



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Secretary General Lamberto Zannier

HIGH LEVEL MEETING

On Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue

Plenary Session 3 on *Making institutions collectively stronger than challenges: providing a counter-narrative to violent extremism*”

Barcelona, 23 July 2015

Mr. Chairman,

Excellencies,

Distinguished participants,

It is a great pleasure for me to address this High Level Meeting. I would like to thank Spain for its continued leadership in the field of interfaith and intercultural dialogue as a means to promote peace and security in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Two months ago, I hosted an *OSCE Security Days* event in Vienna that focused on *Building Bridges: Promoting Dialogue to Prevent Radicalization and Violent Extremism*, a key theme also for our meeting today. I am pleased that so many of the institutions which participated in our event are also represented in this room.

When looking at the Euro-Mediterranean region today, we see two contradictory trends. On the one hand, globalization has been a powerful force towards increasing cultural and human bonds between our societies. Surveys conducted by the Anna Lindh Foundation have shown that peoples across the

region are progressively embracing similar values and lifestyles notwithstanding the diversity that characterizes our cultures and religions. On the other hand, the Euro-Mediterranean region is experiencing renewed and heightened tensions with terrorist groups waging a frontal attack on civilization as we know it.

It is our responsibility to protect what binds us together and to present a united front against forces that would like to reverse these positive trends by exploiting what still divides us.

Our first urgent task is to forge a common, powerful counter-narrative to the divisive messages which are being spread by groups and movements who reject dialogue, tolerance and peaceful coexistence. We must affirm without ambiguity that there can be no religious or cultural justification for violence. Although those who perpetrate terrorist acts often manipulate religion to pursue agendas that have nothing to do with religious teachings, religion is not a root cause of violent extremism. Indeed, religions generally condemn violence and promote peace. It is therefore incorrect and misleading to blame any particular religion for acts of violence carried out in its name. This is why the participation of religious leaders in developing and communicating our counter-narrative is so important.

Last month at the 5th Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in Astana, I had the chance to highlight the responsibility and positive role that religious leaders, together with government and civil society leaders, can play in preventing radicalization and violent extremism. They can do so by engaging in interreligious and intra-religious dialogue, as supported by KAICIID and other organizations represented here today, but also as educators and mentors in their respective communities.

Our second task, together with the rejection of violence, is to reaffirm the importance of respect for diversity, which underpins dialogue.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe is an inclusive platform for dialogue that has traditionally been used to decrease tensions, correct misperceptions, and promote a culture of tolerance across the OSCE area. Supporting intercultural and inter-faith dialogue is an integral part of the work of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

In recognition of the rich cultural, social and religious diversity in our region, the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office has nominated three Personal Representatives who focus on combating intolerance against Jews, Muslims and Christians, as well as against members of other religions. Through our network of field operations, we promote tolerance and non-discrimination, youth outreach, inter-ethnic relations, cooperation with religious communities and prevention of hate through sport, among many other concrete initiatives on the ground.

Distinguished participants,

How can we ensure greater effectiveness in our collective efforts?

As Secretary General Sijilmassi aptly put it at the OSCE Security Days conference in May, we need an “Alliance of Institutions” in addition to the UN-mandated Alliance of Civilizations to wage a common campaign against today’s nihilistic ideologies. For this, we need to further articulate the added value of our respective organizations according to their specific vocations and mandates, while building synergies among us wherever possible. We also need to draw in other partners to turn our initiatives into larger efforts, creating powerful

interregional coalitions. Let me give you a few examples of synergies that could become the building blocks of our common mission.

Together with the Serbian OSCE Chairmanship, I recently launched an OSCE-wide campaign to send a unified message against violent extremism. This is an important part of our counter-narrative. The campaign highlights the OSCE's comprehensive approach to preventing terrorism by branding all relevant activities across the Organization with a common slogan: "OSCE United in Countering Violent Extremism". [A visual of the campaign is displayed on the screen as I speak]. Together we are rising to the challenge of responding to the corrosive appeal of violent extremism by promoting tolerance, mutual respect, pluralism and inclusion. Within a week of launching this campaign, we had already reached more than half a million people on social media.

Another vector of joint action could center on women and youth, who are key target groups for terrorist recruiters, but have the potential to become critical stakeholders of enhanced security within and across our societies. The Union for the Mediterranean is leading several important projects involving women, especially in the field of development. UNAOC is also deeply engaged in these matters. The OSCE has traditionally looked at women as critical partners in conflict prevention. We could explore broadening and linking our respective initiatives to highlight the positive role that women can play in fostering dialogue at the local level and combating radicalization, thus enhancing the resilience of our communities.

With its vast network at the grass-roots level, the Anna Lindh Foundation could help us facilitate our outreach to civil society across the Euro-Mediterranean region and ensure that our exchanges also include youth representatives. As we promote youth leadership, we should involve young leaders in our analysis and

understanding of the phenomenon of violent radicalization. Initiatives such as Young Arab Voices, which promotes dialogue at the community level in important ways, show the way forward. We have to counter the perverse role model of the foreign terrorist fighter with positive inspirations personified by young entrepreneurs, political activists, journalists and artists who are breaking new ground for peace, prosperity and freedom, instead of breaking apart communities and destroying lives.

Extremists often make very skilled use of the media. In particular, the Internet and social media have become powerful tools in the hands of terrorists and violent groups. However, media can also be effective tools for promoting counter-narratives and messages of tolerance, and for connecting all those who are working to advance mutual understanding and dialogue. This is why joining forces behind the common goal of protecting society from violent extremism necessarily needs to involve the media. Our respective organizations could initiate cross-regional projects involving journalists from both sides of the Mediterranean in this discussion.

Another area where our organizations could cooperate more is migration policy. Discussions about so-called “safe migration”, and protecting the security of receiving states, cannot be disconnected from an intensified effort to promote the values of acceptance, integration, and tolerance for diversity. We should cooperate to ensure that migration debates shift away from the defensive and alarmist tones that predominate today and are instead framed within the narrative of dialogue and mutually beneficial encounters.

The 2015 OSCE Mediterranean Conference, which will take place in Jordan in October, will foster high-level discussion on irregular migration, refugee protection, migrant smuggling and human trafficking in the Mediterranean. I am

also planning to organize an Security Days event devoted to migration in early 2016 to explore common positions and, possibly, to develop an up-to-date approach to addressing this phenomenon within a comprehensive definition of security.

In all these possible areas for joint action, the OSCE Partners for Co-operation, especially our six Mediterranean Partners, can act as bridges towards other regional organizations such as the League of Arab States or the Organization for Islamic Co-operation, with which the OSCE already enjoys a high degree of cooperation on topics such as mediation and preventive diplomacy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wholeheartedly endorse the plan to transform the group of institutions involved in today's initiative into a more formal network to foster inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue as an important means to promote peace in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The OSCE is ready to play its part.

Thank you.