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Thematic Discussion: Agriculture and Rural Development

Speech of Italy

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Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Mr Chairman, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Italy would like to associate itself with the intervention made by Slovenia and the European Commission on behalf of the European Union.

Indeed, sustainable agriculture and sustainable rural development are continuous challenges. Worldwide, the demographic pressure and the consequent demand for food are increasing the pace of agricultural intensification and, as a consequence, soil, water and biological systems are under increasing pressure. Those ecosystem services will be therefore affected while, according to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, they are one of the crucial factor for sustainable human development.

But allow me to highlight also another issue even more challenging nowadays for sustainable agriculture: the fight against climate change and its disastrous impacts in the short and medium term. As noticed by all the most recent assessments, agriculture will need to respond and to adjust its production patterns, including through sustainable bioenergy and afforestation.

It is a matter of fact that the need for alternative sources of energy is strengthening the demand for bioenergy at global and national level. In this context, we observe that sustainable bioenergy is emerging, rapidly, as a top priority on the international agenda as countries face the triple challenge of ensuring food security, energy security and environmental protection.

While modern bioenergy has the potential to contribute effectively to sustainable development, nonetheless, we are aware that a fast growth in bioenergy demand and supply could also bear enormous risks such as the increasing of food prices and the loss of biodiversity.

In this respect, we believe that sustainability is the key element and that it would be wise to put into place the necessary safeguards to ensure sustainable management of the entire production chain – feedstock production, processing and use of biofuels. Therefore, life cycle analysis, labelling and certification of biofuels should be agreed internationally and introduced into the global energy market.

To this purpose, Mr Chairman, allow me to recall the Global Bio-Energy Partnership, built upon the commitment to contribute to find the solution to those challenges. The Partnership was established to reflect the commitments taken by Italy within the G8 +5 Countries in the 2005 G8 Summit in Gleneagles, and was recently invited by the G8 Summit in Heiligendamm to continue its work on biofuels as a framework to enhance coordination and development of bioenergy activities at international level and to promote sharing of knowledge, technologies and skills.

Mr Chairman, at regional level, in order to contribute to the commitments agreed in the Agenda 21 and the JPoI but also in synergies with other Multilateral Environmental Agreements, Italy has financed some projects in Central and Eastern Europe advocating for sustainable agricultural practices. In particular, with UNIDO as the implementing agency and in the context of the Multilateral Fund of the Montreal Protocol, Italy has worked with Romania to progressively eliminate 156,5 tons of methyl bromide to clean the fields used for agriculture. The objective was achieved using alternative technologies and environmentally compatible agricultural practices.

Furthermore, Italy has been very active in the context of Education for Sustainable Development and has organized different courses at the Venice International University for key government officials responsible for the “three pillars” of sustainable development and targeted to various ministries of Central and Eastern Europe. In particular the *Rural Development and Natural Resources Workshop* has given participants the opportunity to assess international and regional policies such as the EU Common Agricultural Policy; understand multiple dimensions and impacts of resource use and the limits of growth; consider social, environmental and economic factors and effects when making resource-use-related decisions; understand the role of local communities in natural resources management, and their engagement and ability to develop implementation tools at the national level.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, allow me to recall the continuing and increased commitment of the Italian Government and of the Italian Development Cooperation on food and agriculture to which, both multilaterally and bilaterally, Italy allocated this year a total funding of 130 million euro, corresponding today to some 200 million US dollars.

Thank you.

