

8th Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership Meeting (ASEP 8)

Rome, 6-7 October 2014

Chamber of Deputies

*“The role of Parliaments in fostering Europe-Asia dialogue,
sustainable growth and stronger governance structures”*

Report of Panel 2 “Sustainable growth and food security”

The meeting was co-chaired by **Mrs Meutya Viada Hafid**, Member of the Parliament of Indonesia and **Ms Aila Paloniemi**, Member of the Parliament of Finland. Mr Lucio Malan, Member of the Italian Senate, served as Rapporteur for the meeting.

The two lead statements were delivered by Mr Maurizio MARTINA, Italian Minister of Agriculture and Mr CAO DUC PHAT, Vietnam Minister of Agriculture.

Minister Martina stressed the need to strengthen relations between Europe and Asia with regard to the agri-food sector and to establish a common strategy to address the changes which are expected to affect the agricultural sector in the next few years. The exponential growth of the world population – expected to reach 9 billion in 2050 -, the increased demand for agricultural products, a more intense urbanization and a depopulation of rural areas are among the main issues which require the establishment of an effective Euro-Asian partnership. The Minister also underlined the role of Italy and expressed the wish that the already good relations with Asian countries in the agri-food sector will be further strengthened. Italy believes that growth should never take place to the detriment of the links with local geographical areas, biodiversity, traditions, and sound nutrition models. The geographical indication system that has been in force in Italy for quite a long time goes precisely in this direction.

Italy offers a unique perspective on today’s landscape. The importance Italy attaches to the link with local areas and the protection of biodiversity can be a model not just for the countries similar to Italy in size but also for bigger countries. Likewise, Italy

can give a major contribution to the technological platforms at the service of agriculture by offering best practices and excellent experiences that have improved the efficiency of agricultural production models. The EU Common Agricultural Policy has been innovated as a result of the new global scenario. The CAP continues to be a pillar of the European policies, and Europe is interested in the Asian farming models and how they have evolved.

Finally, Minister Martina recalled that the topic of food security was the main focus of the informal council of agriculture ministers held in late September in Milan, in the context of the Italian Presidency of the EU Council. He also recalled that Milan Expo 2015 will be a major platform for the exchange of ideas at the international level on agriculture and agri-food issues.

Of the more than 147 countries registered with the Expo, over 40 are Asian, a sizable number of countries that will be able to interact with the many participants from Europe.

The Minister invited the delegations of the countries present to make the most of the platform of Expo 2015, that will undoubtedly offer the opportunity for sharing and dialogue. And finally he stated that there is a continuum where the activities of ASEP are followed by the upcoming Euro-Asian summits, and then Expo 2015 and finally the discussion to be held at the UN to define the new post-2015 Development Goals.

According to the second keynote speaker, **Mr CAO DUC PHAT, the Minister of Agriculture of Vietnam**, there seems to be a vicious circle: on the one hand, the increase in food production means land reclamation, deforestation and a greater use of water resources and energy, which increases GHG emissions; on the other hand, in order to combat the climate change it is necessary to reduce emissions. However, the case of Vietnam is different: since the 90s, a strong reform programme for agricultural development has been in place; the reform has given priority to the development of food production, a comprehensive land reform, the adoption of market mechanisms and substantial investments in rural infrastructure. Vietnam has become the second rice exporter in the world and the poverty rate (that was above 30%) is now down to 7.6%. In this respect, Mr CAO DUC PHAT acknowledges the support received from the international community, which will also be crucial to reach the Millennium Development Goals and in view of the UN Zero Hunger Challenge. New technologies will be vital in order to face two major

challenges: improving competitiveness and responding to climate change. ASEP can play a key role to foster cooperation in these areas.

Discussion

Ms Paloniemi, an MP from Finland and co-chair of panel 2, thanked Italy for the good organisation of the meeting and stressed the importance that ASEP attaches to the issues of sustainable growth and food security, in line with the Laos Conference held two years ago. On that occasion the topic of food security was addressed in close connection with the issue of access to water and land. She also noted that agriculture remains the highest-employment sector in the majority of developing countries.

Ms Paloniemi stressed the need to develop policies aimed at combating climate change and to encourage the involvement of the private sector and civil society in the development of environmental protection measures in order to contribute to change development and consumption patterns.

With regard to ASEM, the leaders from participating countries stressed the need to manage sustainable resources and to cooperate and exchange experiences and good practices. ASEM, which brings together both producing and consumer countries at different economic development levels, provides a good platform for cooperation and consultation on sustainable growth and food security issues.

Mr Li Yang, MP from China, stressed that the governments' commitment to sustainable development must be based on common responsibilities, although the differences between developing countries and developed countries should be taken into account: the former must give priority to the fight against poverty, while the latter must engage in reducing excessive consumption and support developing countries by providing resources, funding and technology. Other common responsibilities of our countries are the development of a green economy, with a view to improving the quality of life of the people, providing support to the UN initiatives in this field and commitment for worldwide peace and stability. China has adopted a food security strategy based on the principle of self-sufficiency and support to exports that has accounted for 10 years of uninterrupted growth. And it is shoulder-to-shoulder with the international community in the fight against hunger in the world

Mr. Shunichi SUZUKI (Japan) - After recalling that Japan depends on food imports because the Country is not self-sufficient in the area of food production, Hon. SUZUKI (Japan) confirmed Japan's commitment to uphold and promote the principles of responsible investments at the international level so as to increase agricultural production to the advantage not only of investors but also of small farmers.

Mr Laszlo BORBELY (Romania) stressed the importance of the present global debate on post 2015 Development Goals and expressed the need to place food security at the core of the debate. Development policies are linked to the efforts to fight climate change and curb CO2 emissions. Agriculture development models should rely on integrated tools to increase efficiency and promote research and innovation in this sector. The initiative to create a global reserve to contain prices and reduce damage from droughts should be promoted at the international level. Mr Borbely welcomed the choice of the Italian Government to devote EXPO 2015 to these issues and recalled the importance of the role of MPs in fostering development and the rule of law.

Mrs Dolors MONTSERRAT Second deputy Speaker (Spain) pointed out that the world population is expected to reach 12 billion by 2100 and all will have the right to food. Farmland will progressively diminish and agricultural efficiency will have to increase by having recourse to technology to boost productivity.

She stated that the world hunger map is changing. An increasing number of people who suffer from hunger live in middle-income countries. There is no longer a difference between north and south, whereas inequalities are increasingly found within individual countries. A joint effort by governments, civil society and women is required. She stressed the importance of the 2015 Paris Summit where a global agreement on climate will have to be reached. MPs can play a major role in promoting agreements and ensuring enforcement in national legislation. She concluded by calling for a commitment to guarantee the future of the new generations.

Mrs Romana JERKOVIĆ (Croatia) recalled that his Country will be joining ASEM at the next Milan Meeting and stated that it is some time that national legislation has been taking measures to adapt to the European directives on food security. She deems that the food security issue and the challenge posed by climate change require not only technological solutions but above all political solutions, as well as a holistic approach and greater interaction between decision-makers and researchers.

Ms Maria Tolpannen, MP from the Parliament of **Finland**, underlined the importance of access to clean water, which is a daily struggle in many parts of the world. This difficulty is compounded by such challenges as climate change, urbanization and industrialization. It may also pose security problems in terms of conflict generation and impact on migration flows. Ms Tolpannen stressed the need to increase international cooperation on these issues.

Dartin Paduka Hajah Salbiah (Brunei Darussalam). The contribution focused on the agricultural and food supply situation in Brunei that, owing to the small size of the Country and to the paucity of farmland has to import most of its food. The Government therefore intends to increase rice production in order to reach self-sufficiency, also with the support of the private sector. Various strategies and incentives have been adopted, especially for the development of farmland for the production of high yield rice. Given the unfavourable weather conditions that make agricultural production difficult, it has been necessary to reach a balance between the increase in land use for agricultural purposes and environmental protection. Finally he expressed the hope that, within ASEAN, cooperation instruments be developed for agricultural production and that more binding agreements be reached on food security.

Mr Htay Myint, MP from Myanmar, stated that his country launched a strategy in favour of sustainable development which made it possible to reduce poverty among large sections of society. In this regard, the FAO recognised that Myanmar reached the Millennium Goals. He also underlined the need to improve and broaden the international cooperation fora in this field.

Mr Kittti WASINONDH from Thailand reported that his country responded to the 1997 economic crisis by adopting the so-called "Sufficient Economy" philosophy, i.e. a new approach whereby growth must be accompanied by social welfare measures. This has enabled Thailand to be unharmed by subsequent crises and to become ASEAN's second largest economy. Promoting modern technologies is crucial to

achieve sustainable growth, and ASEP can promote cooperation precisely in this area. Thailand will participate in Expo Milano 2015 with its own pavilion bearing the title "Nourishing and Delighting the World".

Ms Elena Fattori, Italian MP, stated that it is important to protect biodiversity. She recalled the issue of GMOs, the free trade agreements and non-tariff barriers in the EU-USA partnerships. She pointed out the risk that this agreement may undermine the precautionary principle, especially with regard to the use of chemical instruments in agriculture.

Ms Colomba Mongiello, Italian MP, addressed the issue of the counterfeiting of Italian agri-food products, which represents a major example of illegal activity and also poses serious risks for consumers' health.

Ms Mongiello expressed the hope that greater cooperation between European and Asian partners can be achieved, so as to rapidly achieve a mutual recognition of the European geographical indication system.

Mrs Sharon GARIN (Philippines) stressed the need to adopt concrete measures to combat food insecurity, which can lead to instability and conflicts. In particular, she said it is necessary to improve agricultural productivity by developing and promoting new technologies, eliminating protectionist barriers to free trade of agricultural products and ensuring greater coordination at international level.

Mr Sajid MIR (Pakistan) stressed that food security and the right to food are fundamental rights of all human beings. According to the FAO, malnutrition currently affects 800 million people. Agriculture is the basis of the economies of many of the countries represented at this meeting. The agricultural sector employs about 2 billion people, 40% of whom are women. In Pakistan, where a high percentage of the population suffers from food shortage, a ministry for food security has been established.

The path towards zero hunger and sustainable development should be undertaken jointly by all countries. Asia can learn a great deal from Europe and its historical experience of solving food-related problems. As to Asia, the more developed ASEAN partners can ensure financing and technology transfers in order to help reach the stated objectives. It is essential to foster the development of all countries in the context of open and fair trade relations.

Mr Chong SIN WOON, MP from Malaysia, underscored the need to ensure fair international trade relations which take into account the particular characteristics of developing countries. A better coordination at international level, especially in the Euro-Asian context, is necessary in order to address the world food crisis and prevent socio-economic imbalances in a number of countries.