

**11th MEETING OF THE MINISTERS OF AGRICULTURE OF THE MEMBER  
STATES OF THE CIHEAM**

**22/09/2016, 9:00-15:30, Tirana International**

**Welcome address by representative of Mrs. Federica MOGHERINI, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security policy/ Vice-President of the Commission, Amb. Romana VLAHUTIN, Head of European Union Delegation to Albania**

Your Excellencies,

Dear Ministers, dear colleagues,

I would like to wholeheartedly thank you on behalf Ms Federica Mogherini, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission, for your kind invitation to the 11th meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture of the member States of CIHEAM.

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to address you here in Tirana. I sincerely hope that, besides the meeting, you will also have the chance to spend some time in the city and in Albania, enjoy the beauty of the country and taste the delicious local agricultural products.

In this short opening address I would like to touch upon the economic migration and its link to the agricultural sector.

Unfortunately, in many countries still almost all rural areas are poorer, with fewer jobs available, lower wages and lack of assets including sufficient arable land. In addition, the infrastructure, housing, education possibilities and healthcare are at different level than those in towns. People look for better opportunities, and they leave.

Only from January until the beginning of September this year more than 120,000 people have arrived to Italy through what is now the main transit route of irregular migration to Europe – the central Mediterranean one. If we take a close look at the figures we see that amongst the top ten nationalities of those who disembarked on Italian shores there were 7,000 people from Ivory Coast or 4,800 from Senegal. The majority of these migrants are not fleeing a conflict but looking for economic opportunities.

A very significant number of these people come from countries where the bulk of the population lives in rural areas and whose livelihood depends heavily on agriculture. If the agricultural sector in their regions fails to secure their basic needs or offer them decent work and life, the probability of them leaving will increase exponentially.

Other migration is also the one from villages to towns. Cities might look more appealing to the young generation with their better job opportunities, universities, cultural and social activities.

As a result, the process of depopulation of rural areas is leading to even further deterioration of the living conditions in them.

That is why the agriculture and especially the rural development policy should not be simply aiming at retention of the population, but to boost economic growth and sustainable employment and income, while preserving the natural and social riches of the rural areas.

I am glad that today we have representatives of some of the European Union States with strongest tradition in the agricultural sector, as well as Candidate Countries present to share knowledge and choices of EU common agricultural policy. I believe that in the discussions you will look into how the rural development can also be used to:

- promote local competitiveness,
- Protect and improve natural resources,
- Introduce economic incentives to improve services in rural areas such as schooling and health care, and how to use information technology for the advancement of this sector.

And as we are gathered in Albania today, I am happy to say that Albania as candidate Country will have an access to 71 million EUR under IPARD over the period 2016-2020. How important the agricultural sector for the country is can be described best by two figures- agriculture accounts for almost 50 % of the employment and 20% of GDP of the country. We firmly believe this financing will not only support the agricultural sector, but will contribute to the development of the rural regions in the country, give more chances to the young people to see their future in the places where they were born, and boost the overall growth of the Albanian economy.

This is our ultimate goal – to create sustainable growth that would benefit the quality of life of every citizen. I wish you a lot of success in your discussions.