



*Under the auspices of the Italian  
Chairmanship of the OSCE  
Mediterranean Contact Group*

## **New-Med conference on “Youth and the Mediterranean: Exploring New Approaches to Dialogue and Cooperation”, Rome, 19 January 2017**

### **Draft Intervention**

by

**Ambassador Alessandro Azzoni**

**Permanent Representative of Italy to the OSCE in Vienna**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear colleagues and friends,

It is for me a great pleasure to open today’s conference on “Youth and the Mediterranean: Exploring New Approaches to Dialogue and Cooperation”. I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the Institute of International Affairs (IAI) of Rome, the Compagnia di San Paolo of Turin, the German Marshall Fund of the US and the OSCE Secretariat in Vienna for organizing this event as part of the broader New-Med network initiative.

In its almost three years of existence, the New-Med network has proven its potential as a “Track II” tool to engage a growing community of non-governmental experts in forward-looking and out-of-the-box discussions about the future of Mediterranean diplomacy and cooperation. My colleague Ambassador Barucco, Head of the Unit of Analysis and Planning (UAP) which oversees the development of New-Med, will say a few more words about the network and its intended goals. But let me stress that the initiative can count on all my personal support and appreciation. As the Permanent Representative of Italy to the OSCE in Vienna I look forward to further leveraging the expertise and the human connections New-Med can mobilize to support the important work Italy is called upon to carry forward over the next two years in the OSCE context.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Italy has just taken over from Austria the Chairmanship of the OSCE Mediterranean Contact Group, the first step towards chairing the OSCE in 2018. I cannot think of a better way to start our Chairmanship than being here in Rome today and supporting this important initiative. Today’s conference brings together young thinkers and practitioners from the Southern shore of the Mediterranean with more established experts, and that is exactly what we need: we need to revive dialogue and co-operation in a region that cannot continue to be defined exclusively by conflict and negative narratives, and we need to do it by thinking boldly and innovatively about a positive agenda Mediterranean youth can be empowered to

advance as part of a new intergenerational dialogue. Bluntly said, we have had enough of hearing youth described as a potential source of problems. Youth is where we should find answers to our questions.

We need to look beyond the emergency and the various on-going “crises” and focus on the many things – challenges as well as *opportunities* - that bring us together in a diverse region whose patterns of cooperation and confrontation have defined over the centuries not only our common Euro-Mediterranean heritage, but shaped human civilization as such. With these ambitious goals in mind, I believe that today’s agenda is off to a great start. And this is not only because of the topics that have been chosen: climate change, governance, radicalization, migration are all key challenges we face together and, therefore, they are issues which must be turned into opportunities for cooperation. But the real added value of today’s event lies with its human element: the people who will be leading the discussion.

I would like to personally thank the eight youth representatives from the Southern Mediterranean that have accepted to join us today and serve as speakers in the four main sessions. I know you have been selected by the New-Med network from a much larger pool of talented young women and men from different walks of life. You have been given the opportunity to participate in this event not because of where you come from, the schools you have attended, or the social and professional connections you may or may not have. You are here because of the future you have imagined for your country and for the region. You are here because your proposed approaches to some of the region’s most pressing problems were found to be innovative and inspiring. Today, you will have the opportunity to present these ideas and be heard and challenged by other youth like you as well as by a number of practitioners.

I think we should all see today’s event as a first, promising step towards building new and more systematic connections between Mediterranean youth and the Mediterranean policy community. In a region in which youth below age of 25 represents around 60% of the total population and is the fastest growing segment, and in which both youth education and unemployment – south and north of the Mediterranean – greatly exceed levels of other population segments, putting youth perspectives at the center is not really a noble choice or a particularly wise one: rather, it is the pre-condition for crafting realistic and workable approaches to the many challenges we face together.

Let me be clear on this point because it is easy to be misunderstood. I believe that the OSCE, and Italy in it, should continue to support youth engagement and youth empowerment as important aspects of Euro-Mediterranean security and cooperation not because of some abused clichés but because the aspirations that youth north and south of the Mediterranean largely share for peace, employment, personal and family security, and freedom, remind us all that tensions and conflict are not inexorably rooted in cultural, religious or other human differences, as some would like us to believe. Rather, conflict and insecurity originate in the failure of our societies and our governments to address the legitimate demands and fulfil the common dreams that each new generation rightfully aspires to when its turn comes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Italy’s Chairmanship of the Mediterranean Contact Group will continue to support youth perspectives beyond today’s initiative. We are setting up a rich program of activities in a

number of key policy areas. In the course of 2017 we want to discuss how to more effectively protect our common Mediterranean cultural heritage which has come under threat, how to strengthen women participation in the public sphere and in decision-making processes as a catalyst for both development and security. We also want to talk about how to better manage migration, fully protecting the rights of people on the move and deploying all the necessary legal and operational tools to dismantle the criminal networks that exploit human suffering. We also want to discuss how to strengthen cooperation on cyber security, thus safeguarding the internet as one of the great new commons of our civilization. On all these topics and many others, it is our intention to take full advantage of the unique cooperation framework between the OSCE and its six Mediterranean Partners (Algeria, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia).

Dear colleagues, dear friends,

When adopted in 1975 the Helsinki Final Act – the OSCE founding document – marked a turning point in patterns of confrontation and cooperation in a Europe still divided by the Cold War. Since then, the CSCE/OSCE experience has been about building bridges between East and West, respecting the diversity of our cultural and political traditions but also finding common ground on which to build a more secure and prosperous future for all. For its part, the OSCE Mediterranean Partnership has acted as a much-needed bridge between North and South, growing over the years into a unique mix of inclusive political dialogue and practical cooperation projects.

Under Italy's Chairmanship of the OSCE Mediterranean Contact Group I can assure you that this bridge will be further strengthened. We will promote a discussion about to further leverage platforms such as the OSCE to promote peace and prosperity in the region, and we will involve youth in this important debate. We believe that youth should not be seen as the "victim" of recent negative trends, from radicalization to migration. Rather, we need to empower youth as a powerful force for change, a bridge-builder at a time when too many are embracing the highly regrettable and ultimately self-defeating fallacy of erecting walls – cultural, legal, even physical – between our peoples.

Thank you.