

Opening Remarks



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Secretary General Lamberto Zannier

OSCE Mediterranean Conference

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Vienna, Hofburg, 5 October 2016

Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,

It is a great honour for me to join H.E. Secretary General Michael Linhart in welcoming you to the 2016 OSCE Mediterranean Conference. This high-level gathering, which once again will be attended by high level representatives, including Foreign Ministers from many participating States and Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation, confirms the growing relevance of OSCE-Mediterranean co-operation. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the Austrian Chairmanship of the Mediterranean Contact Group for further raising the profile of the OSCE Mediterranean Partnership. From the first-ever Mediterranean Retreat in Madrid last May, which explored ways to improve our mechanisms for co-operation and discussed the topical issue of Libya's future, to the many initiatives in civil society mediation, countering radicalization, promoting intercultural dialogue and integration, Austria has offered an extremely rich and relevant agenda this year.

I would also like to thank the representatives and speakers from the six OSCE Mediterranean Partners, including several outstanding youth representatives who will share with us their most interesting experiences and their impressive achievements. Your active contribution and fresh ideas will greatly enrich our discussions and can help ensure meaningful follow-up to this important event.

This Conference should go beyond a debate on issues of common concern for European and Mediterranean countries and focus on our common future. It is my strong belief that instead of looking at the Mediterranean dialogue as an appendix of the European agenda within the OSCE, we should treat European and Mediterranean issues as complementary dimensions of a common agenda that can only be implemented through a genuine partnership.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When looking at the Euro-Mediterranean region today, it is tempting, perhaps even unevitable, to view regional developments through the prism of confrontation and conflict. Divisions originating around the Mediterranean are feeding both North-South tensions and tensions between countries on the European continent. In the Southern Mediterranean,

conflict continues to rage in some contexts, causing unacceptable loss of life, vast human suffering, and human displacement on a scale not seen since World War II.

So it is very important that refugees and migrants are at the centre of our agenda today. International migration is a game changer, a defining issue which will shape the future of our societies. As discussed last month in New York at the UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants, which I had the honour to address, the international community as a whole – including international and regional organizations – has the responsibility to come together to provide protection to refugees fleeing persecution and war and put in place new, comprehensive, sustainable approaches to migration management.

The OSCE can and should do its part too. The adoption of a Decision on migration at the upcoming OSCE Ministerial Council in Hamburg would be a key step in the right direction. We need to firmly position the OSCE on migration, which has wide-ranging security implications that can only be successfully addressed through a co-operative and comprehensive approach that fully protects human rights and leverages the added value of all international actors involved in the response. I see migration governance as a key issue on the security agenda of the 21st century and as a priority for which co-operation between the OSCE and Mediterranean Partners is not only necessary, but irreplaceable. We must turn the current challenge into an opportunity for mobilizing solidarity at all levels, rediscovering migration's traditional role as a catalyst for human development. We cannot let migration become yet another fault line across the Mediterranean and within Europe.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Migration, as well as other challenges affecting the Mediterranean region like radicalization, violent extremism and terrorism, can only be tackled effectively by adopting a long-term perspective and by changing an increasingly toxic narrative of confrontation. We need to set our sights on the future and inject more positive energy into our efforts to face these challenges. Here, the views and ideas of the younger generations that will shape the future of our societies play a fundamental role.

Youth was very aptly chosen as the underlying theme of this year's Conference because it is both the age group that is most affected by the phenomena that agitate societies across our region – from radicalization to migration, from lack of economic opportunity to disenfranchisement – and the diverse constituency that can give rise to new leaders and innovative solutions. As many surveys show, the aspirations of young people both north and south of the Mediterranean have increasingly converged in recent decades, even as needs and levels of representation still widely differ across the region. Today our young people are fundamentally united in seeking empowerment in a world that has never been as connected but can be alienating and harsh at times. Despite technological development and progress in many important fields, basic human needs – including respect for human dignity, access to employment, personal and family security – are too often neglected.

We need to start from these basic shared aspirations to rediscover what unites us instead of focusing on what divides us. We must also understand, or more simply remind ourselves, that conflict is not irredeemably rooted in cultural, religious or other human differences – as some would like us to believe. Rather, conflict and insecurity originate in the failure of our societies and our governments to fulfil the dreams that every new generation rightly aspires to when its turn comes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The OSCE's commitment to promote the inclusion of youth in its peace and security agenda dates back over 40 years to the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, our founding document. Several Ministerial Decisions and Declarations in recent years have re-affirmed this commitment. The Organization and our participating States have taken a number of initiatives to better connect our mandates on peace and security to youth engagement, mainstreaming youth perspectives across our areas of action. In 2014, the Swiss OSCE Chairmanship created Youth Ambassadors to help the OSCE strengthen its outreach to young people, and last year the Serbian Chairmanship appointed Special Representatives on Youth and Security, who were reconfirmed by Germany this year, in a ground-breaking move to empower youth to advance their vision for a more peaceful, inclusive OSCE region. Youth networks and initiatives have been created in Central Asia and the Western Balkans with the active involvement of our field operations. And just last month – thanks to Spain's generous contribution – I have established in my Office the first-ever Youth and Security Focal Point at the OSCE Secretariat level. This post will greatly facilitate co-ordination and promote new projects and initiatives related to youth and security both within the Organization and with our Partners for Co-operation and other international actors.

Over the next day and a half, our work should focus on advancing concrete proposals for ways to more fully share this wealth of initiatives with our Mediterranean Partners. For instance, we could consider better connecting bright young women and men from both sides of the Mediterranean basin by expanding the network of OSCE Youth Ambassadors from participating States to our Mediterranean Partners. Together, they could initiate and foster a New Mediterranean Dialogue. If needed, we could even consider a Security Days event on this in the future.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am optimistic that this year's Mediterranean Conference will put forward a rich set of recommendations we can work on together in the months to come. I think this exchange will provide the opportunity to reiterate and renew our commitment to the indivisibility of Mediterranean and European security, a link that was presciently recognized by the Helsinki Final Act over forty years ago and which young people throughout the Mediterranean region are endowing with a new, very tangible meaning today. In this spirit and with this hope, I wish you fruitful discussions.

Thank you.