

The Mediterranean Seminar in Tel-Aviv, 18-19 December 2007

Statement by the Ambassador of Israel, Mr. Dan Ashbel at the PC meeting, 24/1/01

I would like to start by thanking the chairperson in office, as well as the coordinator of the Mediterranean Partners for their decision to hold the annual Mediterranean Seminar in Israel. This is also the opportunity to thank the Secretary General, and especially the secretariat's staff for their tireless work, before and during the seminar. Without their help we could not run this operation. I don't want to miss the opportunity to thank the head of ODIHR and his team for their contribution to the seminar, and last but not least, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and its former president and head of the Mediterranean Forum, the Right Honourable Alcee C. Hastings, who added his perspective to the issues on the seminar's agenda.

A large number of delegates from Participating Countries and Partners, as well as some 65 members of NGOs, some of them from partner countries who were not present at the seminar, used the Mediterranean Seminar as a place for expressing their views and positions. At the same time, Tel Aviv became a venue where everyone could listen to the others. Tolerance was not only the main theme of the seminar but was well practiced by all participants. Keynote speakers and participants were actively dealing with the implementation of OSCE tolerance-related commitments. Sessions were dedicated to the respect for cultural and religious diversity, facilitating dialogue and to countering discrimination in the OSCE participating States and the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation. I believe that in the short time we had at our disposal, we succeeded in raising ideas and suggesting practical activities that could, and should fill a whole working year and more. Moreover these ideas could contribute to the advancement of OSCE norms and values in Mediterranean Partner countries, and help bring them closer to each other.

Just to name a few of them, like the idea to increase civil society involvement in OSCE Mediterranean Seminars, or to assist the creation in the Partners for Co-operation of centres for promoting tolerance and non-discrimination and lending libraries on this subject. Some speakers described ways to enhance understanding of cultural and religious diversity in society as a means to promoting the feeling of inclusiveness for minority groups, or how to address the sense in some Muslim communities of being trapped between Western and Islamic traditional identities. The discussions also raised the issue of the potential role of women in transforming society. There were some suggestions on how to exchange information on hate crimes and strategies against them. Help combating anti-Semitism by promoting the use of the OSCE's working definition of this criminal phenomenon. It was also agreed that it is important to promote education of all sectors of society in the values of others.

I could go into a detailed report of the seminar. This would, first of all take too much of your precious time, and secondly, would reward those who decided not to participate in

this meeting. I believe not even one of you expected me to ignore this issue. Some may have even been surprised that I did not mention it yet.

The CIO coined the theme of this chairmanship with Continuity, Coherence and Co-Operation. I am glad that we could fulfil at least one of these goals, the continuity, by holding the seminar. I, however, regret the fact that both the coherence and the co-operation suffered on the way to the seminar, and during the seminar itself.

The OSCE emphasized early on the importance of the Mediterranean area. The Spanish chairmanship introduced physical changes in the sitting order in order to include the partners in the circle. In Madrid the Partners for Co-Operation were included in the Ministerial conclusion. I want, once again thank the OSCE for inviting us to share its norms and values and learn from its experience. It is our duty, as Med. Partners, for our own benefit to use this framework as a tool for promoting understanding and tolerance among us, the Partners. In recent months we witnessed some developments in our area, and in the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict. Representatives of Arab League participated in Annapolis, Ministers from several Arab countries had open meetings with their Israeli counterpart, and Palestinian and Israeli leaders are meeting regularly in order to achieve a political solution to the conflict in our area. On this background it is sad to note that some of the Mediterranean Partners decided to ignore the invitation of the OSCE and decided not to participate in the annual Seminar.

I believe that this special framework of the Mediterranean Partners of the OSCE has two main goals; one is to let us absorb the norms and values of the organization. The other, and not less important, is to try and develop CBMs between us. I know that co-operation between representatives of the six Mediterranean partners, here in Vienna; will not bring about the political solution of the conflict. I believe, however, that the dialogue and cooperation in this framework will contribute to the mutual goal of peace and prosperity for all people and peoples in our region. I hope that the coming year, under the Greek leadership will bring us closer to this goal.