



GRECE / GREECE

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Your Excellences,

Distinguished Heads of Delegations,

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank the Minister Mr. Edmond Panarity, for his welcoming speech, his hospitality and for the excellent organization of the 11th Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture of CIHEAM's Member-States.

It is a pleasure and honor for me to participate in this meeting and exchange views particularly on the important issues of migration and promotion of sustainable development in the Mediterranean Basin within the framework of such beneficial cooperation defined in the Strategic Agenda 2025 and the Action Plan of CIHEAM.

As we all know, migration is influenced by a combination of push and pull factors in the countries of origin or destination of migrants. War conflicts, food insecurity, climatic changes, adverse economic conditions as well as the search for better living and working conditions contribute to world migration flows. Especially in southern Europe, the pressures of migration flows are high, with a strong concentration towards rural areas in which their role is considered crucial for agriculture and rural development.

One of the first things I learned about migration is that you never 'solve' the problem. You seek the best possible management of a continuously changing complex phenomenon. We need to compromise with this approach.

In my country, the percentage of migrants in total population is high (about 10% of the population and 15% of the economically active). During the last few decades the combination of demographic, structural and social factors, created increased labour shortage in the rural areas of Greece, with negative implications for the competitiveness of Greek agriculture. The mass arrival, however, of economic migrants in the local labour markets in the beginning of the 90's, contributed to the alleviation of pressures and to

the economic and social development of rural areas. This fact offered the opportunity to a large part of farmers to maintain, expand or restructure their agricultural holdings.

As a result, over the past years migrants became a structural factor in Greek agriculture contributing nearly 1/4 of its labour force and almost 9/10 of its wage labour. Despite their importance for the economy and the agricultural sector, the processes of regularization and integration have been slower than expected.

You will agree with me that achieving social cohesion must be our top priority. Social cohesion should also be a prime political goal. However, many of the existing migrant integration policies present systemic and structural problems. Additionally, in conditions of deep economic crisis, migrants are the first victims.

For this reason, appropriate policies at national, European and international level, are needed for smoother social and labour integration of both older and younger migrants, singles and families. There is no doubt that achieving coherence in our policies on migration is a challenge which requires a lot of resources and strong commitment. Managing the refugee and migration problem is undoubtedly today the biggest challenge for the future of Europe and the Mediterranean Basin.

Setting efficient and flexible national institutional frameworks for migrants' living and working conditions is crucial. In my country, such a framework was recently complemented by legislation on the labour regime of migrants in the agricultural sector. A new law sets out terms relating to the employment of irregular third-country nationals in serving urgent needs of the rural economy. It is an important reform from which all benefit: farmer, employers, the insurance system and irregular migrants.

It is essential to strengthen the communication channels between our countries through international cooperation at the political and economic level. The exchange of experiences, knowledge and information between our States, will help us to jointly adopt best policies for handling the migratory and refugee challenges. The social integration of migrants should concern actively the receiver countries.

You will all agree with me that the triptych "Diversity - Sustainability - Productivity" is a prerequisite for the agricultural sector to fulfill its role as a key factor in food security, producing safe and quality agricultural products, ensuring a fair income for farmers, responding to market crisis, making sustainable use of natural resources. I think respect of human and working rights of migrants should be an indispensable feature of this triptych above.

I strongly believe that we can address the future challenges by adopting innovative approaches and tools that take advantage of our differences and agricultural diversity. The priorities of the CIHEAM Strategic Agenda 2025 are in the right direction in order to achieve sustainable development in the Mediterranean. I am convinced that the proposed Action Plan for the Mediterranean will play this role and provide us opportunities and tools to further encourage and strengthen cooperation among our countries in order to achieve development and prosperity for our people. We have to create the appropriate conditions, on the one hand, for people to have the possibility to live and thrive in their countries and, on the other, to have the possibility of equal treatment in the receiver country.

Dear Ministers and Heads of Delegations, Dear Participants,

Last year, as you know, the mass arrival of refugees in my country created new conditions and new challenges. Greece being the gate to Europe faced first the refugees' tragedy. Everybody acknowledges, however, that despite its serious economic problems and limited resources, the country showed a deep humanitarian face. But for how long? Social tensions are at the gate of Greece and Europe. Action needs to be taken immediately, agreements need to be respected and implemented.

Dear all,

I strongly believe that the conclusions of this conference will encourage us all to plan and implement the right policies and therefore to further promote the Mediterranean Basin as a region of sustainable development, stability and fruitful cooperation.

Thank you for your attention.