

Food security and the right to food in the Mediterranean



BACKGROUND AND CHALLENGES

THE ISSUE OF FOOD will become a crucial problem for the whole region owing to:

- Growing population in the South and East of the Mediterranean, with almost 400 million people to feed by 2030,
- Rising nutritional imbalances and diseases linked to the gradual abort of the Mediterranean diet,
- Deteriorating ecosystems, global warming, reduction of available farming land and water resources, with serious effects on the potential of local production, which currently provides more than 25 million jobs in the region.

- Consequence: rising biological and economic food deficit, increased dependency on imports coming from instable international markets.

If nothing is done immediately, a social, economic and ecological disaster is inevitable in the fairly near future. The EU is directly concerned geopolitically and for its contribution to the right to food and sustainable development. It needs to react and go beyond the discussions on Euro-Mediterranean free trade agreements that have been dragging on for thirty years.

UFM'S PROPOSITIONS FOR ACTION

The EU must innovate by proposing a new Mediterranean policy for agriculture and food based on its half-century experience and principles of solidarity and co-development, along lines mechanisms that it knows how to devise and mobilize:

1. Encourage in SEMCs more local food production through significant investment in R&D and training, and by setting up institutions to organize CMO-type

(common market organization), inter-professional channels, plus regulations to improve product quality (regulations and labels);

2. Promote the Mediterranean diet by educating, developing geographic labels and setting up communication plans in UFM member countries and around the world, with a view to conquering domestic markets and increasing exports;
3. Create regional food security by stimulating North-South and South-South complementarity

via mid-term supply contracts, security stocks of strategic products (cereals and oleaginous plants) and Euro-Mediterranean commercial preference within the UFM for all food products.

These measures offer the two-fold advantage of being rapidly operational and relatively inexpensive. They could be implemented on a voluntary, co-financing basis for SEMCs after endorsement at the second UFM summit.

Food security in the Mediterranean is probably one of the most critical issues that the region will have to face in the forthcoming decades. The UFM should make it an immediate priority and go as far as drawing up an institutional framework suitable for devising and implementing a genuine food security policy in the form of a Euro-Mediterranean pact.

1. Food security in the Mediterranean: a major issue

FROM THE CONSUMER'S POINT OF VIEW, food security mirrors the "right to food" mentioned in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Although South and East Mediterranean countries are close to controlling malnutrition, the same cannot be said for the quality of their food nor for the safeguard of their culinary heritage. The fact is that in 2002, food-related illnesses were responsible for 55% of deaths in SEMCs (including the Balkans). Moreover, surveys show that the famous Mediterranean diet, viewed by nutritionists as ideal for health, is starting to disappear in the very countries that spent five millennia inventing it.

FROM A PRODUCTION POINT OF VIEW, the situation is also worrying in the whole of the Mediterranean region because of the significant pressure on land, water and markets. In addition to the limited potential of farming land (less than 85 million ha are farmable in the North African/Middle Eastern zone), there are insufficient water resources, as well as rising pressure from towns, industry and tourism. Climate change will exacerbate the situation and could lead to a drop in production of around 20% in the region. Food markets remain poorly organized and generally under-perform. They are marked by the duality of a modern sector working alongside a still widely prevalent traditional sector that weighs heavily in national economies. This situation explains, for the most part, the significant differences between the production levels of local businesses and companies dominating the international market.

FROM A GOVERNANCE POINT OF VIEW, SEMCs are characterized by insufficient field observation mechanisms (e.g. no health watch statistics, and no accounting information network on farming and the food industry), an absence of proper policy on food and nutrition, an erosion of farming policies after a period of structural adjustment (1980s), incomplete or rarely applied regulations on product quality, and a cumbersome informal sector.

If nothing is done, the worst food crises are yet to occur. All recent global forecasts indicate that the North Africa/Middle East zone has the highest deficit in terms of food availability per inhabitant, and that the situation is set to deteriorate in coming decades due to the rising gap between local productive resources and the needs of a rising population (380 million people in 2030 + 25% compared with 2010). This will automatically result in an explosive commercial bill (US\$ 16 billion in 2004-2006, +34% since 1995, + 80% in 2007-2008, probably doubling by around 2030).

2. The geopolitics of food security

A COMMON CAUSE OF FOOD CRISES is excessive deregulation. The belief that markets are capable of distributing resources and goods, managing risks and then transferring them to those who are best placed to bear them has blinded us. Rather than ourselves deciding what priority should be given to food, we have left the decision to financial markets, which treat raw materials, including food commodities, as assets.

The reasons behind the recent food crisis have not gone away. Once the price of a barrel of oil exceeds US\$ 80, biofuels become an attractive option, reducing the availability of cereals, oleaginous plants and sugar for food. When growth takes off in Asia, its imports of food products follow suit. As soon as a threat appears on the financial markets, investment funds start speculating on raw materials.

The same causes produce the same effects. The next food crisis might happen at any moment, bringing with it suffering and poverty for an increasing proportion of mankind. It risks being particularly violent in North Africa and the Middle East.

We can call for a deep-rooted reform of global raw materials markets and the introduction of more regulations, thus avoiding the traumas that arise when speculative bubbles burst. These might be joint changes or not. It is up to the G20 and global forums like the World Trade Organization, the

World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and UNCTAD, to promote this agenda and fight it out. France and the European Union have secured strong pledges to review international regulations on financial markets. Raw materials markets should be added to the package.

This action must be supported by a dynamic within the European Union. Discussions started on the “health check” of the Common Agricultural Policy would provide an opportunity for putting some order back into the drifts of exclusive management by the farming and food markets of Europe and the Mediterranean.

3. A food security action plan in three parts

THE OBJECTIVE BEHIND the suggested measures of the action is to reinforce regional food security. They fit into a perspective of sustainable development, based on neighbourhood solidarity.

Firstly, vigorous action is called for to improve the nutrition situation by promoting a standard Mediterranean diet that is both contemporary and rooted in history. Its uniqueness will be a means to conquer domestic markets and expand internationally. Information, education and communication campaigns will be necessary to consolidate and promote the Mediterranean diet. The information campaign would involve making an inventory of each country’s culinary heritage and creating a permanent observatory on nutrition. Education would involve teaching good food practices at all levels (primary, secondary and university) based on the Mediterranean diet. Communication would involve creating promotional tools to be used in the various media and circulated in Euro-Mediterranean countries and throughout the world.

THE SECOND PART deals with the increased production of local food in SEMCs thanks to a new institutional framework, technical and organizational innovation, and training. A policy on agriculture and food production, based on the concept of channels integrated in the territory, should stimulate economic stakeholders. A boost in R&D should result in improved agriculture and food production thanks to better managing of natural resources and the environment. Managerial qualifications resulting from ambitious training programmes should lead to gains in productivity at every stage.

This would involve taking the European Union’s experience of CEECs’ pre-accession and

using it to help SEMCs make a far-reaching reform of agriculture, leading to greater productivity while respecting criteria for sustainable development. A second item in this part would involve working with SEMCs to produce standards on quality, phytosanitation and traceability, by helping them agree and conform to European Union standards. An agreement to use European standards, coupled with broader cooperation in strengthening their monitoring institutions should be included in the Union for the Mediterranean’s agenda.

THE THIRD PART relates to instigating “collective food sovereignty”, based on the idea of complementarity and proximity, and involving the exchange of guarantees of supply against guarantees of market. This policy would be devised using three instruments that have proved efficient in Europe: (1) CMO (common market organizations) and (2) commercial preference, here extended to cover the Euro-Mediterranean area, in the domain of market regulation; (3) a system for protecting and promoting geographical indications (GIs) in the domain of local development; and (4) strengthening commercial relations by making mid-term supply contracts between the EU and SEMCs and creating a common security stock, collectively financed for by UFM countries.

4. Opportunities and challenges

TRANSFORMING AGRICULTURE in the South to make it more competitive will call for strong commitment from governments. For this reason, participation in this food security programme should be voluntary, involving countries set on making the necessary reforms for improving their consumption models and transforming their food production channels.

Through this initiative, the Union for the Mediterranean will demonstrate the active solidarity between its members and introduce cooperation into the agricultural and food industry sector – a sector that has done so much to alienate both shores of the Mediterranean.

This duty of solidarity is not the product of naïve selfless reasoning. It fits in with the interests of countries in the region for building strong bonds and favouring exchanges with their neighbours. Reform of agriculture and food production channels in South and East Mediterranean countries will obviously result in improved nutrition for inhabitants and a rise in purchasing power for countries whose leading commercial partner is the



European Union. It will also lead to more work opportunities for young people in these countries and reduce the temptation to emigrate and the tension it causes. It will ultimately ensure optimal supplies for food-producing companies, create outlets for agriculture and European industry, and thus jobs in the North.

If this project is to succeed, its main funding must come from the country that stands to gain most from it. Only in this way will it be responsible for its future and concerned by the efficiency of its policy. Cooperation should be simply a component, possibly substantial, but centred on supporting reform and not motivating it. The food crisis has

put the focus of policies and budgets back on agriculture; we all have lessons to learn from it.

More generally, the Euro-Mediterranean agricultural and food model prioritizes family farming and a dense fabric of food-producing and commercial SMEs, technologies tested by secular experience yet open to innovation, territorial rooting using GIs, and a diet now recognized for its health and social benefits the world over. All of this constitutes the basis of a regional sectorial policy that will allow us, together, to exist in the future thanks to our “outstanding capability” in the face of the globalization steamroller, and at the same time take up the challenges of sustainable development.

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