

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. DMITRY BALAKIN,  
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE  
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 70th JOINT MEETING OF THE  
OSCE FORUM FOR SECURITY CO-OPERATION AND THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

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**On the Mediterranean – security of the OSCE’s southern region**

Mr. Chairperson,

We are grateful to the Italian Chairmanship of the OSCE and the Slovenian Chairmanship of the Forum for Security Co-operation for organizing this joint meeting of the Permanent Council and the Forum for Security Co-operation on the Mediterranean. We thank the speakers for presenting their evaluations.

Questions of security in the OSCE area are closely interrelated with the neighbouring Mediterranean region. There is a special section of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, “Questions relating to Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean”, which states that security in Europe is closely linked with security in the Mediterranean. This view has been further developed in subsequent CSCE/OSCE documents, including in particular the OSCE Strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the Twenty-First Century (Maastricht 2003), the Ministerial Declaration on the OSCE Partners for Co-operation (Madrid 2007), Ministerial Council Decision No. 5/11 on the Partners for Co-operation (Vilnius 2011) and the Ministerial Council Declaration on Co-operation with the Mediterranean Partners (Basel 2014).

Mr. Chairperson,

The current situation in the Euro-Atlantic region and the world as a whole is characterized by growing instability. There is an increasing dangerous uncertainty in relations between States and certain alliances. Many countries are confronted by regional conflicts and are forced to combat transnational threats. The Mediterranean region is a clear example of the build-up of a “security vacuum”. It is from there and not from the East that the real rather than mythical threats to European security arise. They are due in many cases to a wide range of factors. One of these factors is the continuing armed conflicts in Syria and Libya. Then there is the attempt by some States to achieve domination in the Middle East and North Africa by force of arms to safeguard their political and economic interests, and the interference in the internal affairs of Arab countries. Much has been said here about Libya. It

is important to learn the right lessons from events in that country. We all recall that the origins of the Libyan problems go back to the armed intervention in 2011 by NATO countries to change the regime in violation of provisions of international law. As a result of this, various groups that had been employed earlier to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi gained access to arsenals of arms. This led to a further development of the situation far beyond the borders of Libya, above all in the Sahelo-Saharan zone and the Mediterranean. International terrorist organizations (Islamic State, Al-Qaida, Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and others) emerged as a result. Security in the Southern Mediterranean is also affected by the presence of unresolved inter-ethnic conflicts, the problem of negative economic tendencies, the low standard of living of the population, and unemployment, particularly among the young.

The continuing political instability in the Middle East and North Africa has led to a sharp increase in the number of migrants and refugees. The OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation and other States in the region are particularly hard hit by the influx of refugees from crisis-ridden States. The inhabitants of the European continent are also feeling the direct consequences of this situation. According to the International Organization for Migration, 171,000 migrants arrived in Europe in 2017. Statistics from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees show that between January and May 2018 more than 35,000 people made their way to Europe via Italy, Greece and Spain.

The uncontrolled flow of migrants has worsened the socio-economic situation in a number of countries in the European region, produced a sharp rise in crime in areas where the migrants are temporarily housed and led to an increase in xenophobia and nationalistic attitudes among the local population. We are keeping a close watch on the implementation of the European Union (EU) decision to create a regional disembarkation platform and some kind of filtering centres to screen those people who, in the opinion of the EU, are not in need of international protection. We trust that the implementation of the EU decision will not be to the detriment of generally recognized human rights standards and the EU's international obligations to take in refugees and will not also end up merely shifting the problem beyond the boundaries of the European Union. As for the European Union Naval Force Operation Sophia, we trust that it will comply in full with the provisions of the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 2292 (2016) and 2357 (2017), which formed the basis under international law for the mandate subsequently agreed by the EU Member States.

Illegal migration is closely linked to trafficking in human beings, in particular from the Southern Mediterranean. We cannot but note that among the predetermining factors are the shortage of legal channels for migration, the marginalization of the population, inadequate social and economic support for mothers and children, and the toughening as a whole of the European Union's migration policy.

Against this background, the threat of terrorism is growing sharply. I should like here to highlight in particular the danger of foreign terrorist fighters leaving those parts of Iraq and Syria that have come under control of the government forces. Particular concern is warranted by the fact that a large number of fighters with experience of terrorist activity are attempting to seek shelter under the guise of refugees in the territory of third countries, particularly European ones, creating extensive networks of terrorist groups, operating with a long-term perspective and forming " sleeper cells", as they are called. At the same time, recruiters for Islamic State and Al-Qaida are attempting to exploit illegal migration channels, involving refugees in extremist activity and making use of their religious naivety and low level of legal

awareness. It would be a mistake to think that terrorists might be used to achieve some kind of political aims, for example, changing the regimes in Tripoli, Damascus or elsewhere, and then to expect them to embark on a course of deradicalization and become integrated into peaceful society.

It would be incorrect to state that these worrying tendencies are connected solely with the Mediterranean region. Their negative impact can be felt everywhere. The world is now so interconnected that a crisis situation in one part of the world will cause a chain reaction with an impact extending far beyond the original confines. In an era of globalization we cannot protect ourselves against this by erecting fences at our borders or by dispatching armed forces. The situation also means that there is only one possible way for the international community to respond to these threats. We must join forces on the basis of honest co-operative partnership to settle conflict situations in the Middle East and North Africa, which have become catalysts for the rapid destabilization of the Mediterranean.

It is clear that the influence of the above-mentioned extraregional factors on the security situation in the OSCE area is only likely to grow. We believe that the time has come to look in general at the outreach capabilities of the OSCE and the mechanisms for it.

Interaction by the OSCE with its Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation has become a priority. The Organization's best practices and experience are central to a very wide range of issues, including the comprehensive fight against terrorism and organized crime, migration flow management, the promotion of sustainable development, protection of human rights and the development of civil society. There is a need to make use of the capabilities of the Organization's executive structures, particularly the Office of the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities.

It would seem that the most promising projects could include, for example, assistance in the training of national law enforcement officers and help in combating smuggling, particularly as it is used to finance terrorism. It is also important not to overlook the provision of aid to victims of trafficking. In that regard, we believe that particular attention should be paid to combating trafficking in children, since minors who end up as "human commodities" in the hands of traffickers frequently become victims of sexual exploitation and trafficking in human organs or are involved in criminal activities.

We agree with the approach by the Italian Chairmanship regarding the importance of the OSCE's "southern flank" and the need to work together to combat the challenges to security emanating from the Middle East and North Africa. These efforts should be linked with the work of the United Nations and specialist international organizations.

Thank you for your attention.