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Questions concerning the advanced teaching of agriculture in the Mediterranean basin

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Eleven years ago, we met in Rabat to examine and compare training systems in agriculture in the Mediterranean basin. When I observe the institutional and intellectual landscape of this advanced teaching of agriculture, I am struck by the fact that our system is firstly not competitive within itself and above all that its basis and method are incomplete.

Allow me to return to the major issues with which we are confronted before submitting a report to you and finally making several recommendations.

I – There are five issues

- The first issue is clearly the recognition of the food sovereignty of countries as a way of building peace. I have had the occasion to discuss what I call ‘the right of peoples to feed themselves’. For me, this consists of a political orientation and requirement that acquire their full meaning in the Mediterranean basin;
- the second issue concerns sanitary security and access to food and water. We know today that food security is not only a problem of production of agricultural raw materials, but just as much a problem of the sanitary quality of food as one of access by the population to food that they no longer produce because they live in urban areas. As for water, this is becoming a pre-eminently rare resource;
- the third issue in this context is that of the future of small farmers. We know that the modernisation of agriculture has hitherto led to a drastic reduction in peasant populations in societies with galloping urbanisation and rare jobs. We must invent a development of agriculture which does not mean the disappearance of small farmers;
- the fourth issue concerns the management of natural resources. I refer to, of course, the soil, the sub-soil, water and also landscapes;
- finally, the issue for all of us and that runs through the questions that I have just brought up is that of Mediterranean development and the position of agricultural, environmental and food questions in this development.

We know very well that there is no purely technical response to any of these issues. And still less a purely economic response.

Market forces will not build the Mediterranean. They may help to build it or may help to demolish it. In my opinion, it is essential that the training of agronomists and managers for the agricultural and food sectors should include the necessary reflection concerning these major issues.

II – An observation

A striking feature is the lateness accumulated by colleges, universities and institutes in training in public policies, whether these are national, European and regional or multilateral.

We have made considerable progress in recent years in knowledge and understanding of professional movements and of their position in development.

However, reflection on public policies, the need for them and their complexity has remained very meagre in agricultural colleges. As a result, agronomists have a gap between substantial technical training and lack of training in the implementation of public policies, whereas the latter are at the heart of the evolution of this sector.

Must it be reminded that the European Union is developing around the Common Agricultural Policy, to which it devotes half of its budget?

Must it be reminded that the major multilateral negotiations are hinged mainly on agriculture?

We shall fall behind in the development of food and farming in the Mediterranean unless we place these questions of organisation, regulation and management of agricultural products at the heart of training.

CIHEAM has contributed in several ways:

- it has provided technical courses on the development of production,
- it is preoccupied by food security,
- it has put the question of irrigation and water resource management in the forefront,
- it has gone beyond agriculture and laid stress on rural development,
- its actions in training and research have enabled the establishment around the Mediterranean basin of a network—or possibly a family—of professionals capable of addressing all these problems. However, work remains to be done.

III – Proposals

We lack several tools to make progress in shared familiarisation with public policies.

a. A revolving seminar should be held for students, political officials and decision makers covering the main issues of multilateral negotiations and the implementation of agreements that have been signed. This would give officials and future officials good knowledge of the rules of the game that are becoming established around the world.

We know that the main injustice is that access to information and mastery of the rules of the game are not the same for all countries in these negotiations.

An organisation such as CIHEAM can help to provide officials in Mediterranean countries with access to this information that is so necessary for negotiators.

b. Continuous teaching on these questions should be organised at the institutes with dissemination of the teaching and the holding of seminars outside the establishments. The latter can be organised in collaboration with colleges and universities;

c. A Mediterranean public policy watch should be set up to know, list and compare public local, national, regional and multilateral policies.

This watch would be the central base for the development of new teaching in the Mediterranean.

d. Finally, the formation of a network of teachers and researchers working regularly on public policies should be encouraged. This will help them to develop joint analysis concerning the Mediterranean area.

This assumes that the network meets regularly at seminars and publishes the results of its reflection just as regularly.

These are just what I consider to be a minimum, if we want to develop Mediterranean analysis and thinking concerning agriculture and food.

What was started in Europe at Stresa 40 years ago must also be started and continued in the Mediterranean area.

By making progress in this direction, we shall make CIHEAM a melting pot not only for agricultural training in the Mediterranean but also simply for Mediterranean development.

