

President Efthymiou calls for a strengthened OSCE in U.S. university lecture tour

In the context of ongoing tumult in the Mediterranean region, OSCE PA President Petros Efthymiou said this week that the events in North Africa and the Middle East show that the thirst for democracy is not confined to any particular region or culture.

“We find ourselves today at a time of great turbulence,” he said during a speaking tour of prestigious U.S. universities, identifying four key parameters of this volatility.

First, he pointed to the global instability created by the ongoing financial crisis. Second, he said that there is a continuing power vacuum that resulted from the collapse of communism in the early 1990s. Third, he mentioned the emergence of new global powers, especially Brazil, India and China. And finally, he highlighted the profound changes that are taking place in the Arab world.

Mr. Efthymiou emphasized the unique role of the OSCE in addressing this instability. As the only forum for Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian relations, the Organization has vast experience that incorporates civil society, especially in the fields of human rights and the environment, he said.

However, the OSCE is amid a crisis that demands more than new political leadership, President Efthymiou said. It needs to operate in a fundamentally new way with more involvement from foreign ministers and less dependence on the consensus rule.

Further, he said, implementation of the OSCE’s human dimension commitments remains incomplete, with serious violations of human rights remaining commonplace. This presents a significant challenge to the Organization, particularly with divergent perceptions of the human dimension throughout the OSCE area, he said.

Acknowledging that the OSCE has not resolved protracted conflicts in Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh, the President pointed out that it has prevented further escalation.

The OSCE has developed a profound knowledge of its participating States and their specific problems, he said.

Mr. Efthymiou, a member of the Hellenic Parliament, also said that the OSCE needs a thorough rethinking in order to increase its global relevance and visibility. This can only be achieved if the OSCE further invests in joint activities with the United Nations, as well as its Mediterranean and Asian Partners for Co-operation.

The President also said that U.S.-Russian relations – including the status of NATO – must be converted from rivalry to strategic co-operation. In this regard, the OSCE is the best platform for rapprochement, he said.



President Petros Efthymiou speaking at the Harvard Kennedy School on 19 April

The OSCE must realize its full potential, as well, in the fight against terrorism.

The President called in particular for the Ministerial Council to meet twice a year instead of once, “so as to enhance its political role and create more opportunities for political consultation at the high political level.”

Further, he said that the Organization should alter its consensus-based decision making that “paralyzes us,” particularly in times of crisis.

Regarding calls from some participating States for a new model for transatlantic security, Mr. Efthymiou said that “it would be a grave mistake to look for new solutions instead of trying to harness the capacity of an empowered OSCE.”

“Why try other channels when you have an existing one and a credible one,” the President said.

President Efthymiou also called for a “multilevel political upgrade” of the Organization, which he called “a crucial topic for U.S. policymaking.”

In the same week that the Lithuanian Chairmanship announced that all participating States have voiced their preferences for the position of OSCE Secretary General, President Efthymiou restated his support for the position being filled by a figure of a high political caliber to raise the Organization’s profile.

The President’s speaking tour included stops at Johns Hopkins University, George Washington University, the Harvard Kennedy School, and the Harriman Institute at Columbia University.

Next month he will be conducting presidential visits to Moldova, Azerbaijan and Armenia.