

**REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON
RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD
QUALITY LINKED TO GEOGRAPHICAL ORIGIN IN ASIA;
LESSONS AND PERSPECTIVES
BY
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RAINBOW ROOM, THE IMPERIAL QUEEN'S PARK HOTEL
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HE Mr. Nguyen Quan, Deputy-Minister of Ministry of Science and Technology, Vietnam

Khun Puangrat Asavapisit, Director-General of the Thai Department of Intellectual Property,

Mr. He Changchui, FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Asia and Pacific,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Sawasdee Krab.

- It's my great pleasure to welcome you, on behalf of the European Commission, to the Regional Conference on rural development and agricultural and food quality linked to geographical origin in Asia; lessons and perspectives.

- I would also like to thank our co-hosts; **the Regional Office of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations** and **the Thai Department of Intellectual Property, Ministry of Commerce** for their outstanding cooperation in

hosting this event together with our **Business Information Centre**.

- As you may be aware, Europe is known for diversity of its “high-quality” agriculture and food & drinks products. These products derive from Europe’s natural environment and its special production processes developed over centuries.

- I would like to quote the great philosopher Aristotle, who once said: “Quality is not an act, it’s a habit”. The habit of quality is firmly anchored in European identity. This work of hundreds of years and creativity is one of the reasons why, today, Europe is one of the regions that has the most fantastically diverse food tradition in the world.

- Products with a history, which have withstood the passing of time, which form part of European heritage, and with their own specific characteristics linked to the environment and know-how are very valuable assets. Such products are a part of our identity, our culture and our traditions. Most of the time, consumers recognise specific foods or drinks by the name of the area in which they are produced. In many cases, it is the "geographical name" through which products, such as *Prosciutto di Parma* (Italy), *Scotch beef*, *Kalamata olive oil* (Greece) and many others, have acquired their reputation.

- And it was precisely these reputations that we, the European, wished to protect when we first introduced an EU-wide system of definitions, quality standards and labelling in the wine and spirits sector in 1970s and when we adopted the first EU Geographical Indications rules in 1992. This has put in place the European systems that allowed us to register and to protect valuable names that link quality, origin and reputation together.

- Anyway, GIs are not only worth protecting because of their connection to quality, tradition and reputation. They also make a very valuable contribution to sustainable rural development. Several studies have shown that they have an important role to play in tourism and the "regeneration" of the countryside since they ensure that foodstuffs and agricultural products are produced in such a way that conserves local plant varieties, rewards local people, supports rural diversity and social cohesion as well as promotes new job opportunities in production, processing and other related services. The needs of today's population are met, while natural resources and traditional skills are safeguarded for the next generations, our children and grandchildren.

- Furthermore, some studies showed that GIs serve as an important marketing tool to help farmers and producers to commercialise their traditional products whilst associating them with a specific quality of characteristic that make them more

attractive to consumers. Statistics in the EU clearly confirm that consumers are willing to pay premium price for the GI products.

- As you may know, in the EU, the GIs are widely used. As of September 2008, we have more than 800 registered names of protected designations of origin and protected geographical indications. The exact figure should be increased by now. Let me quickly share with you some of the statistics. Of the total registrations, meat and meat products were the biggest item representing 24%, followed by fruits and vegetables representing 22%. This did not include 1,800 names of wine and some 300 names of spirit drinks.

- Anyway, let me assure you that the EU GIs system is not only restricted to the EU Member States, but opened to non-EU countries on equal footing. The System provides an equal opportunity for producers outside the EU to register GIs or object the applications as the EU producers could do. Our legal framework is fully WTO compatible.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I'm glad that this Regional Conference is organised here in Thailand, which is one of the most active Asian countries in GIs implementation. I am even happier to learn that this event focuses on Asian agricultural and food quality linked to GIs. Like Europe, Asian countries have demonstrated their long tradition and civilisation in their ways of life and food culture.

Recently, there has been an increasing trend and wide spread use of GIs in Asia. Many Asian agricultural products has developed international reputations for quality linked to their geographical origin such as Thai Hom Mali Rice, Korean Ginseng , Indian Darjeeling tea and many more.

- As far as I know, some Asian countries including China, Korea, India and Thailand have directly submitted the applications for GIs registration of their reputable and long tradition products in the EU.

- I am pleased to assure you that the European Union will maintain its active relations with Asian countries on GIs. We have committed to continue our support to the new phase of EC-ASEAN Intellectual Property Rights Co-operation Programme or ECAP 3, which is currently waiting for signature from ASEAN Secretariat. The programme aims at creating a practical network of expertise and experience between ASEAN and the EU in IPR issues. It is always our strong interest to support countries in the region to develop appropriate legal framework for protecting intellectual property rights. The ECAP office will be located in Bangkok. I therefore wish that Thailand will swiftly give its endorsement to the programme, so that the ASEAN Secretariat can enter into the agreement.

- Today's event is another example of our commitments. The outcomes from the technical consultation attended by EC, FAO,

Thai DIP and Asian experts during the past three days will be presented here and now. I am certain that this conference will be beneficial to all participants as it creates a platform for exchanging views and experiences that each country has faced in implementing GIs at both national and local levels.

- It's my utmost wish that there will be active discussions in the event and the outcomes received today could contribute to the future development of a sustainable quality-origin linked policy.
- I would like to conclude by congratulating new GIs registrations in Thailand. As far as I know, there are 7 of them. Among these, one of the EU most famous foodstuffs is included. It's the delicious Parma ham; *Prosciutto di Parma*, with which most of you are familiar. This has shown a dedicated work of Thai DIP which is playing a leading role in GIs among Asian countries.
- I am proud to attend the GIs registration certificate awarding ceremony, which will be held after the keynote speech from the Director General of the Department of Intellectual Property, Khun Puangrat, whom I would like to thank personally for her dedications to the GIs cause.
- Without further ado, I would like to thank everyone for being here today and wish you a successful conference.

Thank you for your attention and Kob Khun Krub.