



## Fourth AFRICAN UNION - EUROPEAN UNION Agriculture Ministerial Conference

### Commissioner Wojciechowski

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

- It is my honour to join Commissioner Sacko, who kindly opened the Plenary Session earlier this afternoon, and deliver the **closing remarks** on behalf of the European Commission, at this, the conclusion of this year's conference of AU and EU Ministers of Agriculture.
- I am glad to note that these conferences are becoming somewhat of a **tradition**, this being the fourth such conference since its inception in 2017. The continuation of these sessions, even under the current adverse conditions, is a testament to the enduring tenacity of the relationship between our two continents.
- Our conference today provided a valuable opportunity to **take stock of progress** made towards the initiatives of the AU-EU Rural Transformation Agenda. The exchange of views and sharing of best practices from the rich trove of AU and EU experiences with building more sustainable food systems also contribute to deeper regional integration.
- Discussions in the **thematic panels** were lively and focussed on some of the most pressing issues affecting the transformation of our respective agri-food systems.

- Participants have explored the **investment opportunities** and challenges for local producers and the competitiveness of the agri-food sector. We have seen that investments are more than mere tools for economic growth. The way we invest will guide the agricultural sector during the post-COVID recovery. Therefore, in order to “build back better”, we need to invest more and better.
- Some of the factors that any **future large-scale investment** in the agri-food sector will have to take into account are: their social, economic and environmental impact; their contribution to sustainability and the SDGs and their expansion of local opportunities for farming and food producing communities to improve their quality of life while also enhancing the nutritional security of the wider society around them.
- We have reviewed the state of play of the AU-EU cooperation in **agricultural research and innovation**. Both the EU Comprehensive Strategy for Africa and our Green Deal initiatives of course have a strong innovation component. As we seek to prepare our agri-food systems for the challenges of an uncertain future, we must also future-proof our cooperation on R&I. Agro-ecological and green business ventures are amongst the most exciting, yet largely untapped areas of opportunity for value-added growth in the agri-food sector.
- We also addressed the use of **digital solutions** in agriculture, and their potential to combat diseases and prevent food losses. We heard that agriculture, one of the oldest, most traditional sectors of the human economy, is now also caught up in the winds of technological change. These range from better data to support planning, forecasting and decision-making from farm to government level, to digital technologies that assist in reducing food losses along the

supply chain by improving facilities, storage techniques and logistics.

- **Innovative devices** from drones to AI-assisted processing plants are revolutionising the way we grow, distribute and consume food. The AU and EU need to ensure that these changes happen in line with our wider societal ambitions for food security and nutrition and the sustainable transformation of agriculture.
- We also reconfirmed that Research and Innovation can pave the way towards a **green transition** with innovative solutions for sustainable agriculture and food systems that are more resilient, equitable and with low carbon emissions. The existing EU-Africa partnership on Food Security and Sustainable Agriculture will be the instrument for joint actions that will provide new knowledge and opportunities for new business and markets for agricultural products.
- Finally, we have discussed **regional trade integration** for improved food security. The most significant step forward in this direction is, no doubt, the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement agreed in 2019. The Agreement addresses a fundamental lesson we in Europe have learned through our historical experience over the past couple of decades.
- Removing (some) tariffs alone does not guarantee the improved flow of trade – to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by regional integration, the parties involved must **harmonise their regulatory environment** (incl. sanitary and phytosanitary measures) and ensure that businesses are able to invest and trade across borders with a sense of legal certainty. Equally important to facilitate trade and increase regional integration is the removal on non-tariff trade barriers.

- We call attention to the unprecedented rise in poverty, hunger and malnutrition and the role that the COVID-19 pandemic, compounded by climate change and increased conflict and increased incidences of migratory pests and disease, play in driving these negative trends. Addressing food and nutrition security is a foundation for human development as well as stability and peace. We must act now to reverse these trends and make our aquatic and agri-food systems sustainable. We have been working together in many ways to achieve this including through the African Union – FAO Task Force on the impact of COVID-19 on food security in which the EU contributes.
- In this context, we are aware that the key element of Africa’s resilience is nutrition, as also confirmed by the African Union theme for the year 2022 “Building resilience in nutrition on the African continent to accelerate the human and socio-economic development”. To that end, the European Union, acting as ‘Team Europe’, has already committed EUR 40.5 billion to jointly support partners in overcoming urgent needs and mitigating (the health, social, economic, and humanitarian) impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, while countering the aggravation of inequalities, food insecurity and malnutrition.
- Mindful of the AU’s agricultural priorities, as per Africa’s Agenda 2063 and the CAADP Malabo commitments, also duly reflected in our joint Rural Transformation Agenda, and the corresponding ambitions of the EU’s Green Deal and Farm to Fork strategy, today’s conference reinforced my belief in the **necessity of our partnership** to achieve more sustainable agriculture and food systems.
- These are more than mere words. Our agricultural sectors are **responsible for feeding our populations** and ensuring that safe,

nutritious and ecologically responsible food is available to all. Until that is achieved, a lot of work remains to be done.

- I hope that our efforts here will serve as valuable input for the upcoming AU-EU Ministerial later this year, but most of all next year's **AU-EU Ministerial Summit**, which will need to take due note of the central role played by our partnership on agri-food systems in order to achieve an overall more robust and resilient economic equilibrium for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- Agriculture is of course the main protagonist in our efforts to combat against malnutrition, calling to mind the ambitious, but altogether indispensable objective of 'Zero Hunger' by 2030 enshrined in the UN's **Sustainable Development Goals**. However, the agri-food sector contributes also to other SDGs - we may call to mind in particular the many millions of jobs supported by agriculture across Africa and Europe.
- The production, value-added processing and distribution of food is a key factor also in the **post-COVID recovery** of the economy, not only by ensuring the food security of farmers and working populations, but also by providing an almost inexhaustible stream of opportunities for small & family enterprises, from farming to retail, from organic and artisanal products to rural tourism and hospitality.
- It is fast becoming a cliché that we live in a post-pandemic world. Business as usual is the past. We need to **join forces** to take advantage of the opportunities ahead, which Africa and Europe could of course try and tackle on their own, but how much more can we achieve if we follow a common path towards a sustainable, resilient, ecologically responsible agriculture adapted to local needs but mindful of global challenges.

- In this spirit, I look forward to working together with you across the full spectrum of international fora, with particular attention to the upcoming **UN Food Systems Summit**. Let's forge a path together that is worth telling the world about!