



Ilkka Kanerva, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President
Remarks to open the Mediterranean Forum
2014 OSCE PA Autumn Meeting
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Excellencies,
Fellow parliamentarians,
Distinguished guests,

I would like to welcome you to the 2014 Autumn Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. I am happy to be here in Geneva with you and I would like to thank the Swiss Parliament and Mr. Andreas Aebi, the Head of the Swiss Delegation, for the hospitality.

There will be more time for welcomes and due thanks this afternoon, so let us now turn directly to the important matters before us, many of which our esteemed colleague, Vice-President Alain Neri, has just introduced.

Since our Autumn Meeting at this time last year, the eyes of the world have often been divided between two hotspots of upheaval and conflict – Ukraine and the Middle East. The OSCE and the Parliamentary Assembly have devoted every possible effort towards de-escalating the former crisis. However, we perhaps have not paid due attention to the latter. It is my sincere hope that this Forum can help remedy that.

What I am referring to is not one conflict, not one source of instability, but multiple conflicts and multiple challenges in a region of highly complex political, cultural and religious realities. These conflicts and challenges are not peripheral to the OSCE area.

One of the biggest security threat to the region and to the whole civilized world is the extremist movement ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria]. Many OSCE States are now considering ways to counter this common enemy.

ISIS's advance has only complicated the horrific conflict in Syria, which has become one of the greatest human tragedies in recent memory. As the conflict rages, it continues to extend its destabilizing wave across the Middle East and beyond. Several OSCE states also have significant influence over some of the parties to the conflict.

The renewed violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has made a lasting peace only more elusive and cost far too many lives on both sides. As long as it remains unresolved, it also threatens the peace and security of the region at large. Sadly, it also continues to serve as a cover for anti-Semitism throughout the world, including the OSCE area.

The political transition that is still under way in the Middle East and North Africa following the “Arab Spring” continues to deserve our attention. Democratic values have not fully taken root. The process will take time, leadership and concerted international support.

These are all issues that closely affect our Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation -- Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly greatly values the experiences and lessons that they will share with us to help us better understand these dynamics. I want to extend a special welcome to the parliamentarians from Algeria and Morocco who are with us here for this Forum.

OSCE participating States also have an important opportunity today to share their perspectives on these issues. Let us learn from each other’s experiences and consider policies to improve security and stability for our Mediterranean Partners and for ourselves.

Our Mediterranean Forum has many issues to discuss, such as the flow of migrants and asylum-seekers throughout the region. This topic, and the related human rights, political and economic factors, was one of the main themes of our Annual Session this year. Our Declaration called on EU member States to engage further in migration management and to ensure that the contribution and burden of migrants on the European continent is shared equally among member States. But how can this be implemented? How can we work together to reduce the root causes of irregular migration?

In our Resolution on Comprehensive Immigration Reform, we noted that “Equality of opportunity for Mediterranean people and the protection of their human rights are essential to security, peace, stability and sustainable democracy, and hence to economic growth in the OSCE area.” We called on OSCE States to reinforce dialogue with countries of origin and transit. Today we have a prime opportunity.

Yes, we have much to work on. I look forward to the rest of this morning’s addresses and to our debate. I urge all of us to seize this opportunity for dialogue and brainstorming, and take lessons learned back home.

Thank you very much.