

Copenhagen, Monday 4 April 2022

Report of Pascal Allizard to the Bureau of the OSCE-PA,

Vice-President and Special Representative for Mediterranean Affairs of the  
OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

Madam President, dear Margareta,

Dear colleagues,

Mr. Secretary General, dear Roberto,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to take the floor today to report on my mission as Special Representative at this crucial time for stability, security and cooperation in the Mediterranean area. The war in Ukraine is causing serious consequences for the entire Mediterranean region. Independent of the tragic circumstances, the dramatic events are concurrently gravely affecting some of our partner countries. There are six of them: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, and Israel (represented in our Assembly by the Knesset and the Palestinian National Council).

The Mediterranean region was the subject of several exchanges during our recent mission to the United States, where I had the chance to accompany President Margareta Cederfelt, Vice-President Irene Charalambides and Secretary General Roberto Montella on a very interesting and intensive visit to the United Nations in New York, and then to Congress and the State Department at Washington, D.C. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who organised this important mission.

In Washington, with the support of President Margareta Cederfelt and the invaluable assistance of the French Ambassador, Philippe Etienne, I took the initiative to organise a round table with the representatives of three major think-tanks on the challenges facing the Mediterranean in the current context, as seen from the United States.

We had the privilege to discuss with three prestigious specialists: Mr. Nathan Sachs, Director of the Middle East Program of the Brookings Institution, a specialist of Israel; Ms. Natasha Hall, a Senior Fellow of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a specialist of Jordan, Syria, and the Levant; and Ms. Intissar Fakir, Director of the North Africa Program of the Middle East Institute, a specialist of the Maghreb.

Our rich exchanges are subject to more detailed report but for now, I would like to summarize them briefly:

The OSCE and our assembly have obvious reasons not to lose interest in the Mediterranean, such as its geographical proximity and economic stakes, but also and above all, due to the actual security problems sharpened by a growing demography, the rise of radical Islam and Islamist terrorism, and by the explosion of migration flows. This troubled context can become truly explosive and is surely exacerbated by the war waged by Russia in Ukraine. As I have drawn your attention at our meeting in Stockholm last December, this war only increases and intensifies the factors of tension that were already discernible prior to the current situation.

In fact, this vast area of conflict should be an area of shared prosperity. During our discussions with our American interlocutors at the round table at Congress and at the State Department, it was made clear to us that they were in the process of taking the full measure.

For my part, and on behalf of our Assembly, I cannot continue to emphasize enough, the importance of calling for a common strategy and a long-term vision, beyond the urgent and worrisome consequences of the war in Ukraine.

Among the urgent issues and current topics, we discussed the following issues with our American interlocutors:

- Western Sahara.
- The Arab-Israeli conflict, observed by the recent attacks in Israel, is still causing many victims.
- Tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean which have been escalating between several countries in the region since the discovery of large hydrocarbon reserves.

- The war in Syria and the destabilisation of the region.
- The war in Libya with multiple external actors.
- The war in Ukraine, of course, and its consequences for the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea at the gateway to the Mediterranean.

All these factors generate instability that leads to militarisation in the region - whether by states, terrorist groups, militias or private groups (e.g., Wagner) - and result in significant population movements. A poorly managed incident could easily escalate to the worst. And today, the worst-case scenario is not just a figment of the imagination.

Currently, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is of course most alarming. The eastern parts of Europe and the Mediterranean are concerned by potential collateral damage. For the immediate future, we are concerned by the rising price of hydrocarbons and its impact on the economies and daily lives of citizens. And in the coming months, a major food crisis is looming for countries that are customers of Russian or Ukrainian wheat, particularly in the Mediterranean. The situations in Egypt and Tunisia are of the greatest concern. We must help them to cope with the upcoming food crisis.

Faced with these risks and the emergence of new uninhibited actors, some are more inclined to use force than to engage in dialogue. I note that our American interlocutors see the current crisis, fraught with threats, as a source of opportunity to be seized -- a "Kairos", an opportune moment. This critical moment, can and must facilitate an awareness of the geopolitical stakes at work in the Mediterranean region, at a time when questions of sovereignty are once again at the centre of our concerns, whether on land or in maritime areas, even beyond the war in Ukraine. And there is hardly any area more central than the Mediterranean for Europe as a whole, but also for the entire OSCE region.

This is especially true in the face of China, which is pushing its trade, investments, bilateral agreements, and navy with a growing influence and power.

All these factors lead me to believe that it is more than urgent for all of us to take actions in order to face these common challenges. No one owns by itself the solution to these intertwined problems.

Cooperation is not an option but a necessity. This is what the OSCE, and our Assembly in particular, is all about. I have strongly appealed to our American interlocutors, and I am pleased to inform you that they have been particularly attentive to our concerns. This is also the role of the parliamentary diplomacy that we embody, and I assure you that I will continue to do so on all the shores of this Mare Nostrum, the Mediterranean Sea.

Thank you very much.