

**The Mediterranean Chapter of the Helsinki Final Act  
and the Future of Mediterranean Co-operation**

Tuesday, 10th November 2015, 9:30am

Minister Vella,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Participants,

Thank you, Minister Vella, for gathering us here today to commemorate the Mediterranean Chapter of the Helsinki Final Act and to explore ways to strengthen Mediterranean co-operation. I would also like to thank the Maltese Diplomatic Academy for organizing this initiative in co-operation with the Track II *New-Med* network. *New-Med* is creating exactly the kinds of connections and synergies between governmental entities and civil society that we need to foster throughout the Euro-Mediterranean region. I am proud that the OSCE is acting as a catalyst for this co-operation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I cannot think of a more suitable place than Malta to hold a commemorative event about the long-standing engagement between the OSCE and the Mediterranean. Maltese statesmen and diplomats played a crucial role in ensuring the inclusion of a dedicated “Mediterranean Chapter” in the text of the Helsinki Final Act. In retrospect, the recognition of an inextricable link between European and Mediterranean security seems uncontroversial and almost inevitable: from terrorism to climate change, from transnational organized crime to the spillovers of regional conflicts, our interdependence is all too apparent. But in the 1970s these connections were not yet fully grasped. The vision of a common Euro-Mediterranean space had not been fully articulated. More importantly, not all participating States in the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), starting with the two superpowers, believed that broadening the scope of discussions to include the Mediterranean would serve the cause of *détente*.

Forty years later, we can agree that the position of Malta and other countries that advocated a Mediterranean focus for the OSCE was very prescient. Time and time again in the history of our Organization we have realized that working with our Mediterranean Partners on common

priorities and shared concerns is not just a matter of good neighbourly relations. We work together because it strengthens our common security in very practical ways.

As the OSCE-Mediterranean Conference in Jordan last month highlighted, Mediterranean issues are no longer regional issues only. They have become part and parcel of both the OSCE agenda and the global agenda. From deploying counter-radicalization strategies to addressing the refugee crisis, Mediterranean-based issues cannot be relegated to a separate chapter of our work. Nor can any of these challenges be effectively tackled by any single country or even by a single region alone. That is why I think it is no overstatement to label the OSCE Partnership with the Mediterranean countries as strategic: it is not only rooted in history, but it is also critical to successfully addressing the most urgent existential challenges of our time.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is no secret that we are going through particularly turbulent times in Europe. The OSCE faces an existential test as challenges to European security threaten to undercut the very foundations of our work. Our model of co-operation and our founding principles are being questioned. In this context, the crisis in and around Ukraine is only the latest incarnation of a deeper malaise that has been building up for quite some time. For all our achievements in key areas of European security such as arms control, confidence-building measures, crisis prevention and conflict resolution, we have failed to genuinely embrace the vision of a common future and have not been able to make peace an irreversible reality in the OSCE area. Instead, we see old and new dividing lines emerging across the OSCE space. Political perspectives, cultures, and interests are once again depicted as mutually exclusive. Geopolitics is back and pitting us against each other.

A significant difference between the Cold War and the current situation is that today there are many more actors involved, including movements and groups that seek to exploit our divisions. The potentially destructive effect of divisive populist and nationalist rhetoric is particularly concerning. Rifts within our societies could erupt into violence just as quickly as tensions between states. Unfortunately, some of these dynamics are at play in the context of the refugee and migration crisis. Migration management, if dealt with short-sightedly and

emotionally, risks being hijacked by xenophobic forces that could turn it into a major source of international tension. We cannot allow migration to become a new fault line.

Despite this difficult backdrop, we should not feel discouraged. We can rightfully be proud of what the OSCE has been able to achieve, even in the midst of heightened tensions. In response to the crisis in and around Ukraine, our participating States reached consensus to authorize the deployment of a Special Monitoring Mission. Our monitors on the ground, as well as the Trilateral Contact Group and other OSCE initiatives, have proved useful tools in working towards de-escalating the conflict. The unique role given to the OSCE in the Minsk agreements demonstrates the capability, credibility, and enduring relevance of our Organization. Co-operation between our participating States has proved to be possible even these very tense times.

As we look ahead, efforts should now be directed towards reinforcing our engagement through an operationally and technologically strengthened presence in Ukraine. At the same time, we should aim at reinvigorating the political dialogue among our participating States in Vienna. Priority should be given to re-building trust, which is a necessity if we are to make any real progress in European security. Although this anniversary year is closing on a sober note, we should all be clear about one thing: a return to zero-sum logic will not serve us well. It has been tried in the past and has failed. Instead of trading accusations and counter-accusations, the OSCE participating States should use the Organization as it was originally intended: as an inclusive platform for dialogue on the way forward.

This is not the first time we have faced formidable challenges. The fortieth anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act offers some historical perspective in this regard. Since 1975, we have seen the end of the Cold War, for which we claim a contributing role, but also a number of violent conflicts in parts of the former Soviet space and in former Yugoslavia. Some of these conflicts still remain unsolved. What has kept us together in both good and bad times is a shared sense that no matter how deep our perceived disagreements, we are better off when all our views are represented around the same table in a constructive way. It may take time to reinvigorate the vision of a common future, but what we must continue to strive to reaffirm that European security is and remains a common project. As we look ahead to the next forty years, we should emphasize the OSCE's important role as a bridge-builder.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The current challenges to European security are compounded by crises in the Mediterranean region. Here too, centrifugal forces and disintegrative processes seem to have gained the upper hand in a number of contexts. As Malta and others know all too well, unrest on the southern shores of the Mediterranean has had significant negative reverberations in Europe and other neighbouring regions. The instability that presently characterizes some areas of the Mediterranean region is so dire that even mentioning the hopes raised by the so-called Arab Spring of just a few years ago now seems out of touch.

But we should avoid taking a pessimistic view of the future because there are positive examples of coping with change. The Tunisian transition stands out in this regard. The OSCE provided election-related advice and assistance to Tunisia through our Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). We will continue to promote a comprehensive definition of security among our Mediterranean Partners that includes the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

As the dialogue with our Mediterranean Partners intensifies, we see increasing opportunities for developing more practical co-operation. Over time, the Mediterranean Partnership has become more operational and action-oriented as our priorities have become more closely aligned and our Partners have become more forthright in requesting OSCE co-operation. In a number of areas, including security issues such as the fight against terrorism, exchange of information and best practices has become particularly important. We are also focusing on a positive agenda that promotes intercultural and interreligious dialogue as well as the protection and integration of minorities as key elements of our comprehensive security dialogue.

In order to build a stronger, more substantive partnership, some OSCE standing procedures may need reviewing and upgrading. I would welcome initiatives to help overcome some of the OSCE's self-imposed constraints that hinder greater operationalization of the Mediterranean Partnership. One set of issues affects our ability to programme activities outside the OSCE area. Without undermining existing prerogatives, we could consider "programmatically baskets" or "framework initiatives" on agreed policy areas that would receive the necessary political backing at the outset, precluding the need for authorization of

individual projects. This kind of programmatic approach could also make our engagement more strategic. A second area where I look forward to change is funding. We are not a grant-making organization but our mechanisms should be reassessed so that we can have some long-term resources to use for initiatives with our Mediterranean Partners. I would be happy to discuss this with the OSCE Chairmanship, the Chair of the Mediterranean Contact Group and all relevant parties.

If we are going to take the OSCE-Mediterranean Partnership to the next level, there is one more critical ingredient: political will. Our practical co-operation works best and delivers more tangible results when political leaders from OSCE participating States and Partners for Cooperation articulate a vision for the future that we can translate into concrete initiatives. In this respect, the OSCE-Mediterranean Conference in Jordan last month, which under the leadership of Germany brought together several foreign ministers, marked an important milestone in developing both the political and operational dimensions of our co-operation. But we still need to keep investing in our regular fora for dialogue, especially the Mediterranean Contact Group. I am very pleased to see both the current German Chair and the incoming Austrian Chair of the Contact Group represented here today.

Excellencies,

Even as we discuss the very serious challenges to our security, we should not forget our achievements, including the Helsinki Final Act itself. I am convinced that what had made – and continues to make – the OSCE relevant is its co-operative approach and its comprehensive definition of security. We know that our model is not perfect and cannot simply be transferred to other world regions. But in our relations with the Mediterranean Partners we will continue to offer a platform for two-way dialogue on common priorities and shared concerns that takes inspiration from the OSCE experience in Europe. I am sure that this conference will provide another impetus to strengthening our long-standing relationship. Maintaining a spirit of confidence in our ability to overcome the current crises will help us to seize the many opportunities for co-operation that lie ahead.

Thank you.