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**REPORT BY THE CHAIRPERSON  
OF THE**

**OSCE MEDITERRANEAN PARTNER FOR CO-OPERATION  
GROUP**

**TO THE  
TWENTY-SEVENTH MEETING OF THE  
MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

## **REPORT BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE OSCE MEDITERRANEAN PARTNERS FOR CO-OPERATION GROUP**

Sweden, as the Chair of the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group, promoted a dynamic, interactive and operational OSCE Mediterranean Partnership during 2020. The focus was placed on increasing security in the OSCE region, including by leveraging the full potential of closer dialogue and co-operation with the Mediterranean Partners.

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Sweden managed to organize three meetings of the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group during the year. The meetings promoted dialogue with the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation on a range of crucial topics with a view to intensifying the exchange of best practices and identifying areas for long-term co-operation. Topics included information technology and the fight against human trafficking; women, peace, and security; and youth engagement and participation to counter violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism.

In addition, representatives of the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation were involved in a range of additional OSCE conferences and events. On 17 February 2020, an Arabic version of the OSCE handbook *Understanding the Role of Gender in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism: Good Practices for Law Enforcement* was launched in Cairo thanks to co-operation between the OSCE Transnational Threats Department and the League of Arab States. On 5 October 2020, the OSCE Chairmanship organized an OSCE-wide conference called “Addressing Organized Crime through Strategic Partnerships”, which was designed by the Strategic Police Matters Unit. A plurality of participating States and partner countries offered an overview of their respective challenges and recognized the need for an inclusive regional approach in addressing them.

The first meeting of the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group, held on 11 May 2020, focused on “Information Technology and Human Trafficking – Challenges and Opportunities”. In her opening remarks, H.E. Ms. Ulrika Funered, Permanent Representative of Sweden to the OSCE and Chairperson of the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group, welcomed the Group in the new video-based format due to the COVID-19 emergency and restrictions applied to in-person gatherings. She underlined the seminal role of the Helsinki Final Act in establishing a link between European and Mediterranean security. It was stressed that continuity was key towards strengthening the Mediterranean Partnership and that Sweden had chosen subjects for the Mediterranean Group that highlighted the OSCE comparative advantage, among which: sustainable development, countering the trafficking in human beings, women, peace and security, youth and countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism (VERLT).

H.E. Mr. Thomas Greminger, Secretary General of the OSCE, noted that the COVID-19 pandemic called for furthering intensifying the dialogue with the Mediterranean Partners, underlining that the Partnership had always been about sharing best practices and lessons learnt based on the tenet that the security of one is the security of all. He drew attention to the recently issued Partnership Fund report and noted that too many projects still relied on a small number of donors and had a short life span.

H.E. Mr. Igli Hasani, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Albania to the OSCE and Chair of the OSCE Permanent Council, stated that in line with the Albanian Chairpersonship’s objective of keeping the Mediterranean Partnership high on the agenda, he

announced plans to hold a Permanent Council meeting on Mediterranean co-operation in the second half of 2020. On the topic of combating trafficking in human beings (CTHB), he noted that it was important to harness big data, combining digital archives with open source information, court cases and other information in a central hub. He further noted that without greater international co-operation, these powerful tools would never fully deliver

Referring explicitly to the meeting's theme – "Information Technology and Human Trafficking – Challenges and Opportunities" – Ambassador Per-Anders Sunesson, Swedish Ambassador at Large for Combatting Trafficking in Persons, stressed the importance of the CTHB topic, noting that tens of millions of people are currently the victims of sexual labour, or other forms of exploitation. He underlined that vulnerable groups, including women and girls, were at a much higher risk of becoming victims of this crime. He noted the still untapped potential of ICT in the fight against CTHB. He further noted that ICT could play a formidable role both in the repressive and preventive aspects of the crime. He stated that CTHB is a key priority of Sweden and called for a strengthening of multilateral co-operation on this challenge at a time of international tension.

Ambassador Naela Gabr, Chairperson of the National Coordinating Committee for Preventing and Combating Illegal Migration and Trafficking in Persons (Egypt), recognized that new technologies could be an asset in helping countries to improve their citizens' quality of life but on the other hand they could be misused by traffickers to exploit and harm vulnerable people. She contended that developing countries still lacked the proper knowledge, tools and laws to counter crimes committed through modern technologies, and those traffickers and their associates were taking advantage of this situation. It was noted that due to the COVID-19 pandemic crimes of trafficking in human beings (THB) were expected to increase as more people were losing jobs, therefore finding themselves in vulnerable situations. Among recommendations, she called for adopting international and regional measures that would provide a presence for law enforcement bodies on the internet to monitor any unlawful acts.

Ms. Alexandra Karra, Cyber Department in the Attorney General's Office of the Ministry of Justice of Israel, underlined Israel's commitment to the Protection, Prevention and Prosecution aspects of CTHB and emphasized that the government was constantly striving to and promoting new partnerships to tackle the challenge. She further noted that during the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, a new reality of closed borders and social distancing forced to further focus on the new tools used by organized crime to continue exploitative practices, including online platforms.

Mr. Eric Anderson, Human Rights and Corporate Affairs at British Telecom, noted that millions of people were directly impacted by modern slavery and THB, with estimates indicating some 40 million victims in the world. Several examples of effective use of ICT to CTHB were given, especially in the areas of supply chain worker engagement, identification of victims and perpetrators, and victim case management systems. A particular emphasis was placed on private sector driven tools and public-private partnerships.

Mr. Valiant Richey, OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, stressed the crucial importance of addressing the double-edged sword that technology was for human trafficking. He noted that technology helped traffickers to hide identities and increase anonymity through encrypted applications, cryptocurrency, and fake social media accounts. He noted the huge potential of partnerships with tech companies and businesses to invest in research and development of tools. He praised the role of the Mediterranean Partners Group as a platform to exchange information and lessons learnt, including innovative tools and original practices.

In the follow-up discussion, many delegations suggested establishing a dynamic platform between OSCE participating States and the Mediterranean Partners in order to exchange best practices and lessons learned from their experience on the positive use of

information technology - and launching a study on the Mediterranean dimension of the phenomenon.

The second meeting of the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group, held on 13 July 2020, focused on “Connecting the Tracks. Beyond the Official Negotiation Table: Women’s Comprehensive Contribution to Peace Processes”. The Chairperson of the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group, H.E. Ms. Ulrika Funered, stressed that gender equality and women’s participation were key priorities for Sweden within the OSCE. She further noted that the experiences of the Mediterranean Partners could enrich the exchange of best practices taking place within the OSCE.

Professor Robert Egnell, Vice-Chancellor of the Swedish Defence University, noted that a gender-balanced environment allowed for a maximization of efforts and better performance of all – women and men. This was because such environment fostered co-operation and unlocked qualities and skill sets that would be otherwise underutilized. He noted that much still needed to be done in the security-military sphere to give women equal access and leverage. He also noted that women had to be included from the conceptualization and design phase of peace initiatives. Peace initiatives had to be framed within a comprehensive notion of security that allowed women and men to address different aspects of a security situation, from human to state-related aspects. In this respect, the OSCE had a unique advantage as its concept of security was defined in a comprehensive way from its founding documents.

Mrs. Alida Mici, Director, Directorate of Integration, Coordination and Assistance, General Directorate of Regulation and Compliance for Health and Social Protection, Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Albania, drew attention to the twentieth anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the need to better implement its provisions. As part of its national action plan 2018-2020, Albania intended to foster Mediterranean regional dialogue on women participation in security and peace matters, including by promoting track II initiatives. She underlined the importance of gender equality as the basis for any empowerment strategy. She thanked the OSCE Presence in Albania and UN Women for the co-operation with national authorities in these matters.

Dr. Salma Nims, Secretary General of the Jordanian National Commission for Women, drew attention to the role Jordan had historically played in promoting peace building, mediation, and the successes of Jordanian diplomacy in a complicated regional setting. She noted that Jordan had fully included women in its national coalition for peace-related initiatives since 2010. She further noted that national action plans to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 took into due account the key role of Jordanian women in both preventing conflict and resolving security situations.

Ms. Zahra’ Langhi, International Expert on Mediation and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, Co-founder and CEO Libyan Women’s Platform for Peace, shared some of her ‘observed lessons’ as a researcher and practitioner. She noted that inclusive peace was a more sustainable type of peace and that negotiation efforts tended to be more successful when women were fully involved in them. Furthermore, peace agreements tended to be more comprehensive and more responsive to a variety of needs and situations on the ground when women had been fully engaged in the preceding peace process. Women also seemed to be able to bring to the table security-related questions that could be otherwise neglected, for instance issues pertaining to orphan children, the fate of detainees and their families, refugees, access to contested resources such as food and water. She underlined the importance to frame the discussion in terms of gender equality rather than in terms of women rights only. She also reiterated the need for links between informal and formal tracks and for a structural involvement of women in all phases of peace initiatives, from conflict management to conflict resolution and post-conflict stabilization.

Ambassador Charlotta Sparre, Director of the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa, noted that she had been involved in Middle-East focused Track II processes in the 1990s, which at the time saw very limited participation of women. While gender imbalance seemed normal at the time, these initiatives almost immediately highlighted the fact that insecurity in the region was inseparable from gender inequality and that women's participation was key in changing the security equation. She noted that in recent years the approach had been improving overall and that inclusivity had become a new paradigm, in terms of both gender, age, and background of participants in peace-related initiatives. She further noted, however, that too often women were involved in track III (grass-root) and track II (informal) tracks but not in formal track I formats. She also commented on the implementation of UN Security Resolution 1325. As other speakers, she argued that implementation remained a challenge in a number of national contexts. She called for an enhanced role of the OSCE in promoting cross-regional dialogue, including by leveraging a growing number of networks of women mediators.

Dr. Hedy Fry, OSCE PA Special Representative on Gender Issues since 2010, Canadian MP, lamented that twenty years after the adoption of UN Security Resolution 1325, discussions still revolved around how to get to the desired results. She noted that only 3% of women were mediators and only 8% of them were negotiations in peace process. In the OSCE region, only 43% of countries had formal action plans for the implementation of UN Security Resolution 1325 and only 28 participating States had real resources to back up their action plans.

Following the thematic presentation, a lively and rich discussion followed where delegations illustrated a number of national initiatives and made references to relevant aspects of their respective national action plans to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Mediterranean Partners noted the crucial contribution of women to security-related matters in their respective countries and stressed that the role of women was increasingly acknowledged in the law and in all tracks, not only at the grass-root or community levels.

The third and last meeting of the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group, held on 14 September 2020, focused on "Youth Participation and Engagement to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism (VERLT)". The Chairperson of the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group, H.E. Ms. Ulrika Funerud, noted that VERLT often disproportionately affected young people, while at the same time young people played a key role as positive agents of change in preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism. She further noted that efforts to effectively prevent and combat VERLT must take into account the different needs and concerns of both young women and men to ensure their meaningful participation. She underlined that the Mediterranean Partners could bring much experience and added value to OSCE discussions on this topic.

Ambassador Fredrika Ornbrant, Swedish Counter Terrorism Coordinator, Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, underlined that globally 1.2 billion people were aged between 15 and 24, accounting for ca. 16% of the total population. She highlighted the role of youth in preventing VERLT, citing the Belgrade and Hamburg Declarations in an OSCE context. She noted that young people were often victims of violence perpetrated by terrorist networks, both offline and online. She asserted that the task ahead for organizations such as the OSCE was to ensure that young people had access to the available tools to prevent and combat violence and extremism.

Mr. David Ruah, Member of the Radicalization Awareness Network and the OSCE Perspectives 2030 Core Group of Experts, stressed in a pre-recorded video message that young people were the main target audience of violent extremist groups as they had access to networks and online technologies. However, he also argued that young people could offer a powerful antidote to the spread of violent extremism due to their growing engagement in promoting

better economic governance and more equitable societies, including in light of COVID-19. It was noted that without mentorship from experts, youth organizations would not be able to replicate best practices. Therefore, youth organizations should receive training in program management, monitoring, evaluation, human rights and media literacy. Organizations such as the OSCE could in turn help youth organizations provide these services.

Ms. Fatima Ezzahra Benoughazi, President of the Tangiers' Young Leaders Council, focused on best practices and lessons learned from the Young Leaders Council. The Council offered a set of trainings, workshops and launched initiatives to facilitate the dialogue with the local government. She noted that the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic had revealed several challenges. One of them was that the current crisis was set to have long-term effects on the critical work that youth organizations were undertaking at the grass-roots level. Such organizations relied on volunteer work and they already faced major challenges in accessing funds. She also underlined that the traditional form of civic engagement was shifting more and more towards the digital space. Among recommendations on how to integrate youth in the Post-COVID-19 decision process, she called for including youth in decision-making processes, creating an enabling environment by adopting strategies and laws meeting youth needs, filling the gender gap, leveraging best practices in youth-led approaches to community resilience, and developing a comprehensive approach that countered terrorism.

Ms. Imen Ghedhioui, Innovation Policy Adviser, Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education, presented Tunisia's experience working on policy transformation in fighting VERLT among youth. She also discussed how the public policy sector reform could build reliable state institutions by adopting human security and good governance approaches. Moreover, she highlighted the importance of developing more user-friendly policies to prevent youth radicalization and the use of a gov-tech approach to reduce social gaps and inequalities and to gain social trust through creating online security platforms for young people in Tunisia.

Ms. Keisi Seferi, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Youth and Security, presented Albanian initiatives in preventing VERLT through adopting the Albanian National Strategy on countering violent extremism and adding extra subjects about religions to the school curriculum. She stressed that the comparative advantage of the OSCE was connecting the participating States with relevant stakeholders from the Mediterranean area including youth and youth-led-organizations. A particular emphasis was placed on OSCE's field operations where youth, young women and men were working together to prevent VERLT. She stressed the importance of OSCE's presence in Albania, which had played a crucial role in raising awareness amongst young people.

Following the panel, the Mediterranean Partners noted the crucial contribution of youth to VERLT in their respective countries and pointed out that young women played a constructive role to achieve peace and security. Among other proposals, international co-operation was essential in the fight against terrorism. Several delegations recommended to organize another OSCE-wide Youth Forum to discuss VERLT. Some delegations also commented that the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on VERLT, because the emergency hit young people particularly hard in terms of economic prospects but also by aggravating situations of disenfranchisement and marginalization. Several references were made to the Milan Declaration on Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean as the basis for enhanced OSCE engagement with the Mediterranean Partners on youth-related issue.

The 2020 Mediterranean Conference, held on 3 November 2020, provided a high-level political platform for advancing the Mediterranean Partnership and for discussing security developments in the OSCE and Mediterranean regions, also in light of the security implications of the pandemic. Titled "Promoting Security in the OSCE Mediterranean Region through Sustainable Development and Economic Growth", the conference was a full-day online event

with more than 250 participants from over 60 countries. The high-level political session was attended by a total of 16 ministers and deputy ministers from Partners for Co-operation and participating States, confirming the Mediterranean Conference as a ministerial-level forum for regional dialogue. It was opened by H.E. Ms. Ann Linde, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden; H.E. Mr. Agron Tare, Deputy Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania; and Ms. Tuula Yrjölä, Officer-in-Charge/Secretary-General, OSCE Secretariat. The conference reviewed the security situation in the Mediterranean region by focusing on development-related aspects. It began with a high-level political segment focusing on how to promote security through sustainable development and economic growth at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. H.E. Ms. Ann Linde, stressed that in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic the OSCE Mediterranean Conference was a valuable platform for enhancing regional dialogue and actively promoting security through sustainable development and economic growth. The political segment was followed by two afternoon thematic sessions, focusing on women's economic participation and on promoting environmental co-operation. Several delegations put forward specific proposals for the future of the Partnership and a move towards a more secure, peaceful and prosperous future – for the benefit of all. During the concluding remarks, Ambassador Petra Lärke, Head of the Task Force for the incoming Swedish OSCE Chairpersonship, underlined that environmental co-operation and the empowerment of women, the two main themes covered by the Mediterranean Conference, would rank high on the Swedish OSCE Chairpersonship's agenda.

The 2020 Albanian Chairpersonship dedicated a Permanent Council meeting on 12 November 2020 to a review of co-operation with the Mediterranean Partners. H.E. Ms. Ulrika Funered, Permanent Representative of Sweden to the OSCE and Chairperson of the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group, stated that despite the pandemic, and due to the new, innovative modalities of meetings introduced by the Albanian Chairpersonship, it had been able to contribute to making the OSCE Mediterranean Partnership even more dynamic, interactive and operational.