

GREETING

Fatmir Guri

Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development of Albania

Mr. President of the Academy of Sciences of Albania,
Mr. Rector of the Agricultural University of Tirana,
Distinguished Presidents and Members of the European Academies,
Dear Professors and Researchers,
Esteemed Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege to address the XIII General Assembly of the Union of European Academies for Science Applied to Agriculture, Food and Nature, and to contribute to a discussion centered on one of the most important questions of our time: how to build a more sustainable European agriculture while ensuring a balanced and responsible management of natural resources.

The theme of this Assembly could hardly be more timely.

Agriculture has always operated under uncertainty. Farmers have always depended on climate, markets, natural resources, and the social and economic conditions of their communities. But the nature and scale of uncertainty we face today are different.

Climate change is no longer a distant scenario. It is already reshaping production seasons, water availability, soil conditions, and the frequency of extreme weather events.

More importantly, it is also placing our agricultural ecosystems under increasing pressure.

We are beginning to observe, in many production systems, pests and diseases that were previously uncommon, or even absent, from these ecosystems. Changes in temperature, humidity and seasonal patterns are creating conditions in which certain pathogens and harmful organisms can survive, spread and establish themselves in areas where they were not traditionally present.

This is not a marginal change. It affects the very balance of agricultural ecosystems.

It challenges existing production practices, plant and animal health systems, advisory services, and the capacity of farmers to respond quickly to new risks. It also reminds us that climate change is not only about higher temperatures or more frequent droughts. It is about a profound transformation of the biological environment in which agriculture operates.

At the same time, demographic and migration trends are transforming rural areas. In many parts of Europe, agriculture is facing an aging farming population, difficulties in generational renewal, and a declining rural workforce. The movement of people, both within countries and across borders, is changing the social and economic structure of our rural territories.

And these challenges do not exist separately. They interact.

A climatic shock becomes a social problem when a farm family can no longer maintain its income.

A new pest or disease becomes an economic problem when farmers do not have the knowledge, technology or resources to respond.

A labour shortage becomes a competitiveness problem when production systems cannot adapt.

And poor management of natural resources becomes a food-security issue when it reduces the productive capacity of agriculture for the next generation.

This is why the solutions we design today cannot simply be more of what we have done in the past.

We need a different approach — one that is smarter, more integrated and more sustainable.

And this is precisely where the responsibility of science becomes so important.

The expectations placed on researchers today are very high. Society does not ask science only to describe problems. Increasingly, it asks science to help solve them.

But finding a solution is not enough.

A technological solution that farmers cannot afford is not a complete solution.

An environmentally sound solution that cannot sustain agricultural livelihoods will be difficult to maintain.

And an economically efficient solution that weakens rural communities or places excessive pressure on natural resources will ultimately create new problems.

For this reason, I believe one principle should guide our work very clearly: every solution we develop must be tested against three dimensions of sustainability — economic, social and environmental.

These three dimensions should not compete with one another. Our challenge is to bring them together.

Innovation must make agriculture more productive, but also more resilient.

Digital technologies must generate more information, but that information must become accessible and useful to farmers.

Research on plant and animal health must increasingly anticipate risks, rather than respond only after they have become established.

New production systems must reduce pressure on natural resources, while remaining economically viable.

And agricultural policies must support competitiveness, but they must also preserve the people, knowledge and communities that keep rural territories alive.

This requires research that is not isolated from reality.

It requires scientists to work more closely with farmers, businesses, policymakers and rural communities. It requires us to understand not only what is technically possible, but also what can genuinely work on a farm, in a village, in a region, and across different European agricultural systems.

This is particularly important for countries such as Albania, where agriculture continues to play a significant economic and social role and where the transformation of the sector is taking place alongside the process of European integration.

For us, European integration in agriculture is not simply a process of aligning legislation.

It is also an opportunity to modernise institutions, strengthen knowledge systems, improve the quality of data and advisory services, support farmers more effectively and bring our agricultural model closer to the principles of competitiveness, resilience and sustainability that define the future of European agriculture.

In this transformation, science is indispensable.

The work carried out within your academies can help us answer some of the most difficult questions before us: how to produce more efficiently with fewer resources; how to adapt agriculture to a changing climate; how to respond to emerging pests and diseases; how to make rural areas attractive again to younger generations; how to integrate new technologies without leaving smaller farmers behind; and how to protect natural resources while maintaining viable agricultural economies.

There may not always be simple answers to these questions.

But there is one responsibility we should never lose sight of: the solutions we propose today will shape the agriculture inherited by the next generation.

For that reason, our ambition should not only be to respond to the problems of the present. It should be to build agricultural systems capable of facing the uncertainties of the future.

This Assembly brings together an extraordinary concentration of knowledge and experience. I hope that the discussions held here will go beyond the exchange of scientific results. They should challenge established approaches, connect disciplines and, above all, transform knowledge into solutions that can make a real difference for farmers, rural communities and society.

That is, in my view, one of the most important responsibilities of science today: not only to understand change, but to anticipate it and help societies manage it wisely, responsibly and sustainably.

I wish you fruitful discussions and a successful XIII General Assembly and Scientific Symposium.

Thank you.