

**STATEMENT BY MR. ANGELINO ALFANO,
CHAIRPERSON-IN-OFFICE OF THE OSCE AND MINISTER FOR
FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION OF
ITALY, AT THE 1171st (SPECIAL) MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

11 January 2018

Mr. Secretary General,
Permanent Representatives,

I am very pleased to address the OSCE Permanent Council today to present the Italian Chairmanship's programme for 2018.

Special thanks go to the Austrian Chairmanship – to Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and my colleague Karin Kneissl – for the excellent work that they carried out in the year that has just ended.

We are delighted to take the baton from our Austrian friends in order to continue with the same commitment, with great determination, aware of the responsibilities and challenges that await us.

At the same time, we are certain that we can count on the support of all participating States and partner countries to continue together to broaden our horizons for co-operation, with a growing measure of mutual trust and increasingly meaningful and intensified dialogue.

“Dialogue, ownership and responsibility” is the motto that we have chosen for our Chairmanship. These are the ingredients that we consider fundamental to reviving the “spirit of Helsinki” in its most authentic form – that spirit which Aldo Moro, Italy's Prime Minister at the time, called “a point of transition to the future”.

Today, as we face the reality without any reluctance, our main challenge is the search for a solution to the Ukrainian crisis. Mutual provocations have generated a climate that risks compromising the confidence-building measures hitherto adopted by the parties. A negative sign in this sense is the freezing of the activities of the Joint Centre for Control and Co-ordination (JCCC). Meanwhile, among the few positive exceptions, there was the exchange of prisoners on 27 December, which we regard as a significant humanitarian gesture. We of course hope that this will help to reverse the trend, encouraging further steps towards the full implementation of the Minsk agreements.

As we have always done in the past, we will support with all our energy the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. Its work – often in extremely difficult security conditions – is crucial to prevent a new and dangerous escalation of the crisis. Thus, we believe that the first thing to do is to guarantee the safety of the monitors, who must be able to carry out their mandate and functions with the least possible risk. We should therefore like to foster deeper reflection within the OSCE on this issue and on how to increase the political will of the parties with respect to the Mission.

Some maintain that the OSCE's fate is linked to that of its Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. This is perhaps a deliberately exaggerated assessment, but the Mission's role is certainly a fundamental test for the credibility of our Organization.

Furthermore, we are convinced that it is important to intensify the negotiating efforts within the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group. In the latter, for example, it is vital to resume discussions on humanitarian issues, facilitating access to the conflict areas by humanitarian organizations and non-governmental organizations involved in assistance programmes.

It is my intention to visit Ukraine and the Russian Federation from 30 January to 1 February. Therefore I consider today's discussion to be useful in preparation for that mission and I should like to thank you in advance for your observations.

Looking beyond the crisis in Ukraine, our attention will remain at a heightened level and unchanged with regard to all the main protracted conflicts.

In Transdniestria, 2017 ended with a positive and encouraging momentum, thanks to the achievement of significant agreements, starting with the reopening after many years of the bridge across the Dniester River. These developments show us that this could be a crucial moment for the resolution of the crisis. I should like to commend all the parties involved and the actors in the "5+2" format. I should also like to assure you that Italy will continue on this path in order to try to take further steps forward. I have therefore decided to entrust the office of Special Representative for Transdniestria to a man of great calibre and authority, Franco Frattini, former Italian Foreign Minister and Vice-President of the European Commission.

With regard to Georgia, we will support the Geneva International Discussions and are ready to promote dialogue through informal initiatives, if the preconditions are met. As regards Nagorno-Karabakh, we will continue to support the work of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs for a definitive and shared solution to the conflict.

At the same time, we intend to give greater importance to the many challenges emanating from the Mediterranean region. It is a matter of revitalizing the intuition of our founding fathers, who recognized, already in the Helsinki Final Act, the indivisibility of Euro-Mediterranean security and the fact that the Mediterranean dimension was complimentary and not an alternative to the Eurasian dimension. One reinforces the other. When seen on a world map, the Mediterranean looks like a lake, but the game being played out on this small sea is not regional. It is global. The security and prosperity of the world depend to a large degree on the dynamics of the Mediterranean region, and therefore also on the ability of the OSCE and its participating States to engage in profitable dialogue and co-operate closely with the partner countries from the southern shores of the Mediterranean.

For that reason we wanted our OSCE Chairmanship to be preceded by the Mediterranean Conference in Palermo last October and by the spreading of the “spirit of Palermo”, namely the ability to build a genuine partnership among the 57 countries of the OSCE and the countries of the Mediterranean, in particular on three crucial elements:

1. More political dialogue based on shared responsibility and widespread solidarity with respect to all of our principal common challenges;
2. More concrete security co-operation for the monitoring of migratory routes, also in the light of the risk of the return to Europe of foreign fighters following the military defeat of Daesh in Iraq and Syria;
3. More investments in culture to reduce the dangerous fault line that has appeared in the Mediterranean region, in which fanaticism, violent extremism and terrorism proliferate.

The added value of the Mediterranean Partnership lies in the search for “practical co-operation”, rediscovering the Organization’s role as a plural and inclusive multilateral platform and its function as a bridge-builder. While it was the “spirit of Helsinki” that 40 years ago inspired the rapprochement between East and West during the Cold War, it is the “spirit of Palermo” today that nurtures and strengthens dialogue for peace and security in the Mediterranean.

The migration crisis itself would be unsolvable without a broader sharing of responsibility and international solidarity. As we know, it is a global phenomenon that is destined to last for many years and as such it can only be managed through the most authentic multilateral spirit, extending our hand towards our Mediterranean Partners.

Addressing the issue of immigration also means managing integration. In this regard, we intend to maintain close co-operation with the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ambassador Lamberto Zannier, and naturally with the Slovak Chairmanship, which has succeeded us as the chair of the Mediterranean Contact Group. I should like to wish them every success.

Dear Secretary General,
Dear Permanent Representatives,

The Italian Chairmanship will spare no effort in strengthening the three dimensions upon which our Organization’s concept of “comprehensive security” is based, in constant dialogue with all of you, with the Parliamentary Assembly and with the autonomous institutions. At the same time, I should like to recall that in order to pursue concrete and lasting objectives there needs to be a responsible contribution by all participating States. In order to be able to function, the OSCE must have adequate, assured and predictable resources, which can be guaranteed only by the timely approval of the 2018 Unified Budget.

In the politico-military dimension, we are counting on the political will of the participating States to pursue with determination a revival of the logic of co-operative security. It is our duty to reaffirm the instruments for co-operative security in order to reduce to a minimum the risks of misunderstanding, and to increase trust, transparency,

predictability and moderation, with the aim of achieving concrete results even in the field of conventional arms control.

Furthermore, the Italian Chairmanship will do its utmost to give fresh impetus to the Structured Dialogue, which a year after its inception has already provided an important result, namely the ability to maintain frank and substantive dialogue even on controversial issues.

We will devote particular attention to transnational threats, an area in which greater co-operation with the Mediterranean and Asian Partners is crucial. This includes fighting terrorism and radicalization, with a focus on combating the use of the Internet by terrorist groups; cybersecurity; combating illicit trafficking in arms, drugs, cultural goods, hazardous waste and even wildlife. We attach the utmost importance to identifying and weakening the links between terrorism and criminal activities. We want to promote a holistic approach to the fight against terrorism, which will involve protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms and investing in education and culture, with great attention to women and young people.

We will also fight corruption in all its forms. To that end, I have decided to appoint as my Special Representative on Combating Corruption Professor Paola Severino, former Italian Minister of Justice, who is here with us today and it is my pleasure to introduce her to you. Corruption erodes the rule of law, by undermining the relationship of trust between the State and its citizens, and threatens democracy and security, along with the stability and competitiveness of the economic system.

In the economic and environment dimension, we intend to strengthen dialogue on growth, innovation, human capital, good governance and the transition to green energy. The common thread that binds our initiatives is summarized in the goal of “reducing the inequality gap through responsible leadership”, because we believe the issue of inequality to be at the very heart of fair and sustainable development. For example, we will dedicate ourselves to the implementation of the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality and to strengthening our commitment to combat all forms of violence against women.

Lastly, there is the human dimension. Our common history has taught us that respect for rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law are principles that are inextricably linked to our security. The protection of human dignity is our greatest common good. We should therefore like to call on the participating States to pay greater attention in 2018 to countering trafficking in human beings and protecting the rights of victims, especially women, children and unaccompanied minors.

Likewise, we intend to devote greater efforts to combating all forms of racism, xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance. It is no coincidence that one of the first important events on our calendar will be the international conference on combating anti-Semitism in the OSCE area. I trust that we can look forward to the broadest participation of your countries in this event, which will take place in Rome on 29 January. I am also very pleased to introduce Professor Salvatore Martinez, President of the Italian Observatory on Religious Minorities in the World and on the Respect for Religious Freedom, whom I appointed as my Personal Representative on Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination.

When fundamental rights are protected through the legal system and in everyday life, without exception and without discrimination, the rule of law is asserted and security guaranteed. However, if no such protection exists, conflicts multiply and social and political instability can arise.

Mr. Secretary General,
Permanent Representatives,

Italy is proud to assume the 2018 OSCE Chairmanship and to begin working with all of you, representatives of participating States and partner countries. We believe in the success of the OSCE because in this Organization we are united by a common history, by a common desire for peace in the face of all the threats and by a deep yearning for co-operation.

My hope is that this profound and precious bond of unity among all the participating States will help us to consolidate this year our common commitment to the stability and security of our great space of freedom in the OSCE area.

Allow me to conclude by wishing you all a very happy New Year, may this be a new year of stability, security and peace for our peoples and our countries.

Thank you.