

# **The OSCE engagement with the Mediterranean Partners**

## **Action-oriented co-operation in a new context**

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In my view, this issue of Security and Human Rights devoted to the MENA region is important and timely for three reasons: first, it provides a platform for presenting views on the impact of momentous transformations that have swept the South Mediterranean on domestic political agendas and regional security and stability; second, it increases the awareness of its readers concerning the current formats and mechanisms of interaction between the OSCE and the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation in seeking ways for their better employment for common benefit; third, it helps to generate ideas on how to best use the available instruments to support aspirations of peoples and countries of the region for democratic change.

My country — Ukraine, which continues to undergo a transition process pursuing comprehensive democratic and structural reforms, has a long-standing tradition of friendly and cordial relations with countries of the region. Thus, we are fully conscious of the challenges that need to be confronted, closely follow the development of the situation and consistently support the strengthening of cooperation with the MENA countries in various bilateral and multilateral formats. Three elements, in our view, will be particularly important in the short to medium term to consolidate a foundation for lasting peace and prosperity in the region:

1) The preservation of state sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity as well as historical, cultural and religious traditions in the states that undergo change;  
The continuation of inclusive internal political dialogue with the participation of key players to allow for stable democracy to take roots;  
Economic recovery and improving the population's living conditions to guarantee stability and to intensify cooperation in the region.

2) Developments in the region have testified to the ongoing high relevance of the OSCE concept of comprehensive and indivisible security which cuts across all three dimensions — politico-military, economic and environmental and human dimensions. It is this concept which underpinned the OSCE dialogue and activities over the last four decades or so, the inclusiveness of the Organization as well as the extensive experience and expertise gained that provide the OSCE with unique advantages in facilitating and supporting the transformation processes.

3) As the current Chair of the Mediterranean Contact Group, a member of the OSCE Troika and the incoming OSCE Chairmanship we shall continue to pay keen attention to strengthening political dialogue and practical co-operation with Mediterranean Partners based on adopted OSCE decisions and to promoting progress in all three dimensions.

In terms of general OSCE approaches and decisions, it is worth recalling that back in 1975 the Helsinki Final Act recognized the close link between peace and security in Europe and in the world as a whole. At the recent Astana OSCE Summit of 2010 the participating States recognized that the security of the OSCE area is 'inextricably linked' to that of its neighbouring regions, while developments in the southern Mediterranean in 2011 have amplified the relevance of this connection. Thus, in Vilnius in December last year the OSCE Ministerial Council adopted a specific decision on Partners for Co-operation, aiming 'to enhance further the Partnership for Co-operation by broadening dialogue, intensifying political consultations, strengthening practical co-operation and further sharing best practices and experience gained in the development of comprehensive, co-operative and indivisible security, in the three OSCE dimensions, according to the needs and priorities identified by the Partners'.<sup>1</sup> Significantly, the decision encourages the OSCE executive structures to engage in action-oriented co-operation with the Partner countries in all three dimensions. Thus, the decision clearly prescribes two principal tracks of interaction — 1) enhancing political dialogue and sharing good practices as well as 2) practical and action-oriented co-operation.<sup>2</sup> This guidance informs the activities of the Ukrainian Chair of the Mediterranean Contact Group of 2012 aimed at the implementation of the Vilnius Ministerial Council decision.

As regards dialogue, the Mediterranean Contact Group in the OSCE remains the key format with the full participation of the Partners and the participating States. It met six times in the period from January to November 2012 to address a range of security-related issues that are of interest to the OSCE and Partner states.

The meetings have a generally structured agenda that encompasses 1) a review of current issues that allows for mean-

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1 Ministerial Council Decision No. 5/11, *Partners for Co-operation*, Vilnius, 2011, MC. DEC/5/11, p.1.

2 See: *ibidem*, p.2.

ingful update and exchange on important developments and events, 2) a discussion on the substantive topic or area of OSCE expertise that may be of benefit to Partners, 3) a presentation on internal developments delivered by one of the Partner states.

Our substantive discussions have touched upon issues of the three OSCE dimensions, with a special focus on the OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico- Military Aspects of Security, Energy Sustainability and Water Management and Democratic Elections. The added value of such meetings is that they address not only the methodological approaches based on OSCE commitments but also practical applicability aspects demonstrated by specific country cases. As a follow-up all Mediterranean Partners were invited to take part in the regional seminar on the Code of Conduct for the Baltic Sea Area held on 18-20 June 2012 in Riga (Latvia). The commitment of Germany and Switzerland to translate the Code of Conduct into Arabic enhances the practical value of the discussions for our Partners.

An integral and very useful component of the dialogue has been the country presentations in the Mediterranean Contact Group format made so far in the course of the year by the Ambassadors of Tunisia, Morocco, Israel and Algeria. These presentations have helped to sharpen our understanding of the developments in the countries concerned and to raise awareness of the similarities and diversities of their political culture, traditions and national priorities. They have also highlighted that the democratic transition in the Mediterranean Partner states is a complex, multidimensional and long-term process that has no universal formula. It is important to share experiences and the lessons learned from both successes and shortcomings to ease progress and to make the bumpy road of transformations somewhat smoother.

The regular dialogue in Vienna at the Ambassadorial level or at the level of contact points from the Vienna-based delegations of participating States and Partners for Co-operation is significantly strengthened through the exchange of high-level visits. Let me note in particular in this respect the address to the OSCE Permanent Council by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Jordan and the visits to the region by the OSCE Secretary General and the Director of ODIHR.

Bearing in mind that since the Madrid OSCE Ministerial decision of 2007 the Partners participate in all meetings of the OSCE working bodies, it can be convincingly submitted, in my opinion, that necessary conditions are in place for the progressive development of political dialogue.

Important steps have also been taken to focus attention on the second principal track of interaction — action-oriented cooperation. After a number of informal discussions in January and February in close cooperation with the OSCE Secretariat, a List of Potential Projects and Topics of Potential Co-operation with the OSCE Mediterranean Partners was developed and circulated among participating States and Partners.

The list reflects the OSCE areas of expertise and interests initially expressed by the Partners. It serves as a working tool and is intended to help Mediterranean Partners and participating States to identify concrete activities and to prioritize their implementation. The listed project ideas can be further refined and tailored in accordance with the indications of the Mediterranean Partners and potential donors. Notably, the projects can be undertaken by individual Partner states based on their needs and priorities but also entail the involvement of a number of interested states, thus promoting regional co-operation.

This exchange leads us to a new promising juncture from the viewpoint of practical interaction. Let me note the visit to Tunisia by the ODIHR Director in April and specific areas for possible co-operation identified by the Tunisian Government. I hope that this dialogue will soon materialise in practical steps. An important regional event took place in June, when Jordan hosted a Workshop on Environment and Security Issues in the Southern Mediterranean Region, the so-called 'Valencia Follow-up Project'.

Consistent efforts by the Ukrainian Chair of the Mediterranean Contact Group were directed at the successful preparation of the annual OSCE Mediterranean Conference, which took place in Rome on 30-31 October 2012. Following requests by the Mediterranean Partners, this year's Conference was designed to offer a platform for a focused discussion on the subject of the OSCE second dimension, thus the event was entitled: 'Economic co-operation with Mediterranean Partners in the democratic transition processes and political reforms'.

The distinctive feature of this year's Conference was an open and interactive exchange of views which contributed

to a better understanding of the nature of the assistance that can be provided by the OSCE, based on its experience, to support the national reform agendas in the partner States. The discussions have testified to the expectations on the part of the participating States and Partners for more focused and strategic approaches, for gradually making the partnership more operational through the implementation of concrete projects, particularly in the area of economic and social development. Participants from the OSCE states and countries of the Mediterranean region introduced many ideas that could enhance cooperation and the exchange of best practices. There was particular interest in specific proposals on setting up a Track II focal point that would promote the establishment of an academic network with the Mediterranean region, on holding a seminar on combating human trafficking in view of the implications that this crime entails for Mediterranean partners, on conducting an expert workshop on sustainable energy to share good practices and to seek possible avenues for the way forward.


In this respect we intend to further prioritize and streamline the cooperation within the partnership in accordance with the needs expressed by the Partners for Co-operation. In this regard we rely on the proactive engagements of the Partners for Co-operation. On our side we are ready to provide the OSCE with a platform for exploring ways of mutually beneficial co-operation between the OSCE and our Mediterranean neighbours and a proper follow-up to the Conference.

An important task for all participating States and the Partners should be to establish an effective connection between the discussions we had at the Conference and the work we will be doing next year as its follow-up. In its capacity as a future OSCE Chairmanship Ukraine will try to promote action-oriented activities, also in relations with Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation.

The ongoing dialogue confirms that while the OSCE's relationship with the Partners for Co-operation must be firmly rooted in partnership, this partnership could be made effective when developed on an equal footing and based on the principle of mutual respect and trust. It is important that in Vilnius the OSCE participating States agreed that 'the OSCE's experience in different areas can be of interest and potential benefit for the Partners, while taking into full account their prime responsibility for making national political choices as well as their specific political, cultural and religious heritage and in accordance with their needs, goals and national priorities.'<sup>3</sup> This approach should continue to guide us in exploring areas of enhanced interaction with the Partners and possible assistance from the OSCE.

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3 Ministerial Council Decision No. 5/11, *Partners for Co-operation*, Vilnius, 2011, MC. DEC/5/11, p.1.



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