongside esteemed Lebanese colleagues who have built their careers within CIHEAM, and to collaborate with dedicated partners who contribute immensely to promoting the Mediterranean spirit, while proudly raising the values, culture, and professionalism of Lebanon.

For more than 50 years, our Institutes have implemented significant projects in Lebanon, aiming to support the development of agriculture, enhance university programs, and assist key Ministries in updating and strengthening their initiatives. These collaborations are a source of pride for CIHEAM and reflect the depth of our shared commitment.

Over the past two years, we have followed, with deep concern, the difficult and uncertain challenges that Lebanon has endured. And yet, throughout, we have witnessed your remarkable courage, resilience, and determination.

Today, there is a renewed sense of hope. We feel that Lebanon is entering a new era, one of recovery, rebuilding, and promise. This is why we did not hesitate for a moment to accept the kind invitation of His Excellency Minister Nizar Hani to hold this important conference here in Beirut and I wish to express to him and his team my warmest sense of esteem and consideration.

I would also like to acknowledge the solid, continuous and tireless engagement of Mrs. Wafaa Dikah Hamze in CIHEAM activities, as Delegate of the Lebanese government and Vice President of the CIHEAM Governing Board. We acknowledge today her motivation, determination, engagement and management capacity in organizing this event today, offering the CIHEAM Community the possibility of a new step forward in its history.

CIHEAM Alumni Network

A CIHEAM Alumni Network plays a vital role in extending the impact of the organization's mission. This network is a diverse and dynamic community of professionals who have graduated from CIHEAM's postgraduate programs. They are spread across the globe, holding influential positions in governments, academia, research institutions, and private sectors.

Why do I say...: "A" CIHEAM Alumni Network and not "The" CIHEAM Alumni Network ? Various reasons:

CIHEAM Alumni is a project planned in the CIHEAM Strategic Plan 2030. CIHEAM considers scholars and students as its most relevant patrimony. An enormous human potential which has grown worldwide since its first course released in 1961-62. It is not an original idea: in fact, each of the CIHEAM Institutes has built and runs (through different tools and means) their own Alumni group. Platforms, databases, social media groups, etc. Now, CIHEAM has planned to build an

homogeneous system to follow up with all the former students of CIHEAM. An interactive platform through which to maintain contacts, organize events, propose questionnaires and studies, search for professionalities, expertises, operators, private businesses, etc.

This is one of the main objectives of the CIHEAM, in particular of its Educational Group and it is one of the key objectives of the CIHEAM 2030 Strategic Plan. The CIHEAM (International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies) is a key intergovernmental organization in the Mediterranean region. Its mission is to promote cooperation and knowledge sharing in agriculture, food security, and rural development. At the heart of CIHEAM's work is its commitment to education and training through its four Mediterranean Agronomic Institutes (Bari, Italy - Chania, Greece - Montpellier, France - and Zaragoza, Spain).

Therefore, the role of the CIHEAM Alumni Network is multifaceted:

- **Knowledge Transfer and Dissemination:** Alumni act as multipliers of the knowledge and skills they acquired at CIHEAM. They apply this expertise to address real-world challenges in their home countries and beyond, contributing to sustainable development in the Mediterranean and other regions.
- **Networking and Collaboration:** The network serves as a platform for continuous collaboration among former students. This fosters partnerships and joint projects, enabling the sharing of best practices and the creation of innovative solutions to complex problems related to agriculture, food systems, and rural development.
- **Mentorship and Support:** Experienced alumni often mentor new graduates, providing guidance and support as they begin their careers. This intergenerational connection strengthens the professional community and ensures the continuity of CIHEAM's values.
- **Ambassadors of CIHEAM's Mission:** Alumni are ambassadors of CIHEAM's values and mission. They represent the organization in various forums, raising awareness about its work and contributing to its reputation as a leading institution in agricultural and rural development studies.

From a perspective of the advantages, the CIHEAM Alumni Network offers significant benefits:

- **Professional Advancement:** Membership in the network provides access to a vast professional community, opening doors to new career opportunities, research collaborations, and leadership roles.
- **Access to Expertise:** The network is a rich repository of expertise and experience. Members can tap into this collective knowledge to find solutions to professional challenges, exchange ideas, and stay updated on the latest trends in their fields.
- **Global Reach and Local Impact:** The network's global reach allows for a broad perspective on international challenges, while its strong presence in various countries ensures that knowledge and solutions are tailored to local contexts.
- **A Lifelong Learning Community:** The network fosters a culture of lifelong learning. Alumni can continue to engage with CIHEAM and their peers through workshops, seminars, and collaborative projects, ensuring their skills and knowledge remain relevant and current.

Which is now the competitive advantage for CIHEAM of this event in Beirut?

The CIHEAM Lebanese Alumni Meeting is a critical event for the organization's broader alumni strategy, particularly given the specific challenges and opportunities in Lebanon. While the specific outputs of the meeting will be coming at the end of the day, its stated objectives align directly with the core pillars of the CIHEAM's alumni strategy.

Fostering a "Corporate" CIHEAM Identity

The meeting, titled "Investing in Youth for Sustainable Agri-Food Systems: Linking Training, Employment and Sectoral Priorities," is specifically designed to reconnect and mobilize the Lebanese alumni community. Bringing you all together in person will facilitate the creation of a more cohesive and active local network. This local network will then serve as a vital node within the global CIHEAM Alumni community, reinforcing the "corporate" identity and sense of belonging among its members.

Supporting Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship

The meeting's focus "Linking Training, Employment and Sectoral Priorities" provides a platform for discussions on how CIHEAM's educational programs can better align with the needs of the Lebanese agri-food sector. The meeting's outcomes likely include:

- **Concrete recommendations** for improving training curricula to meet market demands.
- **Creation of a platform** or a mechanism for sharing job opportunities and connecting alumni with potential employers.
- **Identification of specific needs** for specialized training or workshops that can be developed to support the career paths of young professionals.
- **Encouraging entrepreneurship** by showcasing success stories of alumni who have launched their own businesses, thus inspiring others.

Enhancing the Impact of CIHEAM's Actions

Bringing together alumni from various sectors - government, academia, private enterprise - will provide a valuable opportunity to assess the real-world impact of a CIHEAM education. The gathering will serve as a de facto "follow-up study" on the careers of Lebanese alumni, allowing for the collection of feedback and case studies. This information is crucial for CIHEAM to measure its effectiveness and to continuously improve its programs to better serve its students and member countries.

Contributing to Strategic Dialogue and Problem-Solving

The meeting is organized by the Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture together with the CIHEAM and aims to place youth, skills, and innovation at the heart of the country's agri-food transformation. This signifies a move beyond a simple reunion towards a more strategic and solution-oriented event. The meeting is expected to produce tangible outcomes, such as:

- **Collaborative proposals** for research, development, or cooperation projects tackling specific issues like food security, climate change adaptation, sustainable agriculture in Lebanon.
- **Reinforcement of institutional synergies** by strengthening the partnership between CIHEAM, the Lebanese government, and other national and international actors.
- **A "call to action"** or a set of recommendations from the alumni community to guide future initiatives and investments in the Lebanese agri-food sector.

In summary, the Lebanese Alumni Meeting **is not** just a **celebratory event** of a group of former students; it is a tool for CIHEAM to set its alumni strategy on the ground. Its outputs will contribute to engaging and empowering local networks, to clearly understanding of the impact of CIHEAM's work, and to addressing the critical challenges facing Lebanon's agri-food sector.

The CIHEAM Alumni Network is more than simply a group of former students. It is a powerful force for change, a dynamic community that plays a crucial role in advancing CIHEAM's mission and contributing to a more sustainable and prosperous future for the Mediterranean and beyond.

Final Mottos

Let's carry forward the spirit of collaboration and innovation sparked here, ensuring that every CIHEAM alumnus is a catalyst for positive change in building a prosperous and secure future for Lebanon.

We are the change we wish to see in the Mediterranean.

Cultivating collaboration, harvesting resilience: The CIHEAM Alumni, a force for change.

Where Mediterranean minds meet: Igniting innovation for a secure and sustainable tomorrow.

CIHEAM Alumni United: Sowing Seeds of Change.