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SPEAKING NOTES

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Introduction

I am delighted to take part in this international seminar devoted to an issue of great importance and interest, which is also increasingly relevant to the shaping of NATO's outreach dimension.

I would like to focus my remarks on the significant progress registered in recent months by NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue. There has been a real "upgrading" process, which saw the political dimension of the initiative reinforced, and this reinforcement reflected in its practical dimension.

A New Dimension for the Mediterranean Dialogue

The events of September 11th, 2001 have undeniably given rise to a new security scenario. This new security scenario has had an effect on the role of the Mediterranean Dialogue.

The need to enhance the political and practical aspects of the initiative became apparent during an informal "brainstorming" meeting of NATO Ambassadors last October, and subsequently in a round of political consultations with the seven partners in the 19+1 format which was held from 17 to 22 October 2001. Of particular significance was the fact that, following these consultations, a NAC meeting with the Dialogue countries took place in the multilateral format, i.e. 19+7. This meeting enabled the Atlantic Council to see its discussions extended, for the first time, to the seven Mediterranean partners, sitting side by side.

It should be noted that the interest of Alliance members and partners in upgrading and speeding up the Mediterranean cooperation process after September 11th was not expressed in a vacuum: the principles, instruments, programmes and mechanisms for a further development of the initiative were indeed already in place, already defined, as a result of the constant pressure from countries within NATO, including Italy, which were convinced of their potential benefits.

The results achieved in the past

In fact, since the Mediterranean Dialogue was launched in 1994 – thanks to the contribution of then Italian Prime Minister Ciampi, its progress has been remarkably steady.

The creation of the Mediterranean Cooperation Group – as a result of the strong impetus given to the MD at the July 1997 NATO Summit in Madrid – has provided a valuable forum for discussion and decision-making within the Alliance's structure, adding considerable visibility to its Mediterranean dimension.

The need to develop NATO's Mediterranean initiative further was confirmed at the highest level during the Washington Summit where the three principal documents approved (Final Communiqué, Washington Declaration, Strategic Concept) emphasised the increased role of Mediterranean cooperation as an integral part of Euro-Atlantic stability and security. The new Strategic Concept defined the Mediterranean as an area of special interest to the Alliance on the basis of the fundamental principle that European security is closely linked to security and stability in the Mediterranean. All these decisions and directives adopted at the highest level are a point of reference for the development of the Mediterranean Dialogue.

The incremental nature of the Mediterranean Dialogue has led to a pragmatic approach to operational initiatives, resulting in the definition of annual work programmes including cooperation in various sectors. The focus on certain so-called "*soft security*" issues has permitted the identification of programmes that can be implemented without provoking undue political difficulties. The progress achieved in the field of *soft security*, which is of interest to most of the partners, constitutes a necessary condition for moving the Dialogue forward in other areas, including that of military cooperation. The "new NATO", with its rapid evolution during the post-Cold War period, can now offer considerable expertise, including in areas which are not part of its traditional role as a defence and security organisation (*hard security*).

Initiatives have therefore been developed in the areas of information – a key area for the Dialogue, including through the action of the Contact Point Embassies – Civil Emergency Planning, scientific cooperation, crisis management, defence policy and strategy and training (in particular through participation in courses offered by the NATO Defence College in Rome, and by the NATO School in Oberammergau, Germany).

The role of Italy

I believe that Italy can take credit for these achievements: from the very inception of the Mediterranean Dialogue, Rome has consistently and tenaciously supported its development. At first the scepticism and circumspection of some of our Allies had to be overcome, but we were convinced that in the area of security, NATO was in a position to offer its Mediterranean partners "added value" which no other organisation active in this region could match. Italy's stance and efforts in this respect have now been recognised.

The new scenario

The follow-up to decisions taken in recent months has led to a considerable strengthening of the Dialogue's political dimension. Indeed meetings at ambassadorial level have become institutionalised as part of the round of consultations in the 19+1 format, whereas these had previously been held at a lower level. Similarly, meetings in the 19+7 format will hopefully now take place with greater frequency, namely following regular NATO ministerial meetings or summits of Heads of State and Government.

Particular consideration is also given to promoting, in the context of the Mediterranean Dialogue, exchanges of views and information with the seven partners on the fight against terrorism.

The complementarity of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue with other international organisations active in the area

With regard to the “practical dimension” of the Dialogue, it was recently proposed, in order to reinforce complementarity with the efforts of other international organisations, to promote exchanges of information between NATO and the EU on their activities in the area of security and stability in the Mediterranean region.

The existence of other important cooperative initiatives in the area has sometimes brought critics to question the validity and prospects of the Mediterranean Dialogue. I do not think that such reasoning is well-founded. One of the fundamental principles of the Dialogue is that it should concentrate on those activities for which NATO can provide “added value”, in comparison to what other organisations do.

The EU's “Barcelona Process” is radically different in its nature, goals and purposes from the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue, which is a forum particularly well-suited to dealing with subjects in which NATO possesses unique experience and competence.

The relationship with the Middle East peace process is also quite different. The MD does not play a role in that process. It could, nonetheless, especially in moments of crisis such as now, when negotiations are in serious difficulty, provide options for cooperation based on concrete programmes – multilateral or bilateral – with a potential for “confidence building” among the partners.

I think that this is the feedback that we have received from our Mediterranean partners – in the recent political consultations at 19 + 1 – despite the very serious tensions in the Middle East at present. While there is no doubt that the improvement of the situation in the region is a necessary condition for fully exploiting the potential of the exercise, it can be argued that the presence of a forum for Mediterranean cooperation in the security sector guarantees the continuation – albeit at a reduced level – of activities that can be useful for future collaboration among the partners.

The Future of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue: Towards a New Partnership?

The security scenario resulting from the events of September 11th is not the only factor influencing the future of the Mediterranean Dialogue.

The development of the Dialogue is also influenced by factors internal to NATO, namely its reform and external outreach processes launched in view of the Prague Summit next November where important decisions are expected to be taken regarding enlargement.

One of the consequences of a further round of NATO enlargement will in fact be the need to rethink and redefine the partnership dimension of the Alliance.

Without overlooking the differences between both exercises, Italy has stressed the potential benefits of applying the experiences and initiatives developed in the EAPC-PfP context to the Mediterranean Dialogue wherever these could serve NATO's

Mediterranean cooperation. This is a position which Italy has consistently held with a view to furthering the practical dimension of the process.

Indeed this principle, long regarded with a degree of detachment by some countries within the Alliance, is now more widely acknowledged. The fact that this was a sensible approach had been recognised for some time: by way of example, the option of the Mediterranean partners' participation in military exercises is based on models developed in PfP.

Clearly, a decision in Prague to enlarge the Alliance further would also lead to a thorough redefinition of the geographical dimension of NATO's partnership. The specific relevance of the Mediterranean initiative would be increased since this region would be recognised as even more closely linked to Euro-Atlantic security.

Against this background, I believe it will be justified to argue for the inclusion of the Mediterranean Dialogue within a refounded Euro-Atlantic partnership, a decision which would be both logical and beneficial.

Such an approach could also alleviate the difficulties encountered by the Mediterranean cooperation process in launching initiatives in the 19+7 format, by placing them within an expanded framework. In the framework of a renewed, expanded partnership with NATO, including countries from other areas, the sensitivities which arise when confronting certain issues among Mediterranean partner countries might be less salient if the Mediterranean partners were to cooperate with a wider variety of countries, in a forum which would not focus solely on their region.

I trust you will agree that these new perspectives on the development of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue offer interesting prospects, even though they are still to be developed and defined in more detail.

What is certain at this point in time is that Italy will continue to make a determined, open and future-oriented contribution to the growth of an initiative which we regard as important for the future of Euro-Atlantic security.

We are indeed convinced that the indivisibility of Euro-Atlantic and Mediterranean security cannot simply be a statement of principle. It must become a reality matched by political and operational decisions.

We are therefore confident that renewed NATO success in taking up its new challenges and missions can be an essential factor – if supported by sufficient political will and concrete action – for the further development of an indispensable role in a region as crucial to global security as the Mediterranean.