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Mutually Reinforcing Institutions and Their Undertakings in the Mediterranean: The Parliamentary Dimension

Mr. Adrian SEVERIN
President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Already at the very birth of the CSCE during the Helsinki Conference twenty-five years ago, the importance of the Mediterranean region was realized, and the need for cooperation with the non-CSCE Mediterranean states identified as a priority. Throughout the ensuing years, the need for cooperation with the Mediterranean Partners has been stated again and again in OSCE documents.

Back in 1990, the Charter of Paris for a New Europe set forth the importance of inter-parliamentary dialogue in the sense that confidence- and security-building measures would lead to increased transparency and confidence, and consequently, to stability and security in Europe. Since that time, we have supported the promotion of

stability and peace within the OSCE region through, among other things, the inter-parliamentary for a provided by our meetings, seminars, and missions. Retrospectively thinking, it was the Parliamentary Assembly's pledge to the processes of confidence-building which put the first accent on the importance of this process.

With the end of the Cold War, however, and the associated collapse of Communism, European priorities in the Mediterranean have increasingly been eclipsed by new imperatives, such as the integration of Central and Eastern Europe into the family of developed democracies, the delicate maintenance of the new power pattern, and the necessity to control the tumultuous events in the Balkans.

Nevertheless, it is utterly risky to underestimate the continued significance of stability in the Mediterranean region for the security of Europe. One of the most important factors that inevitably bind the two shores of the Mediterranean together is the issue of migration. Some 2.5 North Africans are currently employed in the labour markets of the EU, and there are perhaps another million workers in other non-EU Mediterranean countries. Apart from these, there is a growing number of illegal migrants from Mediterranean countries; living in Spain alone, it is estimated that there are some 200,000 illegal residents, mostly coming from Morocco and Algeria. Furthermore, there is every indication that these numbers will only rise in the future.

The need for a certain kind of labour in European markets is increasing and so are the populations of the Mediterranean Partners. While population growth in Europe is stagnating, it is believed that in the period between 1990 and 2010, the population of the Maghreb will increase from 58 million to 90 million. Given these demographic pressures, migration is likely to become an issue of increasing importance in the coming years between the Europeans and the Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation.

Why should we not engage this available labour in common projects networking the area? Why should we not encourage the European investors – mainly the small and medium ones – to invest in order to establish their “second enterprise” in the countries of our Mediterranean Partners? Why should we not promote procedures which make the difference between the legal and necessary migration and the illegal one?

All these would require the right political impulses and the appropriate legislation. The Parliamentary Assembly and the parliamentarians could provide guidance and dynamism in both these respects.

Beyond the immediate concern over migration, there are other matters, such as weapons proliferation, drug trafficking, international terrorism, and religious

extremism, manifest throughout the region encompassing the OSCE and the Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation, on which the community of interests between our countries depends.

Now, the link between internal stability and external security has long ceased to be questioned. A perceived threat from the outside, for example, can lead to political turmoil within a nation and the rise of an externally hostile government; conversely, economic failure within a country may result not only in the growth of internal extremist groups, but also in an externally damaging surge in refugees and migrants.

Of course, the origin of these processes goes far back before the establishment of the OSCE PA. Yet, we must admit this is no excuse for having failed in previous attempts at playing a positive role and building bridges of understanding and cooperation over the Mediterranean. Talking about building, I would like to point out three fields in which confidence-building (our joint task and objective) will prove crucial: the economic, cultural and political fields, all of them facets of what we actually term as "security" today.

The economic side of Mediterranean security is primarily an internal one, although not devoid of multiple international determinations. Looking into a maybe

not so distant future, we have to acknowledge that economic growth of the Mediterranean Partners really deserves higher priority: its major importance for stability in the region needs no underscoring. Allow me to resort to a statistical argument to make my point: although the Mediterranean accounts for only a small percentage of EU imports and exports, on the average more than half of all Mediterranean foreign trade is with the EU. So, a significant part of Europe seems to have - at least for the moment - little economic interest in the Mediterranean. Yet, who could estimate the disastrous consequences of a possible widening of this discrepancy for the economies of the Mediterranean Partners, for their stability and the stability of the entire area?

Naturally, economy-planners may play a direct role in the development of the Mediterranean countries. Still, politicians, and I think of parliamentarians above all, can prepare the way for economic growth through negotiation and legislation. Markets must be reformed and opened, not only in the Mediterranean Partner countries, but throughout the OSCE region. Inter-parliamentary dialogue and the free exchange of ideas are also critical in promoting investments and economic cooperation and finally reaching mutually beneficial trade agreements.

The cultural side of security is an issue the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is particularly well-suited to tackle, seeing its comprehensive area of participation and

acknowledged community of values. Experience unfortunately has shown that cultural antagonism and mistrust pose growing problems to stability. As we all know, differences - sometimes radical - in cultures may lead to confrontational attitudes and potential clashes, although they are actually misunderstandings or misperceptions. As direct representatives of their cultures, parliamentarians from both the OSCE area and the Mediterranean Partner countries should take advantage of their democratic experience to find common ground for communication, correct misperceptions and come to mutual understanding with their counterparts, therefore exerting the role they are actually expected to play - bringing together the political and the civilian communities.

If variety is a challenge, or, better said, a challenging richness/fortune, then confidence-building is by all means a task and a duty our parliamentarians have to be up to. Organizing meetings and exchanges of views with their counterparts in the Mediterranean Partner countries, taking steps to encourage joint university projects, exchanges of visits by youth organizations, intellectuals, and labour representatives, and greater access to foreign media on both sides of the Mediterranean are factors that can increase mutual understanding and hence stability in the region.

Last but not least, and, in fact, last for best, the political dimension of security and stability is one to which the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is well acquainted

by virtue of its considerable experience. Despite lingering feelings of mistrust and insecurity, potential danger of regional arms races and conflicts, we all know that transparency and mutually agreed solutions are sure ways to build confidence and security.

What we actually need is a model of co-operation, based upon our commonly shared principles and values; we have to build on previous constructive experiences and learn from our mutual failures. The OSCE PA is here, ready to impart its experience in managing the problems of 55 Member States, equally ready to learn new lessons and, if not always in a position to identify solutions, to help create a favourable environment in this respect, even if others than us present will find the right answers and implement the workable solutions.