



CIHEAM

International Center for Advanced
Mediterranean Agronomic Studies

Strengthening Local Innovation Ecosystems to build Young Entrepreneurs' future

159th GB Meeting

Tirana,
Albania

July 7,
2026



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**Strengthening Local Innovation Ecosystems to build Young
Entrepreneurs' future**

INTRODUCTION

by President Frida Krifca

159th GB Meeting |

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**Strengthening Local Innovation Ecosystems to build Young
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Keynote speech

***The innovation ecosystem development model in the
Mediterranean Area***

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Damiano Petruzzella

Scientific Administrator, CIHEAM Bari

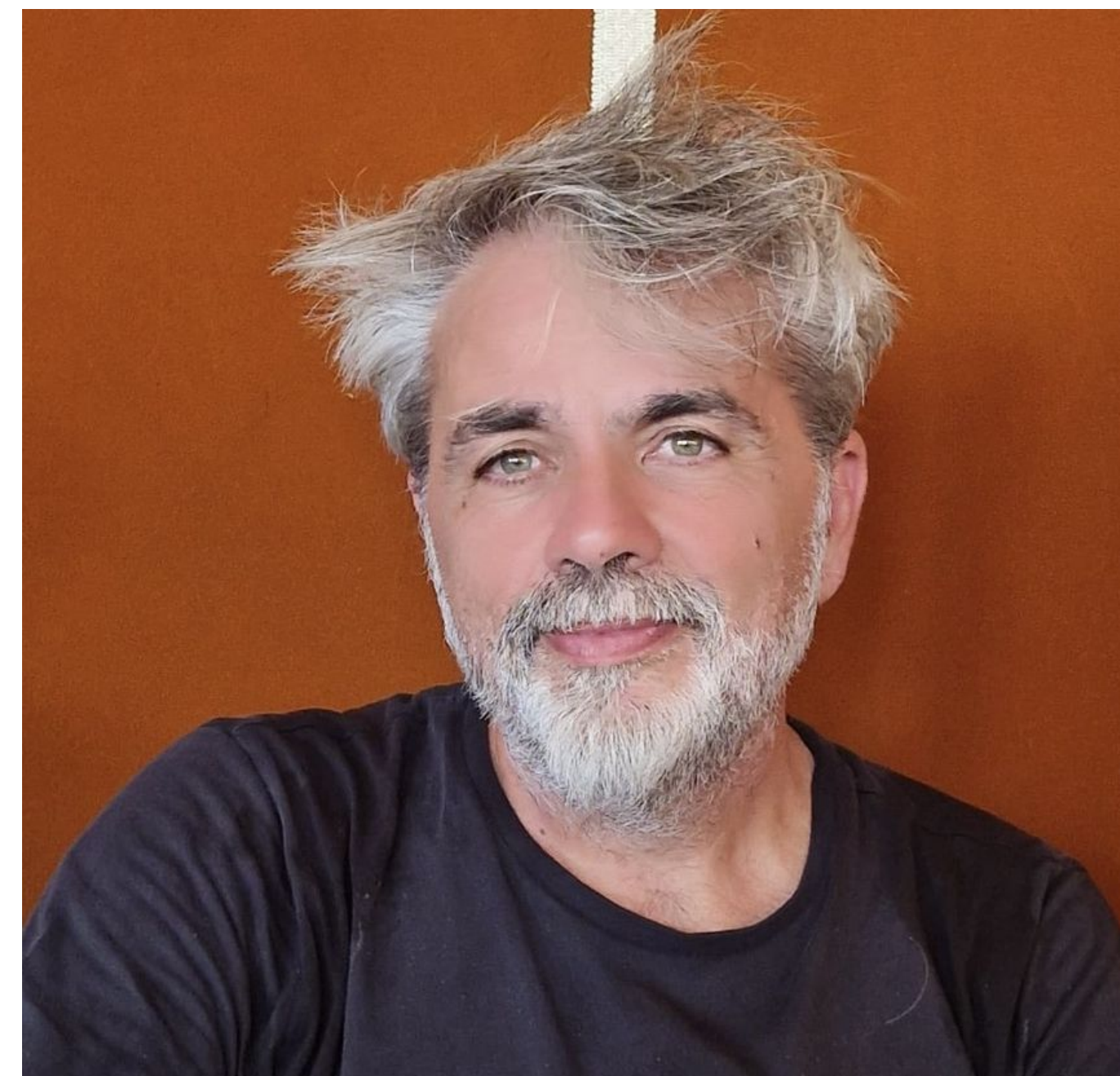
Graduated in Agricultural Sciences, PhD in Economics for the sustainability of the Urban and Rural Environment. He is Scientific Administrator of CIHEAM BARI-Mediterranean Agronomic Institute (www.iamb.it).

Head of the “Innovation and Knowledge transfer” Area, dedicated to the knowledge sharing, open innovation, youth entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystems for food transition in the Mediterranean region and Africa.

He is Responsible of the Mediterranean agrifood Innovation Hub and the MIP Network - Mediterranean Innovation Partnership, and MEDIL Living Lab for Mediterranean Rural development (ENOLL Certified) and from 2023 is chair of the Enoll WG on agriculture and rural development.

He is Scientific Coordinator of the Master in "Open Innovation and Youth Entrepreneurship in the mediterranean agrifood sector" and “local food policy”.

He coordinates many international projects on food system transition, innovation and startups empowerment, mainly in mediterranean region and Africa.



Giuseppina Miuli

CIHEAM Bari

Giuseppina Miuli is an expert in Open Innovation and manages international cooperation programs in the domain of education and youth entrepreneurship in the Youth Entrepreneurship & Innovation Ecosystems Unit at CIHEAM Bari. In particular, In particular, she is desk officer and international coach of the development cooperation project "Startup10" of CIHEAM Bari funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and which aims at the empowerment of young people and startups from 10 countries in the MedAfrica region and promotes collaboration with Italian companies, and she is tutor and innovation coach of the Master in Open Innovation & Youth Entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean Agrifood Sector of CIHEAM Bari. She has a Master's degree in Economics and Strategies for International Markets at the University of Bari and she is co-author of the article «Advancing University-Business Cooperation in the Mediterranean Area» published in the Amfiteatru Economic Journal.



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Moderation

Yasmine Seghirate

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Yasmine Seghirate

Administrator, CIHEAM General Secretariat

Yasmine Seghirate is currently an administrator at the CIHEAM General Secretariat, where she oversees communications and publications, and serves as the Gender Policy and Women and Youth Empowerment focal point. A graduate of Sciences Po Aix-en-Provence with a specialization in the political sociology of the Arab and Muslim world, Yasmine previously led sustainable development and CSR projects in the Maghreb for ORSE (French Observatory of Corporate Social Responsibility). She has also served as a project officer in the office of the UN Under-Secretary-General for Innovative Financing for Development (UNITAID) and worked as a consultant for the French Development Agency (AFD).





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PANEL 1

***"Beyond Startup Numbers: Building Better Innovation
Ecosystems"***

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Arjan Ymeri

General Director, Innovation4Albania (I4A)

Arjan Ymeri is the General Director of Innovation4Albania, the national agency driving Albania's startup ecosystem and public sector innovation agenda.

Since his appointment in November 2023, he has led the country's strategy for innovative entrepreneurship, overseeing national grant schemes and funding instruments, coordinating policy across government, and representing Albania's ecosystem internationally.

Focused on the entrepreneurship and technology sectors, Arjan has built incubation programs across Albania and mentored startups throughout the Western Balkans.

He is a co-founder of the Startup Alliance Western Balkans, a founding member of the Startup Europe Network, and has served as Digital Transformation Expert supporting the EU Delegation to Albania.

His earlier career includes senior commercial leadership roles at ALBtelecom & Eagle Mobile and Orange UK.

Arjan holds a BA (Hons) in Politics, Philosophy and Economics from London Guildhall University, IMD, and is a certified Global Strategy and Scale Up Coach.



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Saša Ivanović

Head of the Department for Strategic Planning and International Cooperation, Innovation Fund of Montenegro

He brings more than 20 years of experience in the innovation sector, with expertise in innovation policy development and implementation, strategic planning, cross-border cooperation, and EU project management.

Throughout his career, he has contributed to the development of Montenegro's innovation ecosystem by supporting startups, innovative companies, and collaboration between public institutions, research organizations, and international partners.

He also serves as an Advisory Board Member of the Western Balkan Startup Alliance, where he supports regional cooperation and efforts to build a stronger and more connected startup environment.



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Biagio Di Terlizzi

Director, CIHEAM Bari

Biagio Di Terlizzi is the Director of CIHEAM Bari. An agronomist by training, he has dedicated his career to advancing sustainable development in agriculture. With over three decades of experience at CIHEAM Bari, where he served in various roles since 1987, including Deputy Director and Head of Planning and Cooperation, he has been instrumental in numerous training, research, and cooperation initiatives.

His expertise spans a wide range of fields, from project management for key international donors to leading diverse teams on country-specific and regional projects across the Mediterranean, the Middle East, North Africa, and beyond.





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PANEL 2

"From Skills to Opportunities: Strengthening Youth Employability and Entrepreneurship"

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Dr. Fatbardh Sallaku

**Professor of management and administration of natural resources,
Agricultural University of Tirana**

His scientific activity focuses on environmental aspects related to land and water, their degradation and protection, the problems of rural development, agro-environmental policies, etc. He completed his doctoral studies and defended the degree of "Doctor" in 1996. During the period 2008-2016 he performed the duties of the head of the Department of Agriculture and Ecology and during the period 2016-2020 he performed the duties of the Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture and Environment.

From 2020 onwards, Prof. Fatbardh Sallaku is the Rector of the Agricultural University of Tirana. He has about 120 scientific publications, of which 40 scientific articles are indexed in Impact Factor or Scopus in well-known journals such as: "Geoderma", "Environmental Modeling & Assessment", "Journal of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy", "Ecology, Environment and Conservation", "Research Journal of Agricultural Science", "Journal of Ecological Engineering", "Journal of Food Agriculture and Environment", "Journal of Hygienic Engineering and Design", etc. From 2021 onwards, Prof. Sallaku is a visiting professor at the Department of Community Sustainability, Michigan State University (USA), in the International Development: Theory and Practice module.



Raúl Compés

Director, CIHEAM Zaragoza

Raúl Compés has served as Director of CIHEAM Zaragoza, the Spanish institute of the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM), since 2021.

Under his leadership, CIHEAM Zaragoza has advanced its mission of providing high-quality international training, strengthening research, international cooperation, and entrepreneurship projects to address the complex challenges facing Mediterranean food systems.

Compés brings to this role extensive expertise in agrifood economics and policy, developed through his academic career at the Polytechnic University of Valencia (UPV), where he serves as a Professor in the Department of Economics and Social Sciences.



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Thierry Dupeuble

Director, CIHEAM Montpellier

Thierry Dupeuble is a doctor in economics.

He is a specialist in public policies in favor of sustainable agriculture and rural development. He has supported development projects in the fields of organic farming and sustainable agriculture, on-farm transformation and selling, rural tourism, ...

Most of his experiences have been run in various positions within the ministry for agriculture in France. As such, he has worked in particular on initial and continuing professional training for farmers involved in the agroecological transition. Since 2021, he is the director of CIHEAM Montpellier.





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PANEL 3

"Unlocking Local Potential through Inclusive Innovation and Stronger Territories"

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George Baourakis

Director, CIHEAM Chania

George Baourakis is the Director of the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania, CIHEAM Chania. He has extensive experience in the management and coordination of educational and research activities, including coordination of the Business Economics and Management Program of CIHEAM Chania, the organization of international seminars and training courses and the scientific, economic and administrative management of research projects. He has co-ordinated and participated in a large number of EU, international and national-regional research projects. He is a visiting Fellow in Marketing and Supply Chain Management, at the Centre of Entrepreneurship, Nyenrode University, The Netherlands Business School, while he has also been appointed Distinguished Research Fellow in Food Marketing-Management at several universities. Dr Baourakis has published numerous papers in internationally refereed scientific journals, presented extensively at international conferences and authored/co-authored several scientific and academic books and special issues which have been distributed by renowned publishing houses. George Baourakis has lectured as an Invited Speaker in many internationally recognized Universities and has served as an OECD Consultant on regionalization and rural governance. He has organized and implemented international conferences and specialized seminars in cooperation with Universities and Research Institutes of many countries and a large number of short courses mainly addressed to executives of the public sector of several countries.



Ljubica Zlojutro

Representative of the Smart Village Knežica project

Ljubica Zlojutro is a representative of the Smart Village Knežica project an initiative aimed at transforming a rural community into a model of smart, sustainable and inclusive local development.

A qualified lawyer and active agricultural producer, Ljubica lives and works in a rural area, where together with her family she builds every day the sustainable future of her local community. As a mother of two children, her commitment to the development of smart villages is not merely a professional engagement- it is a deeply personal conviction.

Through the integration of digital tools, green approaches and community-driven solutions, the Smart Village Knežica project works to create real economic opportunities for young people in rural areas, proving that innovation is not a privilege reserved for urban centres alone.

The experience gained in Knežica can be replicated- and it is precisely this experience, its results and its challenges, that Ljubica brings to the discussion on strengthening local innovation ecosystems and building young entrepreneurs' future.



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Gezim Shuli

Executive Director, AlbNatyra Association

Gezim Shuli is the Executive Director of AlbNatyra Association and an environmental project coordinator specializing in biodiversity conservation, community engagement, and sustainable rural development.

He has extensive experience managing projects on wildlife monitoring, environmental education, wildfire prevention, eco-tourism, and cross-border cooperation.

Gezim is also the founder of Shebenik-Egnatia Explorers and Star Campers Albania, two tourism startups promoting nature-based experiences.

With a background in agribusiness, business administration, and open innovation, he works to connect conservation with local livelihoods and sustainable development.





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CONCLUSION

by SG Teodoro Miano

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