Short Communication

A tribute to Giovanni Anania: Scholar, Mentor, Friend

European Commission

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We had many wonderful contributions on Giovanni Anania - the academic - and on his countless friends. I would like to make a small contribution in between professional and personal, because behind that great agricultural economist who was Giovanni also was a great person.

Negotiations in the EU banana sector were always complex. I think that this is the product in which there are more differences of opinion - differences between the dollar area producers and ACP producers, but also differences between European countries. Differences between the very liberals, such as Germany, and those with production, as Spain or France, or those who want their former colonies to continue to export to Europe. There are also differences between those who want to spend to sustain the sector, and those who refuse any budgetary effort.

So when in 2005 we had to propose an external tariff on bananas, you can imagine that this was anything but easy to agree in COREPER. Each Ambassador had a different opinion. We did not look like easily reaching a common position, but we had to do so before the start of the ministerial meeting of the WTO in Hong Kong, as I am referring to the month of December 2005. I still remember very well the date - the agreement came at the beginning of an evening on the first Friday of December 2005 (I had to catch a flight the same evening...).

Fortunately, we negotiators from the Commission had a very effective weapon - we had agreed to commission an external study on the banana sector, a study led by Giovanni. Today, it sounds normal that the Commission requests external academic studies, but at that time this was still very new. In fact this study pioneered the collaboration between DG-AGRI and the academic world.

As negotiator, I felt very well protected and supported, not only by colleagues who were with me in the meetings - Aldo, Mary, Tassos, Elisabetta or Nicolas among others - but above all I felt supported by the factual arguments provided to me by the study done by Giovanni. And although no one particularly liked the numbers produced by Giovanni, no one was also able to contest them – and if nobody seems happy with an agreement, but can live with it, this is a sign of a good agreement!

The study on the banana market also allowed me to meet Giovanni. I am a person who is interested in people above all. Meeting Giovanni was a wonderful gift. His intelligence, his humour, his humanity and especially that look of his, will always accompany us.

Death, Margherita, although sure, is always unwelcome. Fortunately, somehow we sense that people do not leave us completely; and I think the smile of Giovanni remains alive among us.