

OSCE PA President João Soares

**Testimony before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
(The Helsinki Commission)**

“The Future of the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation”

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'm very pleased to be invited to this OSCE hearing on the future of the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation, which I believe to be very timely. I'm also pleased with the leadership that Congressman Hastings has shown, and his willingness to continue to be so active in his role as OSCE PA Special Representative on Mediterranean Affairs.

There are several aspects that I would like to touch on, all of which, in my opinion, speak to the benefit of continued and increased engagement between the OSCE and our Mediterranean Partners. Both us, and our Partners benefit from increased co-operation.

The OSCE's experience in comprehensive security is very relevant to the Mediterranean, and warrants greater attention in the region. In the last thirty years the approach to security has been enriched by new dimensions, which have substantially modified our vision of security. At the same time new concepts and definitions emerged, new methodologies of how to avoid and/or prevent conflicts became a major issue of discussion. It looks to security not only in military terms but it takes into account other aspects such as the economy, sustainable development and the environment.

Comprehensive security is an approach that sees security as a complex topic focused not only in territorial integrity and military issues but also in economic, social, political, environmental, and cultural dimensions. It gives great importance to the needs of human beings as well as it expresses its concern about the lack of social justice and inequality. It considers that security actors are no longer limited to states, but also new actors are becoming increasingly important, such as NGOs, and international organizations, such as the United Nations or the OSCE.

The OSCE is the classic institution exemplifying the concept of comprehensive security, and so we have a degree of expertise to offer our Partners in this field. The OSCE, which initially was a process to reduce tensions between East and West, became finally an active actor in reducing tensions as well as being relevant in the different peace processes that took, and still take place, in Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. I think that much of this success is thanks to the approach which looks to security as a broader issue not limited to military terms and territorial integrity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Before addressing what I think should be the future of our partnership, I would like to briefly look at some former work by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. First and foremost, I have been very pleased with the active work of Representative Hastings as Special Representative who has clearly made efforts to enhance, in the meetings of the OSCE PA and beyond, the dialogue between the parliamentary delegations of the Mediterranean Partners.

But we should be clear that from the very beginning of the Helsinki process, close co-operation with the Mediterranean region was envisioned. The chapter on the Mediterranean contained in the Helsinki Final Act was a clear recognition of shared historical, cultural, economic ties with the then CSCE region (today's OSCE). This relationship has been reinforced since, enabling the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation – as they are now called – to participate regularly in OSCE events, including those in the Economic and Environmental Dimension.

The Parliamentary Assembly has reiterated this important dimension, and we have also several times discussed and subsequently passed resolutions related to our co-operation with the Mediterranean region. The Assembly is clearly on record, for example in our Rotterdam Declaration of 2003, of calling on the OSCE to enhance its role in the Mediterranean region by further promoting its Mediterranean dimension to achieve closer co-operation with the Mediterranean partners.

In this and at other times, we have encouraged the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation to use the framework and mechanisms of the OSCE, including those devoted to conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation, as a model for enhancing security, promoting co-operation and protecting human rights in the region.

Over the last years the OSCE has engaged in an increasingly intensified dialogue with its partners for co-operation from the Mediterranean region and Asia. I believe there is a growing awareness in the OSCE that only a free, democratic, prosperous and undivided Europe will be able to promote security, stability and prosperity in the adjacent area and also that European security will benefit from positive developments in other regions, including the Mediterranean.

As a representative of the OSCE PA, I would also like to comment that the Mediterranean dialogue in the OSCE has become an example of good co-operation between the OSCE and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. We have been pleased to have high-level input each year at our Mediterranean Forum by representatives of the governmental side of the organization, for example, during our last such meeting in Toronto.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Looking more clearly to the future, I believe that European security in the Mediterranean should be based on the implementation of policies of co-operation with the countries in the Southern Regions destined to contribute to the elimination of the social and economic causes of instability; to the reinforcement of democratisation; to

the restoration of an inter-cultural dialogue; and to the promotion of energy security. In effect, we should advance the comprehensive security approach that the OSCE itself has implemented.

However, I would like to underline that although democracy cannot be imposed or exported, democratic values can be imported. The OSCE principles and practices are a good example of what can be achieved in this region.

In this context I would like to welcome the appointment of Senator George Mitchell as the Special Envoy to the Middle East. This appointment is a clear indication that President Barack Obama, and his Administration, intend to engage both Israel and the Palestinian Authority in a lasting peace process with two independent states living side by side.

Increasing communication and co-operation among the different international organisations focusing on security in the Mediterranean is also essential to harmonise such a notion of security while increasing confidence between Western Countries and countries in the Southern Mediterranean.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly will continue to engage actively on these issues, particularly through our annual Mediterranean Parliamentary Forum. This an annual event is clearly placed on our agenda and in our Rules of Procedure.

I will continue to support side meetings on the Mediterranean, involving parliamentarians from the Partner States, organised on the margins of the Assembly's meetings. If I am to point to a single priority that I would like to see fulfilled, it is increased participation by parliamentarians from the Mediterranean in our meetings. Not only from our Partner States, but also from Libya, Lebanon, Syria and Palestine.

I will continue to support an intensification of our contacts and exchanges with our Parliamentarians from the Partner countries. Alcee Hastings has been most active in forwarding this agenda. In recent years, parliamentarians from Partner States have expanded their participation in some activities of the Assembly, most notably in the election observation that we conducted to the general elections in this country last year. I hope that such co-operation will continue.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is an excellent forum in which new ideas can be tried – we are not hampered by the consensus rule in the same way the governmental side in Vienna is. So, for example, we were able to include parliamentarians from Libya in one of our meetings, and I would encourage further such participation. This is one way that the Organization can explore whether further co-operation with other Mediterranean States is possible and worthwhile.

In conclusion, efforts aimed at enhancing our contact in the Mediterranean will receive my full support, both on the governmental and parliamentary sides. Both the OSCE and the Mediterranean region benefit from this co-operation.

I say this with full respect for the fact that the Mediterranean region possesses its own specific dynamics and security challenges. The OSCE model of co-operative security can be proposed to, but not imposed upon the Mediterranean region.

The work ahead is not easy, but we must always remember that parliamentarians directly elected by the people can provide an important input to the process. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, as a unique OSCE Institution promoting parliamentary involvement in the activities of the OSCE and facilitating inter-parliamentary dialogue – will do its utmost to enhance the Mediterranean dimension of the OSCE and the relations with our Partners for Co-operation in the South Mediterranean.

Thank you