



OPENING ADDRESS
BY
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TO
THE OSCE MEDITERRANEAN SEMINAR
ON
ADDRESSING THREATS TO SECURITY IN THE 21st CENTURY
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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Excellency Dr. Solomon Passy
Foreign Minister of Bulgaria,
Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE,
Excellency Andre Logar , State Secretary, Foreign Ministry of Slovenia, incoming OSCE
Chairman-in-office,
Ambassador Jan Kubis
OSCE Secretary-General,

Mr. Chairmen,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me immense pleasure to greet you today in Sharm El-Sheikh, this fabulous spot of Egypt, at the opening ceremony of the annual OSCE Mediterranean Seminar. Egypt is pleased to host this seminar for the third time, as a practical mean to convey our close link that exists between Mediterranean and European security.

I would like to express our appreciation for the dedicated efforts of the Bulgarian Chairmanship of the OSCE, and for those of Slovenia as current chair of Mediterranean Partners Contact Group in making this meeting possible.

Since the establishment of the OSCE, Egypt has been closely following the developments it has gone through, in particular the vital role it has played to build security, stability and mutual confidence in the European continent. We are certain that the success of the Organization in its tasks in Europe is mainly embedded in its dealing with security through a comprehensive approach: political, economic, and social, together with directly addressing the root causes of conflicts and problems in Europe.

Throughout our partnership with the Organization since 1995, Egypt has sought to strengthen dialogue, to contribute to the various activities, and to benefit from the Organization's experience in the more profound dialogue, the promotion of political, economic and social relations, and the consolidation of confidence-building measures among its Member States.

Egypt has welcomed the decision of the OSCE Ministerial Council last year to invite Mediterranean Partners more frequently to attend the meetings of the Permanent Council, and the Security Cooperation Forum as observers, a request we have been making for several years.

This year's Seminar acquires special importance in light of current international conditions and problems which represent a significant increase of security threats. The causes of such threats have become diverse, not merely related to military aspects but also incorporating such issues as terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, non-resolution of regional conflicts, increasing hatred, risks of illegal emigration, increasing economic gaps between countries, and environmental degradation. Such threats do not distinguish between developed and developing countries. Rather, they impose a serious reality, a *fait accompli*, that has to be addressed and tackled collectively through close cooperation.

In this context, we can say that the most serious threat to our security is the narrow international prism through which our region is dealt with. It is looked upon as a source of threats and tensions that should be sedated and kept within boundaries, without genuine attempts so far to resolve its problems in earnest.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The narrow prism I have just referred to is the genuine threat faced by our region, and an objective realization thereof is the real challenge for our partners. The danger of terrorism may be the exact outcome of such a serious combination of attempts at cultural hegemony over our region.

It is essential to understand the causes of this danger so that we can address and overcome it. Terrorism is born out of despair, oppression, injustice and double standards.

Feelings of frustration are compounded by increasing living conditions below the poverty line, and low standards of living in developing countries in general, as well as fathomless discrepancies among societies. The projection of such discrepancies has been made easy by globalization.

Unfortunately, the international community had not realized the danger of terrorism until its scourge hit it. Immediately, terrorism has promptly jumped to the forefront of the international agenda, and has become a permanent item in all fora and a top priority for the UN and the Security Council which has set up a special committee to combat it.

The most successful and efficient method to confront the threat and danger of terrorism is to uproot the real causes which provide a fertile ground in which it sprouts and grows.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The challenge resides in two elements: the first is the need for economic, social and political development of societies; the second, and the more important in my opinion, is the necessity for achieving just political solutions for the major issues which have beset our region for several decades. In this context, we reiterate the call made by President Mubarak since 1986 to convene an international conference on terrorism under the auspices of the United Nations in order to deal effectively with the underlying causes of that phenomenon, and to examine and address its roots and origins.

We do not concur with the claim that the Middle East is the main source of terrorism and security threats. There are several factors, domestic, regional and external, that have led to the birth and aggravation of violence and terrorism in various regions of the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I should refer, in this important forum, to the fact that the prime threat to our region, and perhaps to its geographical neighborhood too, emanates from the continued possession by some in the Middle East of nuclear weapons. At a time when everyone is in agreement on the danger of such weapons and the necessity for their non-proliferation, the international community still adopts a selective approach in dealing with weapons of mass destruction.

At a time when the international community seeks to impose strict control systems on imports of dual use materials of states party to the non-proliferation regimes, including all the Arab countries, it turns a blind eye to the persistence of some parties in the region in stockpiling and developing their nuclear capabilities.

Here, a question poses itself: Is it acceptable to condone the continuation of nuclear proliferation risks in this region? Is the present international approach in addressing this issue capable of dealing with those risks and threats? Or does it require an urgent and radical change? Of course we see that it requires an urgent and radical change.

Persistence in adopting double standards can lead, not only to the perpetuation of aggravation of nuclear proliferation dangers but also to weakening conviction of the solemnity and authority of the international treaties on this issue. Moreover, such a state of affairs will compound tensions in the Middle East region. Aware of the peril of such tensions, and in a drive to reduce them and eliminate concomitant risks, President Mubarak launched an Egyptian initiative in 1990, to make of the Middle East a zone free from all weapons of mass destruction, without any exceptions.

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Leaving regional disputes unresolved largely contributes to the outbreak and escalation of violence and counter-violence. The Palestinian question remains the core of conflict in the Middle East. It directly affects both Mediterranean and European security. The region will never enjoy stability, calm or development unless a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to this question is reached with no further delay or procrastination.

In this context, the intended Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip could be an important step. If withdrawal is completed in an orderly and complete manner, it could usher the start of defusing the crisis and restoring the peace process to the correct path. If it is carried out in a different logic and frame, it will lead to more tension and violence.

To attain the objectives of withdrawal, a number of elements should be ensured:

- The withdrawal should be total and comprehensive. As long as a single Israeli soldier remains in the Gaza Strip, occupation will not have ended and the factors of tension will persist.
- The withdrawal should include all crossings, the port, and the airport in order to avoid other means of imposing a siege on the Palestinian people.
- A comprehensive Israeli withdrawal does not only mean the departure of the occupation forces from the Gaza Strip but also non-recourse to the practices of incursion, invasion or assassination.

The international community should now support, in an action oriented manner, elections in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, set by the Palestinian Authority for 9th January 2005. We expect the international community, particularly at a crucial post-Arafat period, to press all parties concerned not to put any verbal or physical obstacles before a process of smooth and democratic elections.

We still face another challenge namely, restoration of stability to Iraq. In this context, here in Sharm El-Sheikh, an international conference will be held in a few days to discuss the Iraqi question. We do hope that the meeting will represent a step towards the attainment of stability, security, full sovereignty, and prosperity for Iraq and its people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We wish to express our concern about and preoccupation with the ongoing dialogue within OSCE concerning intolerance. I need not overemphasize our agreement on the necessity of fighting all forms of religious intolerance, and ensuring protection and respect for all religions. There is a pressing need for that in light of what we are witnessing worldwide in terms of defamation campaigns against specific religions, and attacks against their followers, including Islam.

In this regard, we deem it necessary to adopt a common position on dealing with the detestable trends at disparaging religions. Such a common position should reflect concerted efforts by the international community to confront these phenomena, without letting discussion on the details or nature of those efforts lead to further differences, at a time when we need more cooperation and coordination among ourselves on this issue.

Therefore, we consider that the formation of a committee to deal evenly with all forms of religious intolerance as the better option that reflects the unity, sincerity and determination of the international community to deal with all those phenomena. Granting a privileged status to one religion or its followers over others, or being selective in such sensitive issues, will be counter-productive. We believe that spreading tolerance depends essentially on respecting the “other” ... the individual... the human being, irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, colour or religion, in accordance with the unanimity of the international community as reflected in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We look forward to continued and further cooperation and concertation of efforts between Mediterranean countries and OSCE, with a view to reaching optimum ways to deal with security threats in the 21st Century.

In conclusion, I wish to express our appreciation of the efforts made by OSCE Secretariat in the preparation for and success of this Seminar. I hope that your deliberations will be fruitful, and look forward to reading the conclusions of your Seminar. I wish you all an enjoyable stay in Egypt.

Thank you.