Short Communication

A tribute to Giovanni Anania: Scholar, Mentor, Friend

European Commission

Tassos Haniotis (DG Agriculture)
I am the last to speak in this session we would all have liked never to have taken place. I will thus not focus on Giovanni’s academic contributions, already mentioned, but raise instead three more personal aspects in our professional relationship.

But before I do so, I would like to start from something Cuqui already mentioned – negotiating with “a number” - and bring some personal relevant background information. I started my career in the Commission with Cuqui (in a market unit), in a job more related to my passport than my field of academic expertise (trade). But I soon moved into an analytical unit, and started working on developing a market model at a time a myth was circulating in the corridors of DG AGRI, one stemming from a former Director’s General statement that claimed “don’t give me numbers, give me room for manoeuvre”!

Yet everything that Cuqui said about his ability to better negotiate as a Director General was stemming exactly from the fact that he had numbers - the solid numbers that Giovanni had produced. And it is evidence of the monumental change of mentality that has taken place in DG AGRI since then, with Giovanni’s work fitting perfectly well in solidifying this change.

I don’t exactly remember when I first met Giovanni. Mary mentioned to me earlier that he was in the ICAE in Buenos Aires, the first one that I also went to. But I do not recall meeting him there. I do recall though when I first came across his name. It was during these “modelling years” of mine, when out of curiosity I was leafing through the AJAE annexes for names of Europeans that received, like myself, their PhD degree from US universities. This is when I first noticed Giovanni’s name, and remembered it especially since he worked with my idol of the time, Alex McCalla.

In person I believe I first met him at the ICAE in Sacramento in 1997. Since then, we often met, especially during my Fischler years and beyond. We developed a pretty close relationship based on what we broadly agreed on - that numbers matter, that policy concepts matter, and that trade distortions are real issues for policy making. From this professional relationship, I would like to mention three areas - one where we always agreed, on where we often disagreed, and one more personal.

We always agreed on trade, on the necessary path of trade reform, on the speed of reform - which has to be the right one to allow smooth adjustment, and on the importance of always looking at the big picture. Giovanni was a pragmatist, and it was this pragmatism that gave him, as a trade modeller, the capacity to put things into perspective taking the real world as his starting point. After all, models are supposed to be a representation of reality, and not the other way round.

We often disagreed on income support, and more specifically on its logic. As many academics do, Giovanni considered that the target of income support should be means-tested. I believed, and continue to do so, that family income should not be an item for farm policy since taxation (a national responsibility in the EU) is there to address differences in the level of wealth, and implementation complexities would make any such meas-
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ures counter-productive. I always considered this debate trivial; more important is for me the debate about the logic of greening, or voluntary coupled support - and it is exactly in these areas that I will miss Giovanni’s critical point of view the most.

His contribution to Jo Swinnen’s book on the recent CAP reform shows how pertinent the policy questions he raised in this book are going to be in the very near future.

But I would like to finish with a more personal note, one stemming from the common interest we developed in recent years on something that united us beyond academics. We both came from a very old part of this old continent of ours, a part with so many similarities. Very often, such similarities are drawn from our problems, and from the fact that their analysis does not always point to a “lysis” (solution), but sometimes even to paralysis. Yet our similarities are much deeper and different than this. Scanning the internet you will fast discover that Calabria is the region first occupied by two tribes which ancient Greeks called “oenotrians” and “itali”. The first name comes from the Greek word for wine, whose production was of interest to Giovanni. And the “itali” are a reminder that the origins of your country may come more south that some would like to believe.

But this part of Italy also goes by the name of Magna Grecia, indicating the long historical links between our countries. And the name comes as a more pertinent reminder that this region of the world is where trade, and especially trade in food items (Giovanni’s main area of academic interest), has been from ancient times a factor that unites people, reflecting and promoting their cultures and diversity.

In this part of the world, in the two corners of the Italian boot, a dialect is still today spoken by a few thousand people - a dialect called by some medieval, or better, byzantine Greek, also known by the name of Griko. On numerous occasions Giovanni invited me to visit together this part of Italy, and I will always regret that I will never have the chance to do it with him. I will certainly do it for him, though.

And I am sure that, from wherever he is, he will have learned how to tell us in this dialect “steo ettì ma ‘sà” - “I am here with you”! For me, the only thing that is left to say is to use the very word we have in modern Greek to bid farewell to a friend: Addio!