

Diplomacy and Agricultural Cooperation to Relaunch the Euro-Mediterranean Dynamic

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Considering that 2015 will mark the 20th anniversary of the Barcelona Declaration, it is a good time to consider the cooperation sectors that still mobilise the Mediterranean Region and to which the European Union should be interested in dedicating more of its Southern Neighbourhood-oriented action. Agriculture, food security and rural areas are spheres in which the needs of development require dialogue and multilateral solidarity. The challenges to be met on these strategic matters call for greater Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, now more than ever. If the ambition for a pragmatic relaunch of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership is reaffirmed in 2015, agricultural, food and rural issues will have to be placed at the core of the new regional cooperation agenda. Why have such an intention? Because the challenge of food security is both colossal and vital. Colossal because the constraints are becoming more pronounced: shortage of water and land, the effects of climate change, demographic growth and socio-economic evolutions are modifying diets and trade balances. Vital, because it conditions the day-to-day existence of populations, the development of societies and geopolitical stability.

The Mediterranean is the region of the world that depends the most on international markets to feed itself. Recourse to imports is indispensable. In 2012, the Arab Mediterranean countries, from Morocco to Syria, had to pay a combined food invoice of 52 billion dollars, an amount seven times greater than in

the early 1980s, a critical period in which the agricultural trade deficit of these countries grew significantly. The economic weight of their food dependence is thus structural. The global agricultural landscape has changed, however. The prices of raw materials are experiencing an upward trend. The price volatility for agricultural commodities, which has always existed, is showing worrisome signs of restlessness. The global demand for certain food products surpasses the supply despite record-beating production. But the growth of this demand is greater than that of agricultural yields, which are levelling off, particularly in the Mediterranean Basin, where geography remains a handicap and access to technology is limited.

The case of cereals is symptomatic. These countries make nearly 20% of the world's grain purchases every year. They must find approximately 40 million tonnes (Mt) of grain on the markets to cover their human and animal food needs. Egypt is the world's leading wheat importer. This cereal deficit will inevitably grow in the coming years in the South Mediterranean and it is clear that market surveillance will become increasingly necessary. Sharing information and statistics among Mediterranean countries in the sphere of grains has proven delicate but a major step forward was made in February 2014 with the decision by CIHEAM Member States to set up a network (the Mediterranean Agricultural Markets Information Network or MED-AMIN) dedicated to developing trust and increasing transparency regarding markets.

Given the rise in the food needs of its Southern Neighbourhood, the EU and its Member States, the majority of which enjoy favourable conditions for agricultural production and which some consider

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capable of exporting vital commodities such as grains, milk or meat, should continue to contribute to the food balance of Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Countries (SEMCs). The latter, however, do not only have Europe as their agricultural geo-economic partner. Indeed, two thirds of their supply comes from the rest of the world and half of their agricultural exports are to extra-regional states. While Russian, Ukrainian and US grains find their way to North Africa and the Middle East, citrus fruit also takes the inverse route, not to mention the fact that new agricultural trade relations are likewise emerging in Africa, such as those undertaken by the Kingdom of Morocco or by major Algerian and Egyptian agro-food industries.

Somewhere between the difficulty of producing and the need for supplying lies logistic complexity in the matter of food security in the Mediterranean. The 2014 edition of the regional *Mediterra* report, published biennially by the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM), revealed the key role of trade and logistics, accentuating interdependences between Mediterranean countries and creating new ties with the rest of the world. Although significant progress has been made, there is still a great deal to be done insofar as logistics to obtain better performance in the Mediterranean Basin, whose countries will have to rise to this challenge in order to improve their competitiveness and reduce food insecurity. The aim of this report is to recall that, although agricultural development is an objective for every Mediterranean country, it is likewise necessary to optimise the logistics conditions of food security (the cold chain, infrastructures, transport, standards, the struggle against post-harvest losses and losses during distribution, etc.) and find the means to better combine the dynamics of trade with the needs of development. In sum, it should be stressed that food self-sufficiency for these countries is a myth and that the difficult aim of attaining greater food security performance requires a holistic approach involving aspects of national policy but also new perspectives in terms of regional cooperation.

In this context, it must be stressed that on 6 February 2014, the Agriculture Ministers of the 13 CIHEAM Member States held their tenth meeting in Algiers on the theme of sustainable food security for the Mediterranean Basin. The tenth multilateral meeting of this type organised since 1999, it testifies to the will of these countries, from both the North and South Mediterranean, to regularly enter into dialogue on agriculture, food and rural development. The declaration adopted is ambitious, but rises to the regional challenges. Whereas the quantitative and qualitative aspects of food security are central, water, land and climate issues are at the heart of this declaration whose leitmotif is sustainable development. The imperatives of agricultural production (producing more and better crops), the quality of foodstuffs (standards, identity), employment in agriculture (in particular of youth), the struggle against food wastage (after harvest or in consumption) and inclusive growth for rural areas were regularly underscored in the different ministers' presentations and figure prominently in the Algiers Declaration.

This meeting also reflects a broader political process tending to reinstate Mediterranean agricultural and rural issues on the strategic international and regional agenda. In fact, the participation of the Director General of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in this meeting was appreciated by the Mediterranean countries and mention is made in the Algiers Declaration of the agriculture ministers' will that CIHEAM, EU and FAO activities be synergised to foster development in the Mediterranean. It is an important appeal and certainly an inspiring one. Another sign of this strategic redeployment of agricultural issues on the regional agenda was the first agricultural conference convened by the 5+5 Dialogue on 27 November 2013 and also held in Algiers. It was the first time since the creation of the 5+5 Dialogue in 1990 that a ministerial conference was held on this topic. It should be commended and the pursuit of this trend encouraged.

Clearly, the world food crisis in spring 2008 and the recent socio-political events in the Arab world, in which inflation of food prices and water, land and climate insecurities have constituted catalysts of revolt, have – unfortunately – contributed to the process of reinstating agriculture and food at the top of the international and regional Mediterranean diplomatic agenda. In any case, it must be kept in mind

that agriculture remains inseparable from rural issues. In Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Countries, where a third of the population lives in a rural environment and where one job out of five is in agriculture, it is impossible to consider the development of rural areas without considering agriculture. It is likewise just as unreasonable to attempt to render urban development sustainable without succeeding in reconnecting cities and inland rural areas. Such a geographic split is geopolitically unsustainable. This is true throughout the world but is a particularly significant problem in the Mediterranean.

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The implementation of new national policies for agricultural and rural development in the majority of North African and Middle East States is thus encouraging, for this sector and these territories belong to the future and not the past, as was ineptly assumed at the turn of the millennium. The past few years, with their series of events associated with agriculture and social turbulence in rural areas, have shaken spirits. The Green Plan and the recent creation of a Permanent Inter-ministerial Commission on the Development of Rural and Mountainous Areas in Morocco and Lebanon's strategy to make agriculture a pillar of its development are only a few examples. In a similar vein is an initiative called the European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD), which should be followed with interest. Launched by the EU in 2011, today it involves six pilot countries (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia) and constitutes a true offer of in-depth partnership. Fostering dialogue on agriculture and rural issues between the EU and these countries, including on a multilateral level, the ENPARD initiative has raised great hope in the Southern Mediterranean area. It has also drawn the attention of international and bilateral technical

and financial actors, since ENPARD participates in providing support for political and environmental transitions in the region and is involved in the matter of job creation (in particular for rural youth). All of these factors call for the extension of this initiative in the EU's 2014-2020 programming.

The agricultural and rural experience of North Mediterranean EU States could undeniably nurture and enrich this regional dialogue, all the more so since European countries such as Italy, Greece or Spain have a great deal to learn from the South Mediterranean's experience in adaptation to climate constraints and management of rare resources such as water and arable land. The concept of agroecology, dear to France today, can certainly draw from the pool of projects and solutions that have been operating for years in the Mediterranean Basin. Regional Euro-Mediterranean dialogue on agriculture cannot be limited solely to commercial or health considerations. Economic relations should be combined with the dynamics of development and technical support. Research towards improved food security in the Mediterranean Region requires multilateral involvement while ensuring the implementation of strategies adapted to the local situations of the various countries and to the often highly differentiated situations within each country.

The matter of agriculture should also be considered in all of its dimensions, including the nutritional component, which we shall discuss. Declared an item of Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO in 2010, the Mediterranean diet is not only a sphere of culinary cooperation. It opens up spheres of cultural, tourism, social and thus political solidarity for development in the region, as emphasised by the 2012 edition of the *Mediterra* report that CIHEAM wrote in collaboration with the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed). The search for greater and more sustainable food security in the Mediterranean is indivisible from the challenges associated with the diet and the economics of heritage and heritage conservation it is capable of generating. Moreover, progress is required in the improvement of connections between research, innovation and the needs of development. All the more so since the "Water - Food - Energy" nexus, essential in the climate equation to be solved, demands inter-sectoral, interdisciplinary approaches and thus greater cooperation among the actors (states, local governments,

enterprise, professional organisations and universities). The implementation of research, development and innovation platforms such as the Mediterranean Science, Policy, Research & Innovation Gateway (Med-Spring) and Eranet-Med, in which CIHEAM plays a major role, demonstrates that the Euro-Mediterranean exists in concrete scientific initiatives that contribute to improving living conditions in the essential spheres of food, water and specialised training in indispensable professions.

In sum, the struggle against waste can represent another mobilising facet of Euro-Mediterranean agricultural cooperation. Water and land resources must be preserved, as well as forest systems and the aquacultural wealth of the Mediterranean Sea. Their depletion can be attenuated if efforts are made to economise on water, prevent the urbanisation of the last sections of arable land, combat desertification and forest fires and foster more responsible fishing. We must also fight against post-harvest wastage of produce, both during the transport stage and at the time of consumption. Too much food is lost or thrown out, an intolerable paradox at a time when hunger remains a reality for many throughout the world, in the Mediterranean Region and even in Europe. It would also be appropriate, in a third stage, to struggle against waste of knowledge. In agronomy or the environment, traditional knowledge should be protected and valued. Students studying professions in agriculture, rural development and food security also expect to be able to get involved in these sectors, which means having the income and the resources to carry out a difficult occupation, full of uncertainties (such as the climate or the selling price of produce) and too often in areas where underdevelopment still predominates. The human capital trained in professions indispensable for the lives of populations and the political stability of states should not be wasted, considering the regional challenges.

Clearly, specific solidarities do exist in the Mediterranean Region, so often described as divided and incapable of constructive dialogue. In the sphere of agriculture and foodstuffs, the will to work together is growing. This ongoing process is destined to expand, since the immensity of the challenges ahead

calls for greater trade and cooperation. The International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agromic Studies (CIHEAM), an intergovernmental organisation with 13 Mediterranean Member States, has been working in this direction for over half a century now, convinced that intercultural dialogue, education, research and technical assistance to development perforce require dealing with the agricultural spheres in this region of the world. Some 12,500 people have taken its Masters Programmes and specialised training courses over the past ten years. Ninety research and cooperation projects are currently underway at CIHEAM, destined to be at the heart of Mediterranean food-related diplomacy, to paraphrase the wishes of the ministers of agriculture of its Member States.

2014 is a pivotal year. The UN has declared it the international year of family farming. It is a strong message, that could have been even more effective in the Mediterranean Region if it had been coupled with family fishing, which represents a great deal of employment there. Towards the end of 2014, a new political and institutional landscape will moreover emerge in the EU. But 2015 will be the major rendezvous. The EU will possibly have a new project, or at least a renewed political spirit. The outcome of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will be assessed and the post-2015 development agenda will be established. Agriculture, rural issues and food security are likely to figure prominently. The theme of the Milan Universal Exposition (Expo Milano), to be held from May to October 2015, is "Feeding the Planet: Energy for Life." And in November 2015, the Barcelona Declaration will turn 20. Two decades after this vibrant appeal in favour of building a space for Euro-Mediterranean partnership, we must lend renewed meaning to this vision and focus cooperation on issues in which the future of Europe, northern Africa and the Middle East hangs in the balance. Although difficult to render tangible, this beautiful Euro-Mediterranean idea should not be wasted. The year 2015 will provide the opportunity to decidedly advocate a Mediterranean Sea that unites in order counter the dangerous discourse of a Mediterranean acting as a wall to separate Europe from Africa.