

**2011 OSCE MEDITERRANEAN CONFERENCE ON THE
MEDITERRANEAN PARTNERS AND THE OSCE: DEMOCRATIC
TRANSFORMATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN
THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION
Budva, Montenegro, 10 and 11 October 2011**

Opening address by Ambassador Lamberto Zannier
Secretary General of the OSCE

Your Excellency Minister Roćen,
Vice Minister Liauškienė,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me join previous speakers in sincerely thanking Montenegro for generously hosting this Conference, and for your warm hospitality in these beautiful surroundings. I thank in particular Minister Roćen, Ambassador Dragana Radulović and her capable team in Vienna.

I would also like to congratulate the Irish Chairmanship of the Mediterranean Contact Group for a rich, timely and interesting agenda. Finally, I thank the Lithuanian Chairmanship for its active follow-up of the tasking agreed in Astana by our Heads of State and Government to further enhance the OSCE's interaction with its Partners for Co-operation.

The events that have unfolded since the beginning of this year in the Southern Mediterranean have opened up new opportunities for co-operation. These events have also highlighted its importance of such co-operation for OSCE participating and Partner States alike.

The special relationship between the OSCE and its Mediterranean Partners dates back to the Helsinki process itself. Today, we have the possibility to translate

into practice the OSCE's founding principles by sharing the Organization's values, its experience and its comprehensive approach to security.

This year, the OSCE has clearly and repeatedly stated its readiness to share its experience with our Mediterranean Partners. We have offered our support wherever our Partners find it relevant to the challenging processes of democratic transition they have initiated. This was manifest through the visits conducted to the region by various members of the OSCE family, and by the breadth of discussions on the subject in Vienna. I have also heard this interest reiterated in the capitals I have visited since taking up my post. As we begin in earnest the process of preparing for the Vilnius Ministerial Council, this topic is clearly on the agenda of the participating States.

OSCE expertise in supporting democratic processes in its own participating States is widely recognized. The OSCE's broad membership represents a wide range of cultures, experiences and approaches. Over the years, we have learned that one size does not fit all, and that tools need to be adjusted according to the specific situation of each participating State. Together with the long lasting and consolidated framework of the Mediterranean Partnership, which provides for continuous, open dialogue and concrete co-operation, these constitute distinctive assets of the OSCE. In my view, although the OSCE is of course only one of many international organizations interested in reaching out to the Southern Mediterranean, it nonetheless has the potential to be a uniquely valuable partner for our Mediterranean neighbours.

Over the past two decades, support to democratic transition processes in OSCE participating States in Central and Eastern Europe, in the South Caucasus and in Central Asia, has constituted one of the OSCE's core activities. In this process, the OSCE has developed a number of concrete and specialized tools.

Such instruments include the Vienna-based Secretariat, with its Conflict Prevention Centre and thematic units tasked with combating transnational challenges such as terrorism and trafficking, promoting democratic policing and effective border management, and advancing economic and environmental co-operation. The OSCE's instruments include a wide network of field operations, which tailor OSCE support to the specific needs of host countries. And they include three autonomous institutions: the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Representative on Freedom of the Media.

This comprehensive toolbox is at the disposal of our Partners. The OSCE has made clear its willingness to share its experience and its expertise.

At the same time, we are aware that every country has unique characteristics and priorities, and that a solid Partnership must be a truly two-way process.

For this reason, we need a clear expression of interest from our Mediterranean Partners to translate our offer into concrete forms of co-operation. We are ready to share our experience and enhance our co-operation with those Partners who seek it.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Democratic transition is a multidimensional task. In this regard, the OSCE's unique approach to security – in which questions of democratic reform are not separated from questions of “hard” security or economic development and co-operation – has proved indispensable.

Democratic transition is also a long-term process, which requires persistence and patience. It can fall victim to delays and setbacks, and needs the committed support of all sectors of society, as well as of the international community.

As Secretary General of the OSCE, I am personally committed to facilitating this process and supporting enhanced dialogue with our Partners. I am ready to assist in translating our experience into concrete activities.

In this context, I am also ready to enhance co-ordination with other international and regional organizations, in order to ensure maximum efficiency and effectiveness in our co-operation with our Mediterranean Partners.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have an excellent agenda in front of us, covering important areas of OSCE expertise that have proved essential to successful democratic transitions in the OSCE area itself.

Let us use this Conference as an opportunity to discuss together possible ways for our Partnership to make real progress through specific forms of concrete co-operation. Thank you.