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# The Challenge of Food Security and Mediterranean Diet in the Euro-Mediterranean Area

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## Abstract

The Mediterranean Diet (MD) derived from the Greek word “*díaita*” according to nutritionists is a “traditional diet” which is adapted to all people living in countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea whose ancestors moved to the “cultivated food”. In recent years the MD has received worldwide attention particularly for its health impact. As indicated in the pioneer work of Ancel Keys and subsequently on that of many recent scholars. The lifestyle attached to the MD is the best medicine to reduce cardiovascular disease (CVD). The MD however, cannot be simply identified with the “food” but must be seen as a holistic concept which promotes first of all social integration among the principal actors, which is derived by the practice of eating together, but also by the common practices of cultivation and harvesting linked to a seasonal calendar marked by nature and religious or ritual meanings attached to the rural life. For this reason in 2010 the MD received inscription on the UNESCO Representative list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. This paper highlights how focusing on the protection and promotion of the MD could be made possible to strengthen the Mediterranean countries from both economic and socio-cultural point of view. In this perspective the Mediterranean basin could emerge as an area of convergence between countries and regions in North and South of its shores. This would be possible through the creation of a partnership that aims at the production of goods of “Mediterranean quality”. The role of women in this context has been particularly considered essential in the transmission of expertise well as knowledge of rituals, traditional gestures, celebrations and safeguarding of techniques at the base of the protection of the MD.

**Keywords:** Mediterranean Diet, Food Security, Euro Mediterranean Cooperation

## INTRODUCTION

The Mediterranean Diet (MD), from the Greek word “*díaita*” according to nutritionists is a “traditional diet” which is adapted to people living in countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea whose ancestors moved to the “cultivated food”. It can be described as a unique lifestyle composed of a mosaic variation manifested through related festivals and celebrations which determines a circular line that touches Spain and passes through the south of France to include Italy, Corfu, Greece and encompasses the Asian and the North African countries.

In recent years the MD has received worldwide attention particularly for its health impact as indicated in the pioneer work of Ancel et al; (1980) and subsequently on that of many recent scholars ( Simopoulos et al; 2000, Parker 2007, Estruch et al; 2013) the lifestyle attached to the MD is the best medicine to reduce cardiovascular disease (CVD).

In 2010, four countries - Italy, Greece, Morocco and Spain geographically distant from each other have proposed the nomination of the MD for inscription on the UNESCO Representative list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Nominations file no. 00394 for inscription on the representative list of the intangible cultural heritage in 2010. Convention for the safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Fifth session Nairobi, Kenya November 2010



**Figure 1** :Mediterranean Countries

Source: Pace G. (2003) *Economie Mediterranee Rapporto 2003 ESI*, Napoli

As indicated in the justification given for the nomination, the Mediterranean Diet is a “social practice based on the set of skills, knowledge, practices and traditions ranging from the landscape to the cuisine which in the Mediterranean basin pertains to the crops, harvesting, fishing, conservation, processing, preparation and particularly consumption”.....” The Mediterranean Diet offers a nutritional model enriched by diverse cultures which over centuries has essentially maintained the same food structure in the same proportion: olive oil, grains and derivatives, fresh fruits and vegetables, nuts, and to a lesser extent, fish, dairy products and meat, with an essential presence of condiments and spices, a moderate consumption of wine or tea during meals while respecting religious rules and beliefs”.

As a result the MD cannot simply be identified with the “food” but must be seen as a holistic concept which promotes first of all social integration among the principal actors which is derived by the practice of eating together but also by the common practices of cultivation and harvesting linked to a seasonal calendar marked by nature and religious or ritual meanings attached to the rural life<sup>5</sup>. In this way while respecting the territory and its biodiversity the MD has lead through the years to the creation of a system rooted in respect for the territory and ensured the conservation and development of traditional activities and crafts related to fishing and farming among the communities of the Mediterranean countries, thereby, guaranteeing the balance between the conservation of territory and the development of people living in the territory.

The values underlining the concept/vision of MD are hence, fundamental for the MD to play a pivotal role leading to economic growth and sustainable territorial development. In fact, this vision gives plenty of room for the enterprises and

<sup>5</sup> In this context it is important to underline that women play a very important role in the transmission of expertise, in the recreation of the rituals, traditional gestures and celebrations, in the safeguarding of techniques, in the respect for the seasonal rhythms and the inclusion of all cultural, social and environmental values of the element in the education of the new generations in the process of food safety.

the entrepreneurs to be together with the communities as well as the institutions, the main actors for the construction of a new growth pattern leading to sustainable growth model.

It is in fact, through the coordination and rationalization of the potentialities and the vocations of the territory that it is possible to develop an “organic system” capable of producing wealth and employment and increase both from an individual and a collective point of view, the national and international competitiveness of the geographical areas and that of the communities therein encouraging the creation of strategic partnerships between different actors, both inside and outside the Mediterranean area.

In recent years the renewed interest in the Mediterranean diet both scientific, cultural and economic terms have been reflected in numerous initiatives. Lastly, the nomination of MD to the UNESCO four communities belonging to the Mediterranean countries- Soria in Spain, Koroni in Greece, Chefchaouen in Morocco and the Cilento in Italy. As result there have been among them the joint launch of multidisciplinary studies and analyses, as well as bills and specific legislation and in the Cilento, the establishment of an Observatory, the International Centre of the Mediterranean Diet of Pollica and the Living Museum of Poplars dedicated to Ancestral Keys.

In this perspective, the agriculture and the agrofood sector can be seen as powerful tools for economic growth, contributing to sustain the economies of the Mediterranean countries particularly hit by the multiple crisis of the last decade<sup>6</sup>.

So far, the share of agriculture to the economy's GDP has been often interpreted by policy makers as a signal to drastically change the growth strategies by mainly focusing on non-agricultural activities. Thus, efforts towards reviving rural areas via agricultural activities were either totally suspended or undermined with devastated effects upon the rural economy.

The onset of the current economic crisis has however, strengthen the position of those among the policy makers and to the society as whole that believe that development policies must be re-examined and reassessed in order to identify new development trajectories. In this respect the agrofood chain connecting hundreds of local enterprises with thousands consumers and producers is the only chain in the economy that can bring together and integrate numerous of economic activities offering a unique opportunity to rural development, which consequently can reinvigorate the whole national economy<sup>7</sup>. Rural development around a dynamic and effective agrofood chain can offer economic stability, social coherence and a sustainable growth path. This holds peculiarity for the Mediterranean countries with their multi-crop agro-production structure and mild climate which allows them to produce and trade highly demanded products like fruits, vegetables, nuts, olive oil etc. all of which are integral part of the MD.

However, agricultural systems in general and in particular those related to the MD continued to reflect the countries' social problems and economic contradictions as well as the limits to the management of scarce natural resources. The agricultural sector is faced with the problem of climate change and the need to guarantee food security which has been severely compromised by the volatility of international prices of basic foodstuff supplied to markets and local processing industries.

### **Volatile food prices and hidden hunger (vulnerable groups), its impact on food consumption**

In a purely descriptive way volatility refers to variations in economic variables; when dealing with agriculture we refer to variations in agricultural prices over time. Variations in prices become problematic when they are high and cannot be anticipated and, as a result, create a level of uncertainty which increases risks for producers, traders, consumers and governments and may lead to sub-optimal decisions leading to incorrect decisions.

Low or volatile prices pose significant problems for farmers and other agents in food chains who risk losing their productive investments if price falls while they are locked into strategies dependent on higher price levels to be viable. Farmers who have already planted their crop are the classic example. Poor small holders who do not have access to credit may have difficulty financing the crucial inputs needed to plant again and stay in business; thus, both the welfare of the family and the viability of the farm may be threatened by excessive volatility. This kind of problems may be particularly severe for the female smallholders who are in the majority in many developing (and even in some more advanced) countries<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Some critical issues related to the euro-Mediterranean context should be noted. While remaining significant structural differences between the countries of the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean basin, the similarity in the climate and in the common culture also means that there are similarity in the type of foods and genres of productions. Issues related to environmental degradation, climate change, air pollution are also common to both the south banks and the north shores of the Mediterranean basin as well as from 2008, the existence of multiple crises (economic, financial, social, political).

<sup>7</sup> Mattas K., Loizou E., (2013).

<sup>8</sup> Small farmers may not be operating on a sufficient scale to be able to carry over income from one season to another.

On a general level agricultural prices volatility determine concerns about food security, and since food accounts for a very high share of the total budget of the poorest households, the effect of rises in commodity prices is felt more strongly among the vulnerable groups. In fact, when food prices are high poor households find their nutrition status (especially of pregnant women, children and those affected by long-term diseases such as HIV), as well as their capacity to purchase education, health care, or other basic needs compromised. Typically the effects are felt more strongly by women and particularly by the children<sup>9</sup> with tragic consequences for the individuals and for the future prosperity of the countries where they live. This is not only an issue of concern for the affected countries, but also for humanitarian agencies and the international community who often are left to deal with the aftermaths of food crises.

The last decade, particularly the second part of it, has been one of extraordinary food price volatility; prices rose sharply in 2006, 2007 and in the first half of 2008. For some products the run-up between the average of 2005 and the peak was several hundred percent<sup>10</sup>. Prices then fell sharply in the second half of 2008, although they remained at or above the levels in the period just before the rise in prices began. Market tensions emerged again during 2010 and there have been sharp rise in some food prices. The general trend of the FAO food price index has been one of continuous increase, reaching record highs in the first quarter of 2011, between March 2010 and March 2011, there was a 60% rise in the price index for cereals produced in the area and the prices remained high over the 2011-2012 period. Overall it is possible to say that the sharp increase in consumer price had a strong impact on the population of the Mediterranean countries of the Middle East and North Africa (McMENA)<sup>11</sup> which together with the European Mediterranean countries (EMC) are the focus of this study. The lowest bracket of the population which is very sensitive to even small food price changes was in fact particularly hit<sup>12</sup>; for this reason price movements were seen by many as an additional trigger for the protests which erupted in several McMENA which<sup>13</sup> are net importer of basic food stuff such as cereals.

To better understand the impact of price volatility on food patterns and on the standard of living of the people it is useful to pay attention on the dietary pattern and food balance sheet of the countries of our analysis. The extreme variety of the standards of living in the euro-Mediterranean countries can give the impression that speaking of a common dietary pattern is an over simplification. The data on the food patterns provided by the FAO for different macro regions and in different periods, however, it allow us to outline the main characteristics of the internal availability of primary food products and their use, as well as to highlight and compare the different diets, in order to identify the common patterns. This is especially useful if one want to underline the role that the MD has, or may have in stimulating the process of growth and development in the macro Mediterranean area.

Focusing on the diet used in the Middle East countries for example, with the exception of Lebanon, where the diet is more diversified, grains is still the basis of nutrition and contribute to about half of the average caloric intake of the population. Grain importance is greater where food problems remain high due to the disparities in the distribution of resources both within the same nation and different countries. in this context, in fact, grains remain main source of proteins for the lowest bracket of the population. Moving to the countries of the Southern Mediterranean, we observed that they follow closely the trend observed for the Middle East countries. In this area the main cereal consumption is made up of wheat, followed by barley and corn. In both areas, however, one should always keep in mind the diversity between the rural and urban environment both as regards the "weight" of grains in the structure of the food balance and the type of consumption<sup>14</sup>.

Apart from cereals, the pattern of food consumption in the Middle East is different to some extent from the traditional countries of the southern Mediterranean basin due to the limited presence of legumes mainly used for animal feed. The

<sup>9</sup> Particularly severe are the effects on children – stunting and cognitive loss often occurring as a result of inadequate nourishment during the first 1 000 days after conception.

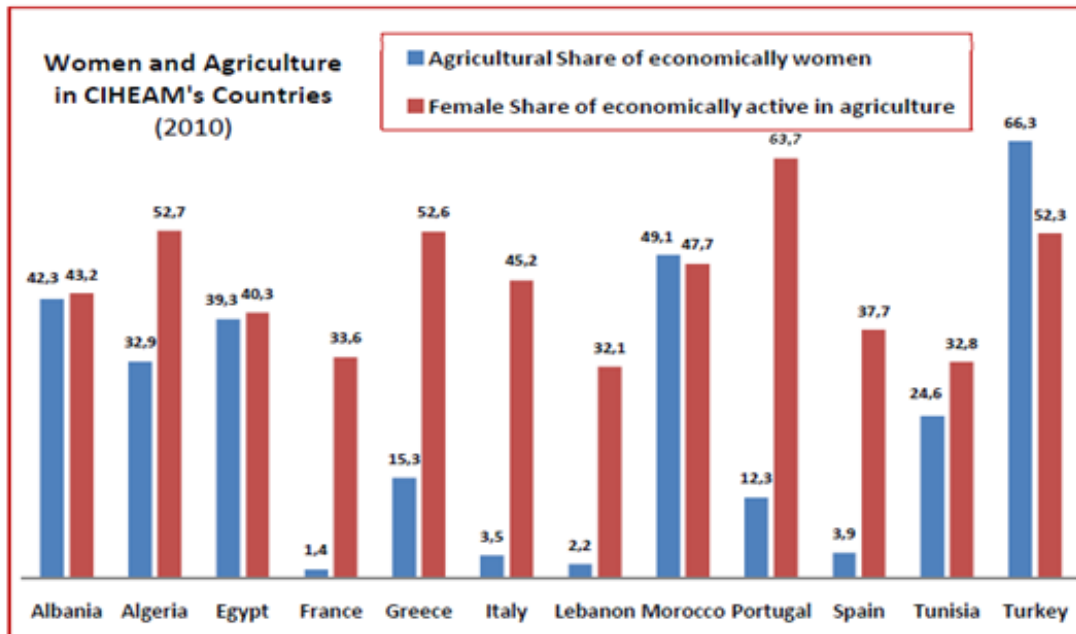
<sup>10</sup> On the rice market the price explosion was particularly pronounced. The price rises caused grave hardship among the poor and were a major factor in the increase in the number of people hunger inferno to more than one billion

<sup>11</sup> Egypt, Syria, Tunisia.

<sup>12</sup> Considering that they consume between 35 and 65 % on their income on food (ESCWA 2010). For example more than 21% of the population fall below the 1.25 \$ per day level in Mauritania while 12% fall below the 2\$ 5 per day level in Tunisia and Morocco and 18.5% in Egypt.

<sup>13</sup> The World Bank (2010) estimated that the impact on the import bill of a 50% increase in the price of wheat would correspond to 0.4-0.5% of the GDP of countries like Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, or Egypt. The share of subsidies for cereals in the current budgets of these countries has reached record levels but at the same time the increase in international prices did not come about all on its own. For countries like Morocco it may correspond to 4% of GDP in 2011 and certainly poses a threat to social order in the MENA countries, Escribano G., (2011), CIHEAM, (2011)

<sup>14</sup> Among urban populations the diversification of food purchases leaves a smaller place to cereals with higher consumption levels for imported products characteristic of the Western patterns of consumption based in particular on animal products and processed food products. In addition, there is difference between what is consumed in an urban and rural environment, the former consumed mainly wheat, while the latter consumed mainly different type of food grains. cfr. CIHEAM.-IAM, (1984).



Source : FAO, SOFA Report 2010-2011. Chart prepared by CIHEAM.

Figure 2. Women Participation in Agriculture

preponderance in the diet of meat but also milk and eggs to the detriment of leguminous plants indicates an improvement in nutritional status that is certainly an indication of the progress made over the past few years and the evolution of the dietary patterns of the population towards the consumption pattern of the developed economies. However, if on the one hand there has been an increase in the nutritional status and food consumption levels of the vast majority of the population, and on the other hand it is possible to observe that food supply is inadequate to respond to the domestic demand and hence, the consequent financial difficulties of many countries arising from the need to import large quantity of food. The rapid increase in food consumption in the countries of the Southern Mediterranean has been covered in most cases through a growing reliance on foreign markets, demonstrating that local agriculture does not play more than a marginal role in the local food supply.

Moving to analyse the pattern of food consumption in the EMC we can observe that particularly in the last decade, these have gone to significant changes; different variables can be identified among the causes of such consumption changes. Demography in the first place, EMC are characterized, in fact, by a “zero” growth rate of the population and a fast aging patterns, concurrently there has been a diminution of the dimension of the families with an increase in the number of single. As a result there have been changes in the alimentary diet as well as in the individual consumption patterns; such alimentary transformation in the EMC has been sharpened by the increase of the immigrants with their different culture, alimentary patterns and new alimentary needs.

Other important factors to be considered when observing the modifications in the consumption and dietary patterns are the trend of per capita income, the changes in the number of income earners within households, the trend in food prices which is often linked to transformation occurred in the food distribution chain, the changes in the lifestyle of the population and the changes in their working conditions<sup>15</sup>. A “time saving” approach has hence emerged when choosing what to buy as food in general and what to eat as meals during the working hours. These transformations have determined a re-allocation of the family budget which has resulted into a penalization of the food consumption turning the products into “commodities”. Special prices, sales, promotion such as “buy 2 and pay 3”, have become a paradigm in the daily research of the consumer for the food commodities producing a dangerous loop that risk to destabilise the traditional food productive system. Globalization when applied to the food market, has in fact as corollary the emergency

<sup>15</sup> Eating out, new work schedules, use of leisure time, travel, etc.. that led to changes in the way people use to eat and in what they eat with the use of “ready meals” and a “time saving” approach when choosing what to buy as food and what to eat as meals during the working hours.

of a global consumer who is homologated in terms of taste and follow a standardised models of consumption. On the other hand the improvement in the level of education of the average consumer and the attention towards the environment, the health issues and a “green economy” have also increased the number of those who are much more selective in the choice of products they buy particularly when it come to food products. As a result in the last decade there has been a renewed interest and attention to food models which are linked to the local traditions and to typical products such as the MD.

All of the above consideration together with the inevitable further development of the scientific knowledge on the relationship between food intake and health will undoubtedly provoke further changes in the models of consumption in all European-Mediterranean countries in the short and medium term. It is to wish that such changes can come true without the eradication of life style attached to MD safeguarding the variety of their products and above all defending the culture and the local alimentary traditions.

### **The role of gender in the euro-Mediterranean food security**

In this context, it is important to underline that one of the reasons why agriculture particularly in developing countries is performing below its capacity is because it does not fully utilize and valorize the work done by the women considering that they represent 70-80 % of the workforce in agriculture and constitute more than half of the rural poor<sup>16</sup>. When focusing at the whole Mediterranean area, even though women farmers tend only to work on small-scale family farms they still make an active contribution to economic and social development in their regions and play an essential role in maintaining food security and keeping alive and developing the rural sector. Despite the importance of their role, very few statistics are available on women engaged in “Mediterranean agriculture”, particularly with regards to those living on the southern shore of the Mediterranean basin. Available statistics indicate that the percentage of women in the active agricultural population varies from 40% in Italy to 70% in Turkey.

Beside the statistics, even in different national contexts the experience of the female agricultural community is similar particularly in terms of:

- professional recognition and the access to goods and services that comes with it;
- initial and continuous training in technical and non-technical subjects;
- the severity of the work and working conditions;
- the difficulty of reconciling professional and family life;
- the number of female farmers in agricultural organisations and their authority to make decisions.

These data suggest that only if gender equitable opportunities are ensured efforts by national governments and international community to achieve agricultural growth, poverty reduction and food security can be realized. Women have a capacity for innovation which they can use to advance economic and social development in rural areas and they also assume an essential role in helping to maintain food security. Equality of opportunity between men and women in the agricultural world should therefore be a priority since it is in the interest of all players particularly in the Mediterranean Region.

Women's role and their contribution to the themes directly linked to the food consumption and thus indirectly to the peculiarities of the MD is in itself a theme that offers much “food for thought”. Recent experiences show that women are able to elaborate the old traditional agricultural role held in the past and to link it to the present values. Such cultural role is fundamental for our survival as it is confirmed by the new models of sustainable agriculture which is becoming more and more multifunctional.

Multi functionality means developing functions other than production at the farm. They may be environmental (contributing to the sustainability of rural areas and maintenance of landscapes), social (maintaining cultural diversity and safeguarding heritage), or economic (through the leverage effects of agriculture on other economic activities).

This new approach to development has been encouraged by public policies launched in accordance with the EU Strategic Guidelines based on the concept of multi functionality in agriculture. Accordingly, it is necessary to stimulate the rural economy and improve the quality of life of the populations therein notably by promoting and creating new kinds of job<sup>17</sup>.

This new concept helps the authorities move beyond the traditional idea of agriculture and include innovative strategies in national rural development policies. These strategies are intended to help agricultural undertakings, discover new economic opportunities by encouraging an optimum use of local resources, promoting greater awareness of

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<sup>16</sup> According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) women produce between 60 and 80 percent of the food in most developing countries and are responsible for half of the world's food production

<sup>17</sup> The characteristic features of most companies managed by women are efficiency, innovation and dynamism and they are more inclined to embrace diversification and multi functionality.



environmental, cultural and traditional factors, and fostering integrated development of deprived areas. Many multifunctional concerns thus, operate as “sentinels”, conserving and managing natural resources such as water, soil and vegetation, which are essential to the development of agricultural activities. In this way multi functionality in agriculture routinely associates production with social and ecological work.

According to this philosophy, agriculture not only supplies foodstuffs, but also provides a wide range of non-tradable services while protecting the environment. The importance of these functions is increasingly acknowledged by our societies. Furthermore, unlike diversification, which may result in the relinquishment of the primary function of agriculture, the adoption of multifunctional practices actually reinforces the productive function of agricultural concerns. All of the above is perfectly in line with the definition of MD given by the UNESCO.

### **Background to the gender issue in development policies**

Nineteen-sixties: development policies focused on the needs of poor women in their capacity as wives and mothers. Women were to benefit from improvements in the economic situation of their husbands. They would be passive beneficiaries of these improvements.

- Nineteen-seventies and nineteen-eighties: development policies were based on the idea of integrating women into the development process and were aimed at activities specific to women. But although many projects improved health, income and resources, they failed to right the male-female imbalance and several of them founded.

- Nineteen-nineties: development policies were designed to do away with social, economic and political disparities between women and men with a view to achieving overall development.

- Since the beginning of the twenty-first century: development policies have been based on gender and encourage women to enhance their role through self-help.

- Gender equality is one of the main pillars of the equal opportunities policy in Europe. A large number of issues are regulated in this legislation including access to employment, working conditions, payment for work performed, social security entitlements, self-employment and the protection of women during pregnancy and motherhood. The opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on “The role of rural women in sustainable development of the agriculture of the European Union”, refers to specific problems when co-ownership is not acknowledged and considers that: “...urgent efforts should be made to achieve recognition of the work carried out by spouses on the farm, in the countries where it does not occur, and regarding contributions to the social security scheme, a possible route to take would be the introduction of a single payment for self-employed and co-workers”.

The European Parliament asked the Commission to re-examine the Directive 86/613/CEE, in particular to improve the situation of assistant spouses in agriculture and to include mechanism to improve the implementation of the principle of equality of treatment between men and women and increase the participation of women in self-employed activities. The report concluded that the best option to reach these objectives would be the proposal of modifications to strengthen Directive 86/613/CEE. The new European directive is still only a proposal to date.

During the Spanish Presidency of the Council in the first half of 2010 one of the priority issues for the Ministry of the Environment and Rural and Marine Affairs has been to introduce the focus of gender into the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Some of the conclusions reached during the technical seminar on “The role of women in rural development” held in Cáceres in April 2010 are highlighted:

- Introduce the focus of gender into the debate of the future of the CAP, having reached a consensus between all member countries to that effect.

- Enhance, especially within the EU, viable formulas to guarantee women farm co-ownership to favour their visibility and financial independence.

- Break down data according to gender in the official statistics and indicators of the Rural Development Policies conferring greater visibility to women.

Even though changes in legislation have not been made in the current CAP the issue of rural women has been placed on the agenda for discussion in the programming period of the CAP beyond 2013. Therefore, with the backing of all the Member States and with the fundamental support of the Commission, the European Parliament is also taking up this matter and it is envisaged that in October 2010 the Commission of Rural Development and Agriculture will publish a Report on this issue, considered equally important by this institution

### **The peculiarity of Mediterranean food trade and hypothesis of cooperation**

To understand the role that the MD play in promoting regional development and then to identify concrete opportunities of cooperation between groups of countries included in the area it is necessary to briefly look at the role of the agricultural



trade with a particular focus on the trade of those products associated to the MD and their role on the internal trade and food balance of the countries belonging to the North and South shores of the Mediterranean basin.

The significant role that the agricultural sector still have in many Mediterranean countries both socially due to the large population density in rural areas and the number of people actively engaged in agriculture and **economic** for the contribution that agriculture has in the economy, has meant that trade relations between North and South countries of the Mediterranean sea have always been particularly sensitive.

The high sensitivity of the agricultural food production to the impact of the free trade area, has led, in fact, both the EU and the Mediterranean partners to erect a protectionist and articulated structure and to date has been a barrier to the creation of a common agricultural market<sup>18</sup>. The system of concessions negotiated between the parties is, in fact, restricted to certain products "specifically" produced in the region and in particular, fruit and vegetables, wheat and meat. Under the agreements, depending on the product, either the total elimination of tariffs or "only" the elimination of the ad valorem part of the products for which there is a system of entry prices were negotiated. This has been done for many fruit and vegetables that fall within the list of sensitive products. These tariff concessions are also subject to a number of seasonal constraints of a quantitative nature; all that make the EU agricultural preferences system very similar to those that characterized the agreements of the '70s. Turning our attention on the southern front, the level of protection to importation of food products from the EU continuously remained high particularly in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Syria and Turkey. In addition, there are non-tariff barriers whose ad valorem equivalent values may reach also the 40 %, which, when added to the standard tariff protection determine a level of protection that reaches in some cases even 60%<sup>19</sup>. There is, however, the will to a total elimination of customs duties or their reduction within tariff quotas, while still keeping a high level of protection for products defined as "continental". The recent agreement on agro-food trade signed with Morocco in February 2012 is an important step in this direction aiming to a profound transformation in the trade agreements between the southern Mediterranean countries<sup>20</sup>. The EU-Morocco agreement in some ways, tends to limit the distortions of Moroccan goods on the European market, but on the other hands it also requires the compliance with the health standards for food products of Moroccan origin.

A similar analysis can be done with reference to the Mediterranean countries of the Western Balkans (Croatia, Albania and Montenegro) and Turkey whose food products are, however subject to the preferential conditions established by a Decision of the Board of EC-Turkey Association in 1998. For this group of countries there are a number of agreements that provide mutual concessions concerning the totality of non - food products ranging from complete abolition of customs duties and measures having equivalent effect, only the elimination of the ad valorem part of the duty, particularly for the fruit and fresh vegetables exported to the EU. Given the importance that agriculture plays also for this group of countries, a transitional period from the entry into force of the agreements as been put in place to negotiate further concessions in order to come to a complete liberalization of agricultural products.

In summary, looking at the evolution of the structure of trade between each country of the EU and the Mediterranean countries outside the EU (understood as the partner countries) in the period 1996-2010, the analysis of agro-food trade<sup>21</sup> shows a complex positive dynamic with an average increase in the volume of trade equal to 6.1% per year, specifically, there is a positive trend in volume of the exports (+4.8%) and equally of the imports (+7.9 %). France is the main partner with an average 44.5 % of trading volumes in the period 2006-10, followed by Italy (25.2%), Spain (20.0%) and Greece (6.4%). Very modest is the weight of Cyprus, Malta and Slovenia which together intercept the remaining 3.9% of the volume of agro-food trade.

The analysis of the bilateral trade highlights some of the main factors affecting the trade relations between the countries of the area.

The historical colonial relations continue to exert a significant influence as in the case of France which has consolidated and intensified the agro-food trade with some of its former colonies. The distance between the trading countries is another determinant of the intensity of trade between the two groups of countries; vicinity results in intense flows of goods between the countries. Preferential treatment, on the other hands are often accompanied by an extensive system of import quotas and calendars that results in a progressive reduction of the intensity of agro-food trade between EU countries bordering the Mediterranean and partners in North Africa and the Near East.

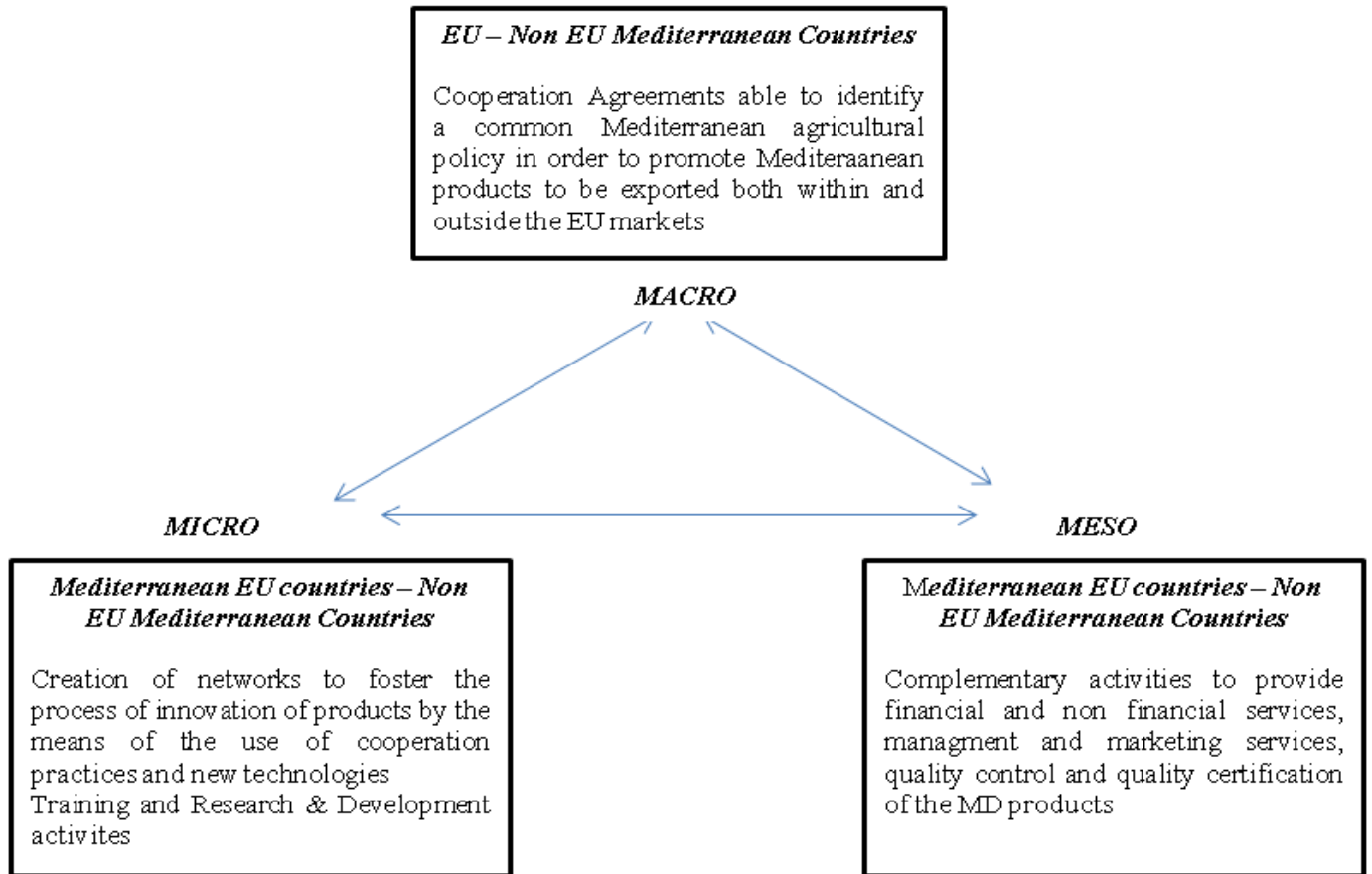
<sup>18</sup> In the initial stage of the European-Mediterranean negotiations the agricultural issue was deliberately put aside for the elevated sensibility of the sector; in 2003 it was a central issue both in 2003 during the European-Mediterranean agriculture summit in Venice and subsequently in 2005, when the EU has announced the opening of the agricultural negotiations with the Mediterranean third Countries. CIHEAM, (2010)

<sup>19</sup> Femise (2010), Le Partenariat Euro-Méditerranéen à la croisée des chemins. Available at [www.femise.org](http://www.femise.org)

<sup>20</sup> Such agreement, signed despite the strong dissent manifested by the Spanish, French and Italian producers, it foresees the elimination of the 55% of the customs duties on the agricultural and of fishing products coming from Morocco and the 70% of those coming from the EU, in a 10 year-old period.

<sup>21</sup> United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database, <http://comtrade.un.org/>

### Bilateral Cooperation



### Decentralised Cooperation

*Involving the participation of both local communities, civil society organisation and local institution*

**Figure 3** Possible form of Cooperation  
Source: Own Elaboration

The association agreements that over the last fifteen years should have been instrumental in helping to support the euro-Mediterranean integration process have played a very negligible role in strengthening the trade between the signatory countries. In this context, the obvious difficulty of composing conflicts that arise between the need to safeguard the agricultural development of its European partners and the development needs of the countries belonging to the McMENA could be overcome through the creation of a partnership that allows the inclusion of both actors through coordinated actions aimed at the production of typical Mediterranean goods so that their quality can be associated to the MD.

Agricultural development would then be connected with issues such as product differentiation, quality assurance, the increase in the value-added content through the application of new technologies, the systemic organization of production and distribution. Underlying this objective is the need to create a network of stakeholders seen as an organizational form of the productive forces that allows the diffusion of knowledge between the productive structures of the two areas and between the different actors of the cooperation process. At the centre for the success of this new form of euro-Mediterranean integration is the development of a South-South process of integration, a process which could promote the diffusion of economies of scale that would compensate the limited size of domestic markets while at the same time increase the level of attractiveness of the area for foreign investment. This form of regional integration which is a key component or more properly an inescapable prerequisite to achieve a form of sustainable development encompassing

the whole Mediterranean area is far to be developed. Even the most innovative countries - Turkey, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan – in fact, have, during the year, focused much more on strengthening their relations with Europe and the rest of the world rather than with the other countries.

To develop an effective economic cooperation, different actors at different levels, that is macro-level governments, micro level the businesses and meso level the institutions and service organizations, should interact with each other; aside from the macro level, it is mainly the other two levels to play an important role. The private sector and the enterprises play an important role in the agro-industrial/food sector by creating jobs and spreading an entrepreneurial spirit, which is a necessary prerequisite for the emergence of new forms of internationalization and related technological exchanges. On the other hand it is clear that the business cooperation can only take place through organizations and institutions that provide financial and other non financial services.

Local authorities have the task of promoting new forms of territorial organization, promoting new form of aggregation with the participation and the cooperation of the principal stakeholders/actors following shared strategies aimed at the implementation of integrated projects, this is in line with the EU policy for the “depressed areas”.

## CONCLUSION

Beside being one of the strengths of the Mediterranean economy, the agrofood sector has specific characteristics known all over the world, these need to be strengthened and adapted to the different needs of the international market. At the same time it is necessary to approach this sector in an innovative way so as to identify and promote new productive chains that can be integrated with different sectors such as tourism and the specific cultures of the Mediterranean basin. In this sense, the Mediterranean diet characterized by a nutritional model that respects the traditions of each community, bring together under the vestige of culture both the food and the agriculture which are common elements to all the countries of the Mediterranean basin.

In a long-term scenario, the presence among the Mediterranean countries of similarities and complementarities for genres and sectors of production, as well as the challenges posed by the current economic and social multiple crises, could contribute through specific cooperation strategies, to create the necessary conditions for the definition of a sustainable development policy based around the MD. Indeed the MD is a intangible heritage to be safeguarded and enhanced, beside including all aspect related to the crops production, harvesting, fishing, conservation, processing, preparation and consumption of food, it promotes social interaction through the sharing of the meal and the transmission of a considerable body of knowledge. Specifically, the practice of the Mediterranean diet is based on the respect for the territory and the biodiversity and ensures the conservation and the development of traditional activities and crafts as well as the revitalization of the Mediterranean way of life. For the local communities the MD is also a fundamental element of aggregation and social cohesion leads to the development of its culture and represents a sustainable lifestyle. The diffusion of the MD may be instrumental to revive the fortunes of many of the rural centers throughout the area that in the course of the years have been emptied of its citizens and lost the roles for which they were created.

In this perspective, the Mediterranean basin could emerge as an area of convergence between countries and regions in North and South of its shores. This would be possible through the creation of a partnership that aims to the production of goods of “Mediterranean quality”. From the macro point of view this means a coordinated action of all the main actors in the international economic scene. The circulation of knowledge between the productive structures of both groups of countries and dissemination of comprehensive information on the reference markets could reduce the existing gaps and in this case new scenarios could be drawn different from those of today. A cost structure which is difficult to replicate, production specialization and the ability to change its offer in response to the changing needs of foreign markets would become, in fact, for the countries of the Mediterranean area competitive advantages. From the micro point of view, concepts like landscape, Mediterranean diet, planning become the keywords to address land issues as a form of sustainable development. The argument pursued is that it is necessary to deepen the knowledge on the Mediterranean Diet which must be seen as an area of application of innovative techniques of agricultural production as a cultural expression of the Mediterranean people and as a set of beneficial eating habits which contribute significantly to the improvement of quality of life. In this context, it is essential to consider the role of women which are essential in the transmission of expertise, as well as knowledge of rituals, traditional gestures and celebrations and the safeguarding of techniques.

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