



Remarks of President Ranko Krivokapic

The Mediterranean: A Union of Civilizations
Budva, Montenegro – 13 October 2013

As prepared for delivery

Excellencies, Colleagues, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to address you all today as President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, as a Montenegrin and, importantly, as a citizen of the Mediterranean. I would like to extend a particular welcome to the parliamentarians from the Mediterranean partner states Algeria and Jordan. It is also a pleasure for us to welcome one of the OSCE Asian partners for co-operation – Afghanistan. Our body is a stronger one because of your involvement.

The great writer from this part of Europe Predrag Matvejevic - although he actually belongs to the whole Mediterranean - writes in his book that the Mediterranean is not merely geography, nor merely history. It is the birthplace of so much that defines the world today. The Mediterranean has given the world the three major monotheistic religions; Greek democracy; Roman laws; Arabic science and scholarship; the Renaissance in Italy... I could go on and on.

Historians credit the Mediterranean region for spawning two of the first advanced human societies, with civilization first developing in Mesopotamia beginning with Sumer, and soon after in the Nile River valley of ancient Egypt. Civilization quickly spread through the Fertile Crescent to what is now Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Israel.

Since those earliest days of civilization, the history of the Mediterranean region has been characterized by the interaction, trade and cultural exchanges between distinct and diverse peoples encompassing three continents: Western Asia, North Africa, and Southern Europe.

Recognizing the challenges and potential of the Mediterranean region, the OSCE participating States in 1975 expressed their intention “to encourage with the non-participating Mediterranean States the development of mutually beneficial co-operation in the various fields of economic activity.” The Helsinki Final Act further encouraged participating States to “contribute to a diversified development of the economies of the non-participating Mediterranean countries”. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has always taken this commitment seriously.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has been holding its Mediterranean Forum for more than ten years now (since 2002). This meeting is about creating an area of freedom, security and co-operation in the Mediterranean. History has proven we have a shared fate, and we can only address challenges by working together. Parliamentary dialogue is crucial in this regard, as it strengthens democracy and human rights for all citizens of the Mediterranean.

In line with the decision made at our latest Annual Session in Istanbul, the OSCE PA is working to achieve greater outreach for the OSCE in the Middle East, encouraging initiatives aimed at facilitating contacts and dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian parliamentarians.

Mediterranean issues are integrally linked with OSCE issues. 1 August 2015 will mark the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. Let me point out that, in this document, an entire chapter is devoted to the Mediterranean region. Since then, the importance of the Mediterranean region for the OSCE area has only been growing. As such, I urge all parliamentarians from the Mediterranean to add their voice to the Helsinki +40 process. Future security challenges, including transnational threats in the Mediterranean, will need to be approached from a firm foundation. This is why Helsinki +40 is so important and why a parliamentarian's voice is so vital to its success.

The region is now at the core of major political shifts and popular awakening. However, taking into account my personal experience in the former Yugoslavia, I strongly believe that no sustainable change is possible without culture-sensitive dialogue. This year's Mediterranean Forum will be about the best ways to foster it, taking into account the civilizational diversity and cultural richness of the region.

I also hope that, in some way, you can all learn from Montenegro as a bridge between Mediterranean civilizations. Throughout history, Montenegro has been a place of diversity and co-operation with a strong conviction in its beliefs.

During our time in Budva, I would like to explore the ways in which the OSCE PA can contribute to maximizing political and cultural exchanges in the region. How can we overcome our differences to form a genuine union, one based on the union of civilizations? And how can the dialogue between various civilizations forming the Mediterranean help us put an end to instability in the region? The OSCE's comprehensive approach to security can help us all manage the effects of events in North Africa and the Syrian crisis, be it on Mediterranean migration flows, border management, or upholding human rights in the face of threats.

The Second Session of our Forum is dedicated to the Special Debate on Syria. I believe that the example of successful co-operation between two OSCE participating States, USA and Russia, in counteracting the chemical weapons in Syria is a manifestation of the win-win logic lying at the core of the OSCE's activities.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to our discussion today.