



Panel 4:

“The future of Partnerships in the Mediterranean and Middle East”

Lecture by

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Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all I am honored to deliver this speech and I am very glad to be in Tirana again, especially in the presence of my Albanian and foreign friends. How many memories connect me with the events of the Atlantic Council of Albania, and what a big progress I have observed over the years of its existence?

I was present at the first Albanian Atlantic Conference many years ago when the first President of the Atlantic Council of Albania Dr. Alfred Moisiu along with you, Mr. President Starova, Pandeli Maiko and Genc Pollo, gathered here a lot of friends of Albania from Europe.

As the years were passing, I was always delighted to come again and again to honor different occasions. And I remember once I was here with some of you to honor the first ever President of the organization, member of ATA, elected as a Head of State. I refer to H.E. Alfred Moisiu- the Former President of Albania. He is the great statesman, personality of a high caliber, who set an example of serving the society on the first place, while working with all political parties in consensus. He was dedicated to driving his country to the NATO family and the result wasn't too long to wait for.

Today we enjoy the organization of the General Assembly in the newest Country Member of NATO. We appreciate good organization and facilitation of this gathering.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

Today the World and Europe are extremely different from it was two decades ago. New challenges have aroused and all transatlantic area: our countries, our societies, and our families now face new threats. It is not enough today to refer only to tactical threats, because also the economic crisis brings the new dimension to the notion of security. But, ladies and gentlemen, the subject of our panel is more specific. We talk here about "The future of Partnerships in the Mediterranean and Middle East".

From the early decade of 90s the Atlantic Alliance started the dialogue with Mediterranean countries, followed by the Istanbul Initiative in 2004.

Dr. Bin, on behalf of NATO, explained to us the story of what we achieved in the past and with what perspective we should have looked in the future.

I will try to bring here some general thoughts as well as open up the perspective that my country shares. I would also like to make some propositions about the future cooperation within the civil society movement that we lead in our countries.

Greece is an intrinsic part of the Mediterranean and since ancient times has maintained strong and unbroken bonds with the peoples and countries of the region. As a European coastal country in the Eastern Mediterranean, Greece – which sees the Mediterranean as a sea of communication, trade and cooperation – plays an active, substantial and leading role in the wider region, pursuing the promotion of actions, programs and synergies in all sectors.

As such, Greece supported the Union for the Mediterranean (EfM) – the new EU institutional framework for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, adopted at the Paris Summit Meeting (13 July 2008).

Promotion of the Mediterranean dimension in confronting current environmental challenges is a high priority. As well as planning of programs for water resource management in the region.

Security is an important dimension of Greece's Mediterranean policy. In the conviction that the Mediterranean is not a boundary, but a natural bridge joining the peoples on all sides of the Sea. During its 2009 OSCE Chairmanship, Greece actively and systematically promoted OSCE cooperation with the Mediterranean Partners, implementing a number of actions (including the appointment of an OSCE Chairmanship special representative to the Mediterranean partners; a seminar for young diplomats in Athens; and a workshop on a comprehensive approach on supply-chain security), contributing in parallel to upgrading the annual meetings with the Mediterranean partners to the level of Conferences.

Greece's emphasis on the importance of establishing substantial coordination among the countries of the Mediterranean is reflected in the fact that it was a founding member of the Mediterranean Forum – an informal cooperation platform between six northern Mediterranean countries (Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Greece and Malta) and five countries on the southern shores of the Mediterranean (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and Turkey).

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me refer specifically to NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue with seven Mediterranean states as well as the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative with four Gulf States.

I cannot stress how important these frameworks are for promoting and ensuring security and stability in the region. First of all, they provide a forum where a constructive security dialogue can be held both between NATO and each Partner separately as well as between NATO and a group of Partners multilaterally. Secondly, they offer practical cooperation activities in various security related matters. And thirdly, they allow Partners to participate in NATO peacekeeping- related operations.

The value of NATO's partnerships was underlined also in the new Strategic Concept which was adopted during the recent Lisbon NATO Summit and which envisages the substantial enhancement of the Alliance's partnership policy and the upgrading of its instruments with all Partners, including those in the Mediterranean and in the Gulf.

This means we will proceed with the strengthening and deepening of the existing political dialogue between NATO and its Partners on critical matters of security. It also means the increased availability of NATO cooperation tools and training activities to the advantage of our Partners in the Mediterranean and the Gulf in areas such as defense reform, combating terrorism, energy security, anti-piracy, non-proliferation of WMD and civil emergency planning.

Last but not least, I would like to note the success of the ongoing NATO anti-terrorist naval Operation "Active Endeavour" in the Mediterranean Sea to which, my country Greece is a major contributor and in which a number of our Mediterranean Partners are participating.

Mr. President

Ladies & Gentlemen,

Coming to the current problems, I think that it is safe to say that although there are certain similarities between what is happening in each of these countries that make the events appear as a "snowball", each individual situation has its own particularities and certainly also differences.

A common thread that is apparent in all is the call of the people for change. Change in systems of governance, change in social and economic policies and, of course, change that will guarantee the advancement of universal freedoms, liberties and fundamental human rights.

The processes for change undoubtedly differs from country to country. The distinct political cultures in each will, to large extent, determine both the scope of political and economic reforms, but also the pace of these reforms.

Challenging the leaderships and systems of governance will be a long drawn-out process, and its repercussions on other Arab countries will be significant and long-term.

What is needed on a diplomatic level is to be supportive of requests for assistance by these countries, without pompous statements or, and this is very important, without patronising tendencies, but in a spirit of true cooperative partnership.

At the same time, we need to try to examine the extent to which the people calling for internal changes within their countries will also call for changes in the external relations of their countries. In other words, should we expect a “paradigm shift” in these countries’ foreign policy orientations and, if so, in what direction?

The evidence so far is that the forces calling for change do not appear to be seeking an overhauling of their international affairs. They seem to acknowledge and embrace the need to pursue regional peace and stability and to forge even closer ties between them, possibly also through a revamped Arab League.

There may be countries in the region or beyond which may seek to exploit the current volatile situation in order to make individual gains in the quest for regional influence.

My sense, however, is that the people calling for change, and in the name of those that have already lost their lives in the struggle of “freedom versus power”, will not readily accept the replacement of one hegemon by another, whether this be internally or externally.

The Euroatlantic partners and Allies have to be prepared for all eventualities, but, most importantly, we need to be prepared to respond effectively and in a timely manner to requests for a variety of assistance that may emanate from these countries themselves.

Now is the time for a comprehensive approach, but with targeted actions depending on the specific requirements, characteristics, and needs of each one of our southern neighbours.

The EU has already initiated a serious dialogue on how best to assist those countries in transition and stands ready to adapt its support, taking into account their requests and specific needs.

We also have to be ready to readjust policies in our countries, so as to put forward a new partnership. And in doing so, our approach should be holistic. We should be able to offer to our Southern Partners a comprehensive and effective package, which will support them in creating a solid basis upon which democracy can really flourish.

Emphasis should be laid upon support of civil society and institution building, while promoting, at the same time, economic and social development in the countries in question.

Democracy and institution building on one hand and socio-economic development on the other are inextricably linked and should be pursued in tandem.

And here, I would like to mention an effort of Greek Association. Since 1996- International Institute for Political and Economic Studies, organized together with the prestigious American Foundation every year brings to Crete, Greece 100 outstanding students, potential leaders from South Eastern Europe and Mediterranean countries. We put them for 3 weeks to interact through education and establish ties of friendship and cooperation from the very beginning of their life. And we hope it will have lasting results for the rest of it.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I know that the tasks at hand may present daunting challenges given also the economic and financial crisis the world is faced with. However, new and additional resources are necessary in order to avoid a serious economic and social downturn in the area, with even worse global repercussions.

In finalizing the measures to be taken, particular attention must be given the principle of ownership. Consequently, our actions should be guided by respect of the dignity and the sensibilities of our Southern neighbours and partners. We should not forget that this transformation was initiated by the peoples themselves and our main goal should be how best to support them in developing their own way towards democracy.

Mr. President,
Ladies & Gentlemen,

As we speak about Mediterranean issues let me remind to you an Arab proverb:
"In the desert of life, the wise person travels by caravan, where the fool prefers to travel alone".

There is general agreement that because the complexity of problems, no single initiative can address both the longer term and proximate of instability of this region.

Only a combination of institutions and policy tools can produce most of the desired results. Complementarity is the key word and each organization should concentrate its effort on field where it has clear comparative advantage and something constructive to offer as a contribution and solution of the problems in the Mediterranean region. In other words we should look for the added value.

Because most of problems are of the economic nature, the EU is the best actor to deal with those problems and I am sure that they do not escalate into major crisis that requires military action.

But also NATO has a potential significant role to play. Although the EU may be more acceptable to some countries, NATO is perceived as more credible when it comes to hard security issues. Therefore, the role of each organization has to be determined on a case by case basis. EU and NATO are in need to agree on a coordinating mechanism regarding their Mediterranean activities.

Dear Friends, let's come now to one fundamental issue that is tyrannizing the relations between these countries and the West. It is the suspicion and mistrust!

The issue of Mediterranean Security is full of misunderstandings: misunderstanding on behalf people of Europe and misunderstanding on behalf people of Mediterranean. Such misunderstanding emanate as much from mutual ignorance as they do from intended confusion.

But if the mentality of one is practically unknown to the other, how can we be sure that confidence will replace suspicion and mistrust. In my view an environment of confidence can be created if we focus our future efforts on development of transparency and information.

This is why, Ladies and Gentlemen, I strongly believe that ATA has a major role to play. Not only to teach about NATO values and operations, not only to establish bilateral and multilateral contact and friendship with the other side of Mediterranean, but firstly and foremost to pave the way for real political relations of understanding with each other.

This is why with my French colleagues, the French Atlantic Association, which unfortunately are not here; in 1999 we analyzed this problem. So we invited personalities from this area to put the problem on the table at the historical General Assembly in Strasbourg under my chairmanship.

We decided 12 years ago to establish Atlantic Antennas or Committees with Mediterranean Dialogue countries. This is why for a good political reason we changed the Constitution of ATA.

But until now, 12 years later, except Atlantic Association in Israel, we have no other similar organization. It is needless to repeat that today it is crucial to restart these efforts and I offer my Association to organize a round table discussion at the end of the spring, inviting opinion leaders from the region to discuss and to bring new result for this purpose.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

Lets drive ATA to “Mare Nostrum” and use ATA as a bridge for the unification of the Euro- Atlantic Area and the Mediterranean countries.

We face common threats, share eternal common values, and we need to work in equality for our common destiny.

Thank you.