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Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy

Sub-Committee on External Relations

Sub-Committee on the Middle East and the Arab World

Joint meeting on

CURRENT POLITICAL CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

Rome, Italy, 5 June 2015

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Towards a Strengthened Democratic Governance in the Southern Mediterranean

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I. PROGRAMME

9.00am Opening of the meeting

Welcome speech by **Mr Pietro Grasso**, President of the Italian Senate

Opening remarks by **Mr Benedetto Della Vedova**, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs; **Mr Michele Nicoletti**, Chairperson of the Italian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe; and **Ms Deborah Bergamini**, member of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy and former President of the Council of Europe North-South Centre

Keynote speech by **Dr Hala Mustafa**, Egyptian political scientist, Cairo

Discussants:

Ms Gabriella Battaini Dragoni, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe

Mr Gianni Buquicchio, President of the Venice Commission

Case study: The current situation in Libya and its consequences

with the participation of:

Ambassador Luca Giansanti, Director General of Political Affairs and Security, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy

Mr Khalid Chaouki, member of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy

Mr Abdul Rahman Al Ageli, co-founder of the Libyan Youth Forum, former security advisor at the Office of the Libyan Prime Minister

1.00pm End of the meeting

II. SPEECHES

Mr Pietro Grasso, President of the Italian Senate

Dear colleagues, authorities, ladies and gentlemen,

Firstly I wish to bid all delegations a hearty welcome and to thank the leader of the Italian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Mr Michele Nicoletti, for the invitation to open these important proceedings on the Mediterranean.

The issue addressed is of crucial significance for Europe and for each of our countries, and I believe that the parliamentary dimension of the Council of Europe is the most suitable context where our common policies and the values which we acknowledge and which bind us can be discussed with the depth and detachment not always permitted by the tempos and the constraints of governmental forums.

Much has been said about the Mediterranean recently, and rightly so, whether because of the tragic humanitarian disaster linked with migration flows or the threats to security emanating from the southern and south-eastern shore of this vast geographical area.

For Europeans like ourselves, working in the Mediterranean and for the Mediterranean is not an option. As our great statesman Aldo Moro was wont to repeat, "Nobody is called upon to choose between being in Europe or in the Mediterranean since the whole of Europe is in the Mediterranean". Historically, although conflicts and instabilities have never been lacking, the Mediterranean region has been criss-crossed by profitable commercial and cultural exchanges which have shaped features of common identity between the two shores. Today 19% and ever more of the world's goods traffic passes through the Mediterranean, and economic interchange between the countries of the southern and northern shores is continually growing despite the restraint due to the economic and political crises.

At the same time, the wider Mediterranean has become the most sensitive spot in a global system more fragmented and disunited than ever before. I am thinking of the geopolitical vacuums caused by the breakup of states and institutions, of the influence wielded by unsanctioned powers over international policy and relations: organised crime, terrorism, black economy. I am thinking of the various levels of current conflict: economic, geopolitical, religious and ethnic. I am thinking of the threats of the world Jihad within which a generational and ideological confrontation is going on between strategies to combat the "distant enemy" (the West) and the "immediate enemy" (the Middle Eastern governments), using as methods terrorism, instability, communication and violation of rights and human dignity. I am thinking of the economic imbalances and the inequalities which have so much to do with the genesis of the Arab revolts, which prejudice social cohesion by relegating a large proportion of the populations to exclusion and marginality, which cause frustrations and resentments by encouraging faith in destructive ideologies chiefly among the youngest. I am thinking of the migrants fleeing from conflicts, persecutions and misrule. In that regard, it is not possible now to deal with all the intricacies of the subject. I personally support the plans which the European Commission has presented as a major first step. More generally, I believe that the history which will be written about the times we live in will appreciate the coherence and the political vision of the European Union and Europe as a whole, the degree of responsibility and solidarity with which we shall be able to address the migration issue while upholding international law, human life and our constituent values.

As regards the various current crises, I consider it necessary to proceed from the pragmatic realisation that we cannot quickly stabilise the hotbeds of war in Syria, Libya, Yemen and elsewhere, nor promptly create acceptable conditions of life and governance in other parts of the region. A common strategy geared to the medium term is inescapable, with actions for political stabilisation of the crises and for development assistance. This process would entail a complete rearrangement of the geopolitical balances between the major regional powers which we must now resolutely support.

Today you will deal in detail with the case of Libya, disrupted by civil war and having become the hub of every kind of traffic, whether in drugs, weapons or people, and the possible operational base of the Islamic State. I am convinced that the goal must be to foster, as Italy is doing, a political solution entrusted to the United Nations: forming a government of national unity that may break off the military hostilities, gradually regain control of the territory and purchasing power, and become a credible interlocutor for Europe. About combating the Islamic State, I think that the military actions already in hand to contain its territorial expansion should be backed by strategies for progressively activating institutions, political arenas, filling the geopolitical gaps held by terrorism.

In conclusion, the Mediterranean has united the two shores far more closely than claimed by the empty rhetoric of encounter between civilisations. Taking our departure from history in order to build the future is a duty that rests with us, with politics. I consider this a natural area of work for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, enabling us to devote ourselves to joint examination of the medium and long term prospects and to debate the major concerns of humanity seen through the prism of the principles and values which we parliamentarians have the high duty to protect and promote, and which are our enduring common heritage.

Thank you.

Ms Deborah Bergamini, member of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy and former President of the Council of Europe North-South Centre

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am particularly happy that this meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is taking place in Rome to discuss, amongst other things, the challenges and opportunities in the Mediterranean region following what we term the Arab Spring.

This is a region at the very heart of which we, and by “we” I mean my country – Italy – find ourselves, but lying also at its very heart is Europe, of which Italy is an integral part and which has its southern border on the Mediterranean.

As history and our day-to-day reality teach us, every border is an area not only of exchange, dialogue and discussion but also of confrontation if politics fails to manage it appropriately. And today, this border is at the very centre of some of the most complex historical and political dynamics of the 21st century.

I am speaking of dynamics that are vital not only for the future of Europe but also for the model of civilisation and development which our continent invented and brought to life.

This civilisation was born here in the Mediterranean, out of the meeting of two great schools of thought – the Greco-Roman and the Judaeo-Christian, which are the foundation of the very identity of our continent.

While it may perhaps be true, as the historian Henri Pirenne said, that with the advent of Islam the cultural and economic unity of the Mediterranean basin was broken once and for all, it is also true that exchanges of goods and ideas between the two shores of the Mediterranean have never decreased over the centuries, despite periodic conflicts.

Part of who we are is due to the relationship with Islam and Arab culture. My own country, Italy, itself bears witness to this. I am thinking of a large island such as Sicily in which Greek, Arab, Norman and Spanish vestiges are superimposed to form a unique harmonious whole.

And so, the Mediterranean can and must be a sea that unites not divides. This is our ambition, our aim and, I would say, the only really viable option. But for this to be possible, we need policies – and politicians – able to play a role similar to that played by the founding fathers of Europe, of the Council of Europe, in the wake of the Second World War.

It is essential to create the economic, political and indeed also the cultural conditions for harmonious co-existence and well-being. And in order to do this, we need to be realistic in looking at the situation in which we now find ourselves. Today, the Mediterranean is for Europe the most exposed and dangerous border. While, up to twenty years ago we were accustomed to thinking of the world in terms of East-West confrontation, today the tension is without doubt on a north-south axis. Today many countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean are in a dramatic situation. Some are engaged in a complex process of reconstruction. Others have to emerge from war, from the violence and ferocity of fundamentalist terrorism.

And we Europeans, we Westerners, are the first called upon to help the victims of daily bombardments and violence to once again find the possibility to live in peace. We are called upon to do this first of all out of a sense of moral duty to help others in difficulty, and also on account of our own principle of self-preservation because clearly Europe cannot contend with a Mediterranean in flames and with the associated threats and difficulties that this entails, from the terrorist threat to the pressure of migration.

The danger to which the southern border of Europe is exposed is not Islam, which with the two other great monotheistic religions is, on the contrary, a most important factor of civilisation.

The danger comes from a combination of three well-known issues: religious fundamentalism, demographic pressure and migration push factors.

Together, they form the key challenge for the decades to come.

What can Europe do in the face of all this? What must we, as European leaders do?

First of all we must understand and clearly explain to all the citizens of our countries, that any shortcut, any attempt to avoid the problem will lead us into a dead end.

Conflicting rhetoric of extremes, that of openness and that of intransigence, will lead us nowhere. Deluding oneself that there is no problem by simply denying it exists or, on the contrary, thinking we can drive it away from our borders is sowing the seeds for worse evils in the future.

The Mediterranean cannot be a barbed-wire fence separating Europe from the South, nor an open border to Europe.

It has to be the site of a wise and far-sighted policy, of which our continent has not always been capable, but which today is no longer just an option, it has become a necessity. A policy of co-operation, of building bridges where others wish to build barriers.

Our main partner in this policy is the Muslim world itself, conscious – at least in its vast majority – that the path of chaos, violence and intolerance is harmful to everyone. This type of Islam, which for convenience we usually define as moderate, but which I would prefer to call “rational” does exist. There are governments, political and cultural institutions, intellectual movements and religious authorities that all belong to this Islam.

These are the first targets of fundamentalism, which claims many more victims among Muslims themselves than it does in the West. They, along with Israel and the persecuted Christian communities, are our prime natural allies for ensuring stability in the Mediterranean area. It is a moral choice, but also a choice of expediency and benefit, to be defended with all the means at our disposal. We have to show the Arab world that being friends with the West is just as much in its interest as it is in ours.

Ensuring stability is also key for bringing an end to the migration emergency. Because of my liberal culture, I will never claim that the free movement of people, goods and ideas is a bad thing. I will never claim that we must barricade ourselves in, but it is also clear that this is not an orderly transfer of people seeking better opportunities. It is migration beyond any rules, beyond any control, without any guarantee. Our societies must be welcoming, must ensure the rights of everyone, but without losing sight of the fact – and indeed making this clear to everyone who arrives – that with rights come duties: lawfulness, integration and sharing.

Today, however, we have to deal with an emergency. A European emergency to which my country is more directly exposed. Those desperate souls who every week in their thousands cross the Mediterranean do not want to just reach Sicily, or Italy, they want to reach Europe.

Europe has a duty to deal with the problem, and in a way that is different from and more convincing than what it has done up to now. There are various and at times contradictory opinions on the technical solutions. All this is open to discussion, nobody can say that they hold the truth. But one thing is certain: no single country can deal with the problem on its own. It is essential, and indeed a moral duty, for Europe to act together. The alternative is total failure, with unforeseeable consequences for the very process of European construction.

And then there is another aspect, no less important. We need to radically rethink the way we deal with the major emergencies in Africa and the Middle East. Co-operation as we have conceived it hitherto has had a high cost, and has not taken us any further forward, rather it has been a step backward. It has given rise to conflicts which it has failed to resolve. It has hampered development, making it dependent on aid, rather than creating the conditions for growth. Why has Africa, in particular, not experienced the development which the economies of the countries of Asia have seen over the last decades? These countries, once regarded as poor, are now among the world's leading economic powers.

Why has this been possible in Asia but not in Africa or the Near East? Could we be at fault? At fault for the action we have taken, or not taken, to deal with those conflicts and in particular to tackle poverty and famine? Could it be the fault of our policies which are more geared to welfare-type assistance than motivated by pure generosity?

I believe that we need to address these questions seriously, calmly and with great frankness.

The Council of Europe has a long tradition of taking action in crisis situations, promoting peace and state building. Its Parliamentary Assembly is the direct expression of the sovereignty of the people of Europe through their parliaments.

Today, faced with momentous choices, our role is even more important as the direct expression of the sovereignty of the people of Europe through their parliaments.

This is why we are called upon to take on a huge responsibility towards Europe and towards history: we must be able to imagine the future and conceive political action that will turn this vision into reality. We must be able to guarantee peace, stability and development in the whole Mediterranean region, just as the founding fathers did in Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War. That task was no easier: for centuries, much blood had been shed and wars had been waged one after another. But then we found the moral strength and the ability to turn a vision into reality. This is exactly what we must do now. We have a duty to ensure that we are up to the task.

I wish you a successful and productive meeting.

Dr Hala Mustafa, Egyptian political scientist, Cairo

Mediterranean affairs cannot be tackled apart from the Middle East region. As many of the Middle East States are Mediterranean as well, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia Syria, Lebanon, Turkey and so on. Therefore the challenges are shared and also new, which mean that they are not limited to the old classic challenges such as illegal immigration and drug trafficking. Today, these challenges are coming from within those countries, where the structure and entity of most of these States are in question and the whole region is prone to change while its future remains ambiguous.

Let me review some of the main challenges that the Middle East is facing and which definitely will affect the Mediterranean region:

1) The stumbling of the “Arab Spring”. As after almost 4 years we could only come to the result that “Democracy” is far to be reached in the this region, and that such “spring” led on the contrary to the explosion of all types of conventional conflicts, in the form of religious, sectarian, doctrinal and tribal conflicts alike.

2) The spread of the “Militia” or the armed radical opposition phenomenon that strongly emerged in the past few years intersecting with the Arab Spring, threatening the State and Society in mean time and replacing all other forms of political opposition (political parties, Institutions, civil society organisations) defying democratisation process. Before, this phenomenon was specified in Lebanon as a particular case but, not any more. It has become the norm in the Middle East today which represents its most dangerous aspect.

3) The “Regionalisation” and “internationalisation” of the domestic conflicts. None of the conflicts today are confined to their local level or borders but, they have become part and parcel of a wider and major conflict over power and influence which take place among the conflicting and competitive regional and international forces. Hence, the conflicts in Libya for example cannot be solved apart from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, on the one hand and Turkey and its allies on the other hand as each of these regional States support different parts in the internal conflicts and have different affiliations. The same could be applied in Syria’s case, Iraq, Yemen and so on. Let alone of the complication of the international role, mainly divided between the US and Russia, with their contradictory orientations in such conflicts. These new realities make any political settlement not only difficult but, also imprisoned and dependent on the balance of power between all these different actors.

4) The end of the traditional “Arab Regional Order” which embodies the “Arab League” and by consequence the inefficacy of its role in most of the conflicts of today. This old order is leaving its place in favour of what so called the “New Middle East”, mainly sectarian, disputed and divided between “Sunnis” and “Shiites” camps. While the latest seems more coherent led by Iran, the first camp is self-divided between Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey and Qatar. So, no one can speculate on its future features or how will be the types settlement of most of these conflicts will reach since this New Order is still at the stage of formation and configuration.

5) The Dilemma of “Political Islam”. This phenomenon, which spread in the region since the seventies, has taken serious form actually. Talking about political Islam cannot be analysed apart from its historical roots because in such phenomenon in particular the past still controls the present. I refer here to the “paradoxical” reaction of the cancellation of the “Caliphate” system after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1924. While this fact led to the establishment of a modern secular State in Turkey, it had an opposite impact in the Arab Muslim World, where the first Political Islamic movement emerged in Egypt a few years later under the name of the “Muslim Brotherhood” in 1927 (the MB) to make from the restoration of the “Caliphate” its main target and ultimate goal as well as part from its searching for a specific “Political Identity” based on a “Theocratic” agenda. This movement which is considered as the “Mother Group” of all other Islamic groups that spread worldwide continues to inspire them since its creation down to the actual present with Al-Qaeda and Isis, regardless of the degree of brutality and aggression that these different groups demonstrate and practice, since the main thought and final goal remain identical.

6) The rejected reaction to the theocratic agenda that is carried out by the political Islamic groups. After the Islamists took over power in most of the cases in the time of the Arab Spring, Their theocratic agenda has become clearly evident and provoked a severe reaction against it. On the 30th of June wide uprising erupted in Egypt while the Islamists lost presidential elections in Tunisia which mean in the 2 principal

countries symbolising that "Spring". The question here: is there any possibility for reconciliation and by result the reintegration of the Islamic forces in the political process?

The answer is "No" for the time being, simply because in the past where the Islamists were partially integrated and recognised as a political actor among others and participated in the parliamentary elections and civil society organisations their comprehensive theocratic agenda was relatively hidden. Today the conflict is not between them as an opposition and the regime but, the clash includes the society and the State's establishments as well. In one word it has become a kind of an "existential" conflict over the "nature and type" of the State and society as the Islamists still deny the legitimacy of the "Nation-Modern State" in favour of an "Islamic Theocratic" one based on a "Transnational" aspect to fulfil their dream of the "Caliphate". Therefore no integration is possible unless this "agenda" is comprehensively revised. I can give here the example of Erbakan (the first founder of an Islamic party in Turkey and the sincere follower of the Muslim Brotherhood versus Erdoğan the leader of the AKP and the actual president. While the first failed by adopting the traditional theocratic agenda, the second showed respect to the secular type of State in order to succeed. Until that moment of revision will come the conflict with the Islamists will continue and manipulate not only the internal scene in different countries but will extend the borders such as the conflict with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt with its extension mainly in Libya and Gaza.

7) The "only" State model that dominates the present Middle East. Since the most influential regional powers are providing just one "Islamic State-Model", the Saudi, Turkish and the Iranian one, the religious and doctrinal conflicts are most likely to be continued, perpetuated and will also nurturing over and over the "Proxy Wars" in the region.

8) The ineffectiveness of the "war on terror" that started after September 11th. In most of the International military intervention cases the task was uncompleted. The lack of a political vision and alternative to the "day after" the military missions left these cases in a miserable situation from Afghanistan to Iraq, Libya and Syria will follow.

In the light of what I have mentioned above, no one can expect a fast or comprehensive political settlement of the different conflicts. All scenarios will remain open such as more military intervention, strikes, division (the Sudan example) and even the emergence of a semi-States (most likely to start by a Kurdish one) and others may follow it.

The absence or the weakness of the modern secular States as a framework for political settlements in the region will continue to make the coexistence between different groups, sects, religions, political forces impossible.

Ms Gabriella Battaini Dragoni, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe

Thank you Mr Chairman. Please let me add a few comments at this point in this very interesting discussion between the experts and the parliamentarians. I think it can be useful to provide you with a quick illustration of where the Council of Europe, through the Committee of Ministers, is heading in this debate.

Let me please go back a few weeks ago, where at the Ministerial Session of the Committee of Ministers in Brussels in May, an important document was adopted - precisely on the question of the Council of Europe's Neighbourhood Policy.

What is the relevance of this document? There is a very interesting element in it which is significant for our discussion today. For the first time, and in quite a strong manner, the Committee of Ministers of our Organisation declares that it wants to develop an enhanced *political* dialogue with the neighbouring countries. And, indeed, it intends to continue to have this enhanced political dialogue with countries like Tunisia, Morocco, and also with Jordan.

Why these three countries? Because these are the countries with which the Council of Europe has already developed, since the times of the Arab Spring, very close co-operation programmes. Now, let's not forget that these operational programmes were launched at a time three years ago when there was much hope around the Arab Spring. Now, we are in the Arab Winter, so to say and the geopolitical situation is changing dramatically day after day. The Council of Europe needs to adapt and to consolidate. We must ensure not to lose, but on the contrary, to build on these three years, which have proven that the process we started is of mutual benefit for both coasts of the Mediterranean Sea and that, three years after, it has made a most valuable contribution to the stability and security of both Europe and its neighbouring regions.

So, the first question Mr Chairman is really to what extent we want to continue on this path and to develop this *enhanced* political dialogue with our neighbourhood, and how we do it in this changing political climate. Should we be restrictive in limiting it exclusively to countries which seem politically more stable? In March this year, the Ministers' Deputies already launched this "*Enhanced Political Dialogue*" and held its first, very interesting exchange of views with a governmental representative of Tunisia. Similar exchanges of views will follow with representatives of Jordan and Morocco. The next challenge seems to me: how to take political dialogue a step further into a sound co-operation with a given country, and all other countries? This comes into my mind having heard the complexity of the situation as you described it this morning and also having listened to the initial statements made by the Italian authorities.

Now, the Council of Europe, let's not forget, has always functioned on the principle of co-operating on a demand-driven approach, which means that it is up to the countries in the neighbourhood first and foremost to request co-operation and dialogue. This allows the beneficiary states to better appropriate themselves priorities for co-operation, which is essential for the reform process and success. This approach works well, and our experience over the last three years has shown that there is a real and expressed interest of Mediterranean countries to work together with the Council of Europe on the consolidation of the democratisation process, reforms and other specific areas of concern, such as constitutional and electoral processes, by strengthening human rights, democracy building and good governance in particular.

Mr Buquicchio will elaborate in more depth on how exactly this works in practice and on the ground and how our Organisation assisted these countries in the building of their democracies - or better, in the strengthening of their democracies through law, which is what the Venice Commission he's presiding stands for.

But in addition to this ground work, and in addition to what we can do to deal bilaterally with these countries in the development of their democratic processes, there is another very important issue, and this is my second point, Mr Chairman, which in my opinion is going to increase a lot in importance in the future.

Namely, how to deal with and to respond to international and global threats. We are witnessing a kind of new reality right now. And the threats come from numerous and very different directions. They are linked to terrorism, to trafficking of human beings, and other threats to the rule of law; there are also more subtle threats emanating from a number of other issues which are not pertinent for the discussion today but which are called *Medicrime* or *Cybercrime*. Looking at the nature, the dimension and the growth of these international threats, a neighbourhood policy and co-operation, it seems to me, will very much be needed in the years to come and I would say even much more than three years ago, when we started the process and when the focus was more to look for countries that were really actively entering into their Arab Spring and to work out what we could do to help them to go for democracy.

I wanted to make these two points and finish with another very important dimension of the work of our Organisation. We are entering a time in which we need to work and promote democratic security. In September 2014, the Secretary General confirmed that assistance to neighbouring countries which want to anchor reforms through adherence to Council of Europe standards should be upheld. Indeed, our neighbourhood has a direct impact on democratic security in Europe. Our aim should now be to prepare their accession to our conventions on common threats and challenges. In this way we can expand the area of stability around Europe and strengthen our common fight against trans-border threats to Europe - thus directly benefiting democratic security in our member states. The Secretary General initiated a new dynamic with the Council of Europe's closest partners by introducing Neighbourhood Partnerships. The two-track approach of the Policy - bilateral and regional – is on its way.

At the Session of the Committee of Ministers in Brussels in May which I quoted at the beginning of my intervention, the Ministers very much welcomed the latest report of the Secretary General, which precisely is about democratic security. And, again, the question of the relationships with the neighbourhood is extremely important for democratic security on both sides of the Mediterranean. Needless to say, institutional coherence with the Parliamentary Assembly is of utmost importance.

Thank you.

**Ambassador Luca Giansanti, Director General of Political Affairs and Security,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy**

Thank you, Mr President,

We do not have very much time to discuss a highly complex situation which directly concerns my country.

I think that an Italian diplomat could talk about the Libyan crisis for hours or days on end. However, today I will try to keep to a couple of key points, the first being where we are at present with the Libyan crisis and its possible solution. We are at a crucial juncture because the political dialogue between the Libyan factions, facilitated by the United Nations, has reached a very important phase.

The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, Bernardino Leon, is about to complete his final contacts with a view to presenting the fourth, and what he hopes will be, the final version of an agreement between the Libyan parties, which will then be submitted for negotiation.

The agreement is a wide-ranging, complex document, which is essentially based on the principle of power sharing, while also taking into account other factors, such as the outcome of the most recent parliamentary elections in Libya in June 2014, as well as the need to go beyond the ruling handed down last November by the Libyan Supreme Court, which added a further institutional complication.

This agreement will be discussed, all being well, on 8 and 9 June in Morocco. We already know that all the parties are willing to participate in this important round of negotiations. Obviously, a successful outcome is by no means a foregone conclusion. But we might regard this as the beginning of a very intense two-week period between now and mid-June.

We will thus have this dialogue going on in Morocco, facilitated by the UN. There will also be an important meeting on Libya in Berlin on 10 June, which will bring together the five permanent members of the Security Council, five other countries, including Italy, that are directly involved in the crisis and the Libyan parties, with the aim of making a real attempt to forge ahead with the approval of this agreement.

All these efforts are being made because the aim is to reach an agreement before the month of Ramadan starts on 17 and 18 June, not because the world will collapse after that, but because a window of opportunity has been created.

After the break for Ramadan, the situation will be more fluid with some slight loss of momentum. This is why we are all using these next two weeks to hold a series of meetings aimed at trying to finalise this agreement. As far as Italy is concerned, apart from attending all these meetings, on Sunday 7 June we will be participating in an important political gathering in Cairo, a second trilateral meeting – the first one took place in Rome two months ago – between Italy, Egypt and Algeria, three countries neighbouring Libya which will attempt yet again, at ministerial level, to bring their positions closer together and find solutions.

On 7 and 8 June the G7 Summit, being held in Germany, will also deal with Libya. Other meetings are being held at the African Union level among Libya's neighbours, making this a very busy period for meetings.

The purpose of all this activity is to make the Libyan parties fully aware of the urgent need to reach an agreement. The United Nations has been extremely resolute in pursuing this agreement. It is easy to criticise the troubled course of these negotiations, but if we look back at where we were six months ago, the progress achieved since January has been quite remarkable. As often happens, it is when the goal is near that things become more difficult. Political agreement is paramount because, without an agreement, the country will continue to be divided and will be unable to constitute a partner with whom the international community and the neighbouring countries can have a dialogue, in order to work together to tackle the various challenges, ranging from terrorism to migration, not to mention the needs of the Libyan population and stabilisation.

The notion that, once Ramadan is over, things could take longer and become more complicated is also based on the fact that the mandate of the House of Representatives in Tobruk, the parliament elected last June, is due to expire in October, the deadline set for it by the Libyan Constitutional Declaration. This is why we are all now providing some impetus so that our Libyan friends, on both sides, will set aside any recourse to stalling tactics, which has hitherto been a feature of these negotiations, and which, as time goes by, is becoming more difficult to understand at an international level. Asking how we have arrived at this situation

would require a long and complicated debate. We have probably arrived here due to a series of errors and failings on the part of both the international community and Libya. It is certainly the case that, after 2011, the international community was unable to grasp fully the complexity of the situation and meet the needs of either Libya's institutions or its population. However, at the same time, we need to be very honest and acknowledge that the ruling class in Libya has been entirely unable to rise above its own interests, or the interests of its own limited constituency, in order to focus on the more general interests of the country. What is at stake in this process is obviously the stability of the Mediterranean area and the whole North African region and, as many of the speakers already reminded us this morning, Italy and Libya are certainly at the very heart of this region.

In the current situation there are two opposing camps, which are clearly fragmented, as often happens when a process of political dialogue is set in train as an alternative to a violent military solution.

In Libya we have tempered the more extremist fringes in both camps. Therefore, we have seen during these last few months further fragmentation within both camps, which I will call the Tobruk camp and the Tripoli camp for simplicity's sake.

This fragmentation has also brought to light the weakness of both camps. In Tobruk we have the parliament which was legitimately elected in June last year, while in Tripoli we have a government which does not exercise any great control over the territory and a military apparatus which is in clear control of the situation. On the other side, there is a parliament which has lost its legitimacy, yet controls much of the territory, while not being recognised by the international community. The main point is that both parties need to be persuaded that there can be no military solution to this crisis and that it is illusory to think that one of the two can prevail by military means. Unfortunately, this notion is also being fuelled by some regional players.

Events of recent months and the last year have shown that is not the case. We have witnessed the inability of either side to achieve results by military means. Therefore, the only solution is to form a government of national unity and share power. This government could take different forms, but ideally it should bring together all the Libyan components. However, this objective is perhaps too ambitious. There are intermediate scenarios, referred to as "Tobruk plans", whereby a new government can be formed based on the Tobruk side, but with fundamental additions such as the Misrata community, a key player in Libya which has proved to be a very important moderating factor since January.

This inclusive government of harmony and unity, for want of a better description, is the best solution for Libyans, Italy, Europe and the international community, as it would re-establish an interlocutor in Libya with whom we can engage in tackling certain challenges which, unfortunately, cannot wait.

The duration of the political process has proved somewhat incompatible with the urgent need to tackle a number of challenges which the political vacuum in Libya has posed for Italy, Malta, the whole of Europe and the neighbouring countries, the challenges of migration and, unfortunately, of terrorism. In the meantime, Europe and the countries which are monitoring the crisis more closely need to address these urgent issues. I must say that the tragedies at sea have served one purpose this year, in that they have triggered, for the first time, a strong, innovative response from the European Union, which, on the back of the European Council meeting of 23 April and the European immigration agenda approved in May, has put in place the policies proposed by the European Commission in May.

At the same time, we are confronted with the challenge posed by terrorism, which has managed to establish operational bases on the coast of Cyrenaica, in Benghazi, Derna and Sirte, right opposite the shores of Italy.

Terrorism and migration are therefore two emergencies we are striving to address, while waiting for this Libyan process to reach a solution. Assuming an agreement can be reached between now and the summer, as we all hope, the real major challenge for all of us will commence the day following such an agreement. This time, not only the international community but also our Libyan friends will no longer be able to afford for the process to fail, as happened after the 2011 revolution. We will have to put in a huge amount of effort together to bring stability and peace to the country and to rebuild it and provide it with assistance in a whole range of sectors. We have a tremendous task ahead of us. Italy has repeatedly said in every international forum, not just today, but since last summer, that we are ready as a government and a country to play a leading role. We have also said this to our Libyan friends as a form of reassurance and guarantee. "If you reach an agreement, know that Italy will be with you." And we will provide everything that the Libyan Government may need and request of us. It is not for us to decide Libya's needs, but whether it is a matter of assistance, a military presence, stabilisation, capacity building or reconstruction of the country, this is a formal undertaking which we have already assumed for some time, naturally as part of the activities coordinated with the United Nations, with the support of the European Union and our main partners which,

like us, have been monitoring this Libyan crisis. I should mention in particular France, the United States, the United Kingdom, Spain and Germany. At the same time, we have continued to work above all with the neighbouring countries: Algeria, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Turkey. This is therefore the overview which I wanted to give you to begin with. This is also what we are offering our Libyan friends, should they decide, with our help, to come to an agreement on forming a new government.

Mr Gianni Buquicchio, President of the Venice Commission

Thank you Mr President,

I have listened with great interest and attention to all of the speakers who have taken the floor before me. And I have to say that it is frightening. What you have said may well turn my habitual optimism into pessimism. From what you say, everything seems to be going wrong. The Mediterranean is becoming a graveyard and the figures are terrifying – it appears that some 170,000 immigrants have landed on the coasts of Italy and that we should expect a further wave of a million people in the coming years. Italy is going to become a parking lot for those fleeing the South in desperation. And I am quite deliberately talking about the South, as immigrants are not only coming from Northern Africa or Africa in general but also from much further afield. Nor is this a purely Mediterranean problem. There are currently examples in Asia and the phenomenon is becoming increasingly frequent in Southern Africa with a massive influx of immigrants into South Africa, and in the Americas Mexicans in particular and other Latin-Americans are arriving in the United States.

What is to be done? Should we build walls, put up barbed wire, bomb and destroy the boats used by traffickers? Of course not. Our conscience doesn't allow us to do such things. It would be completely pointless anyway. What we need to do is to build a future for these countries. This is not an easy thing to do as our own countries are feeling the effects of the economic crisis and that is restricting our ability to do something about the situation.

But we have to do something. The stability and security of the southern shores of the Mediterranean are not only crucial for that region but also for Europe itself. We, and above all our leaders, must create the conditions for stability in the Mediterranean region by assisting not only the economic but also the political development of the countries concerned.

What can the Council of Europe do?

It goes without saying that we are not a financial organisation and that we cannot therefore help with the economic development of these countries, but as Minister Della Vedova said, it is also important to foster the rule of law, human rights and democracy in the South-Mediterranean region. That is what the Council of Europe in general, and the Venice Commission in particular, has been endeavouring to do for some time now. The Venice Commission initiated dialogue with several North African countries as far back as 2007, long before the "Arab Awakening". That was possible because we were already co-operating with the Union of Arab Constitutional Courts and Councils, which covers 14 Arab countries from Mauritania to Yemen. At that time the partners in such dialogue were obviously not the authorities themselves but the sectors of society which were the most advanced, the most liberal and the most prepared to take part in such discussions. The first to be involved were Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, which have since become fully-fledged members of the Venice Commission, as has Israel, whereas Palestine enjoys a special co-operation status.

We were therefore already in a privileged position when the Arab Spring took place as we were already known in these countries, and that facilitated co-operation. Nevertheless, the situation was not easy and the hopes we placed in the success of the Arab Spring were only fulfilled in part. However I am particularly proud of the success of our co-operation with not only Tunisia but also Morocco and Jordan. Unfortunately our dialogue with Egypt did not yield the anticipated results but we intend to resume co-operation soon. More recently we have – and here again I refer to a concept mentioned by Minister Della Vedova – stimulated and encouraged regional co-operation. This is an initiative which I warmly recommend to other Council of Europe bodies and in particular the Parliamentary Assembly. We must encourage the countries which have made progress in terms of democracy to develop regional co-operation at their level.

For example, the Venice Commission has helped Jordan to embark on co-operation with the electoral authorities in Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, Yemen and Libya.

On 14 September, in co-operation with the Moroccan Ministry of Public Service, we will launch a programme of seminars (2015-2017) on enhancing the legal capacities of the senior public administration officials of the 9 countries in the MENA Region on the subjects of good governance and human rights.

The Commission, along with the Moroccan Ombudsperson, has helped organise training sessions for collaborators of Mediator members of the Association of Mediterranean Ombudsmen.

Also in Morocco, the National Human Rights Council has asked us to help organise an international colloquy on the techniques of semi-direct participative democracy.

Since 2012, the Venice Commission has, in co-operation with South-Mediterranean and European countries, held intercultural workshops on democracy, designed to give Arab and European legal experts and politicians the opportunity to discuss subjects such as constitutional reforms, the rule of law and human rights.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as we have seen, the Council of Europe and the Venice Commission have done a great deal in the Southern Mediterranean region – at these countries' own request, as Ms Battaini explained - but a great deal still remains to be done.

The Venice Commission intends to continue and to step up its co-operation with Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia and to resume co-operation as soon as possible with Egypt and Libya and with other countries which may choose to call on its assistance, such as Lebanon or Algeria.

Thank you for your attention.

Mr Abdul Rahman Al Ageli, Non-Resident Fellow at the Atlantic Council, co-founder of the Libyan Youth Forum and former security advisor at the Office of the Libyan Prime Minister

Thank you very much, it is an honour to be here amongst distinguished members of parliament. The situation is very complex, I would say much more so than even in Syria and I will be extremely brief and extremely frank.

The devil is in the detail. Nothing is as it seems and everything is possible. The whole region is most certainly at a crossroads, but specifically Libya, and unfortunately for the international community, most of the solutions that are on the table must be led by Libyans. If us as Libyans are insistent on war and not willing to make compromises towards a political solution, then there is not much the international community can do.

There are windows of opportunities available, but for the international community, the fact that they cannot be inside Libya because of security concerns means that really, they cannot take full advantage of some of these windows of opportunity. The previous speaker has gone over many of the important points, so I won't need to repeat, but I will cover, in bullet points, the recent developments.

There are on-going UN led negotiations and there are criticisms of the third draft presented. The delegation representing the bloc known as 'Libya Dawn' and their allies criticise it because they see it as biased to the House of Representatives in Tobruk. As the previous speaker mentioned, there are hardliners on both sides and the hardliners on the internationally recognised parliament side believe that the decisive military victory is a better option than a political settlement that involves power sharing with what they describe as an illegitimate entity.

There are municipal council dialogues that have recently been taking place in Tunisia and there is supposed to be a security track of dialogue as well. The Algerian government has been very supportive and they have also been holding talks for Political and Civil Society activists. There is a risk of economic collapse, regardless of whether there is a solution or not. The reality is our deficit will reach 68% of GDP by next year. If a change in the spending policy is implemented, it will go down to around 48% / 45%. In any case, even if there is a unity government, within the next couple of years, we would see an economic collapse as a result of rising subsidies and salary spending as a percentage of the national budget. Not to mention the fact that we are unable to export the full capacity of our oil and natural resources.

Most of the politicians who are engaged in the dialogue are not directly involved in the conflict; neither do they have hierarchical control over the warring actors. It's much more of an upside down pyramid. So I would say, as a recommendation, that the politicians need to be track two. Track one needs to be the social structures that people have created to represent their interests and who are engaged in war, which is primarily social actors such as tribes, families, depending on which region you are talking about, and the military actors. Those are the people who are engaged at this moment in time in grassroots level negotiations which are slightly successful, particularly in the West of Libya where people don't see a tangible benefit of continuing in the conflict. Many of the tribes and many of the warring actors in the West of Libya are engaging in direct conversations and compromises with each other which could have a productive result, again there are spoilers from both sides.

Now, the civil society that many refer to in the international community, and according to international best practice, is sometimes human rights organisations, NGOs, youth organisations, but the reality is that the only civil society which is relevant to a potential solution and the current conflict, are the tribes. Many of the civil society, NGOs, youth groups, human rights organisations, are slightly disconnected from the current conflict and there is a huge gap. So I think international best practice in regards to dealing with civil society must evolve accordingly.

There are key differences in the dynamics between East, West and South of Libya and now the Central region. Each region has its own unique social and military dynamic. The East and South of Libya is characterised by slightly more organised and hierarchical tribal and social structures, whereas the West of Libya, particularly Tripoli and Misrata, is more characterised as cosmopolitan, so we talk about, families and maybe clans. In the areas where the social structures are more powerful, the armed groups actually represent the interests of social structures and therefore it is incorrect, technically, to speak about the

elimination or demobilisation of armed groups that come from these areas because they are representative of social structures, interests and grievances which must be addressed.

The differences between the armed organisations, are particularly relevant and all over Libya, we have social structures that exist across multiple borders and multiple countries. In the South you have the Toubou and Tuareg, who move freely between around 7 countries. In the East of Libya, you have tribes such as Awlad Ali. In the West of Libya, there is close integration between Libyan entities and Tunisian entities as well. There are also evolving regional dynamics concerning these tribes which could provide a window of opportunity for the international community.

You have the EU migration plan which could be good if clearly defined. I worry that it could spill over into combatting IS, which might not necessarily be a good thing. There is a change in the politics of Saudi Arabia, which is definitely an opportunity for Saudi Arabia to become a credible mediator in the Libyan conflict, as long as Saudi Arabia has influence over Doha as well as Abu Dhabi and Cairo. What has happened, and what I fear will continue, is a delegation of the Libya issue to Egypt because there are significant national security threats to the Egyptian State from Libya.

The priority for the Gulf is much more Yemen than Libya. If the national security threats to our neighbouring countries are not dealt with by the Libyan authorities or by the international community, then these countries will take it upon themselves to address these challenges in their own way, which I think would be mostly destructive and non-productive if there isn't effective Libyan facilitation.

Unfortunately, the way I would describe the regional dynamic as opposed to Libya is: Libyans themselves have been willing proxies to a regional battle between countries that are fighting the Muslim Brotherhood and the countries that are supporting them. Libyan actors, using their relationships with the ruling class of many of these countries are manipulating their resources combat their political opponents inside Libya. So I would say that a regional battle has been taking place inside Libya, but unfortunately, it is Libyan political actors who are largely influencing and driving this dynamic.

There is a rapidly evolving Islamic State situation, particularly in the Central region. Now there is a significant foreign presence and there are splits, especially in the West of Libya and inside Misrata, about how to combat them. There has been a group from Misrata who has been combatting them since around March, with little or no support, even from the brigade that it came out from. The issue of combatting them is different for every region. You thus have the internationally recognised government fighting them in Benghazi and somewhat in Derna, but in Sirte the social makeup is completely different and there is a local public discourse that supports their presence, but there is also a direct and indirect social link with federalist and Dignity supportive tribes. This is so because of grievances against some of the post-revolutionary exclusionary and in some cases, persecutory dynamics, particularly with Misrata, and the issue of political isolation etc., and that is why the tribal alliances between tribes like the Gaddadfa with IS are mainly aimed at using IS as a vehicle to obtain justice and address grievances, rather than explicit support for IS ideology.

The potential disconnect that could happen between Islamists in Tripoli and the revolutionaries in the West of Libya and other places, could lead to the revolutionaries and the groups who want to fight IS, losing the ability to engage with the radical Islamists using a theological discourse, which would leave violence and force as the last resort of the incompetent. IS actively seeks conflict, it seeks internationally and regionally supported conflict in order to evolve to the next stage of its transformation as an organisation. These organisations will evolve according to the mechanism and the method in which they are combatted. Many of these organisations, whether they are revolutionary movements, criminal organisations or radical Islamist organisations, are made up, of maybe 90 to 95% of either brainwashed youth or people who have a socio-economic or political grievance; whereas 5%, although I can't say exact percentages, but a minority are made up of individuals who are hard line, individuals who have regional, ideological and logistical links to international networks and who will be insistent on combat, regardless of whether there is a dialogue or reconciliation process with them or not. But it is incorrect to use security and military apparatus against 100% of these organisations because they will in fact entrench, which is what we have been seeing for the last 30 years.

So the first step in dealing with the IS issue is that there must be an effort to address the local grievances that have led to local tribal, social and public support to that discourse. In order to disconnect the people who do have legitimate grievances from the people who are insistent on or have a regional Islamic State agenda or a regional totalitarianism type exclusive agenda. Unfortunately, in the big picture, the Islamic State seems to have a vision which is much more appealing than the visions being offered by the Arab and Muslim world and their leaders, and the reality is you cannot fight an idea using force, there must be a vision which addresses the future of social, political and economic empowerment of the individual citizens of the Arab and

Muslim world, which is what the Arab Spring should have been about and what I fought for, but the reality is it turned out to be just about the removal of the dictators with no alternative vision.

If this vision is not provided, not just for Libya but for the Islamic world in general, I fear that organizations like the Islamic State will be seen by Muslims as a Sunni frontline/bulwark against the Shia or against the rest of the world. You may have seen recent changes even in Afghanistan with the defection of many Taliban commanders to IS, which was, a few months ago, seen as impossible by many.

There expansion into some of our neighbouring countries and in Syria and Iraq, particularly if they expand into Saudi Arabia, where they do have a significant level of public support, could change the dynamic and I fear that is the direction that we are going in. So in a couple of years, we could see a completely different Middle East to the one we see now.

Hopefully we will be able to continue with the details in the discussion, Thank You.