Statement by

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to the United Nations

First Committee

Item 94

Strengthening of Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean Region

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(Please check against delivery)
Mr. Chairman

Since I am taking the floor for the first time in this Committee allow me on behalf of my Delegation to join others who have spoken before me by congratulating you on your assumption of the role of Chairman of the First Committee. My delegation seize this opportunity to commend you for the manner with which you have conducted to date the proceedings of this Committee.

Malta aligns itself with the Statement to be made by the distinguished Representative of France on behalf of the European Union. I would therefore like to make some additional remarks.

The First Committee is the perfect platform in the annual session of the General Assembly where all the Member States of the United Nations are given the opportunity to discuss not only matters related to global disarmament, but also urgent and pressing issues concerning international security, in particular, regional ones, including the Mediterranean region.

The Mediterranean region epitomizes many of the thorny and multifaceted problems related to socio-economic and political instability. Since our independence in 1964, Malta has striven hard to take a proactive role in the endeavour to promote security and co-operation in this region. Thirty-three years ago, in Helsinki, the Participating States in the CSCE (now OSCE), on the instigation of Malta, formally affirmed the inextricable link which exists between the Mediterranean and European security. Since then Malta has continuously worked to ensure that this affirmation found its place in every international fora including in the UN General Assembly. It is also important to recall that it was in this particular fora, the UN General Assembly, where Malta introduced and piloted for a number of years the draft resolution which this Committee will once again be recommending for adoption by the Plenary. As one of the co-sponsors of the draft resolution on ‘Strengthening of security and cooperation in the Mediterranean region’, Malta pledges its continued contribution towards this end.

Malta is a firm believer in the initiatives and processes of inclusion that various organizations and institutions have set in motion in order to bridge the divide within this strategically divided area. Throughout the years Malta has actively participated in support of the valuable contribution being made at the regional level in the diverse Mediterranean institutions and initiatives, including, UNEP’s Mediterranean Action Plan, the Med Forum, the 5+5 Process, the Inter Parliamentary Union, and the Parliamentary Assembly for the Mediterranean. Malta is therefore looking forward and to work closely with other EU-Med Partners in the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean to which Malta has submitted its bid to host the seat of its Secretariat.

The Euro-Med Partnership or Barcelona Process launched in 1995, “establishes a comprehensive partnership among participants through strengthened political dialogue, the development of economic and financial cooperation and greater emphasis on the social, cultural and human dimensions, these being the three fundamental aspects of the Euro-Med Partnership”. Malta believes that the Euro-Med Process is making an important contribution to and addressing the resolve to reducing the economic and social disparities which for many years have been and continue to be a source of the destabilizing factors of the Mediterranean region. As a member of the EU Malta continues to strongly support the enhancement of this Process which provides and offers new and innovative opportunities to reinforce the much needed co-operation and collaboration between and among all Mediterranean States.

Among the issues which have continued to have a critical impact in advancing the Barcelona Partnership include the difficulties still being faced by all concerned in the search for a durable solution to the Middle East situation and particularly to the core question of Palestine. At the same time, it is of satisfaction to note that in these last few months important progress has been achieved in this regard. As underpinned by the Prime Minister of Malta in this year’s statement to the UN General Assembly:
"important developments have taken place on the permanent settlement negotiation of the Palestinian Question. The Annapolis Conference held in November 2007 renewed an otherwise bleak future in the resolution of this question. Moreover, the Paris Donors' Conference for the Palestinian State, the formal start of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and the series of meetings between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas, have given a most welcome meaning to the efforts being undertaken to resolve all outstanding issues, including all core issues without exception".

Malta feels that every possible avenue must be pursued to ascertain that the efforts being engaged by all the Parties concerned, with the full support of the international community, are translated into tangible and long-term results. Malta is convinced that only through constructive dialogue can an agreement between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority be reached, thus, ensuring a just and lasting peace for all the peoples in the region.

Earlier this year the Government of Malta hosted the first-ever EU-League of Arab States Foreign Affairs Ministerial Meeting with the participation of the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, the Commissioner of External Relations and the Secretary-General of the Arab League. In their Joint Communiqué the participants stressed the need for a dialogue between EU 27 Member States and the 22 League of Arab States. They also expressed their strong belief that the EU-League of Arab States Meeting in Malta provided a useful and constructive opportunity for open dialogue on enhanced cooperation on regional and global issues of common concern. The EU-Arab League Meeting has built on and sought to strengthen the inter-regional, regional and bilateral relations. In this regard, we look forward to the International Ministerial Conference 'Europe and the Arab World – Connecting Partners in Dialogue', which will be held in Vienna next month. We also view Egypt's proposal to hold, in Cairo, a Foreign Minister's Meeting on EU-LAS dialogue, as an important follow-up to the Malta meeting. These meetings enhance the dialogue between two very important protagonists in the region and serve as building blocks for a reinvigorated partnership.

In discussing about the political, economic and social realities of the Mediterranean riparian States, my delegation cannot but bring to the attention of this Committee an emerging and alarming phenomenon which is directly affecting Malta today. I am referring to the serious question of the influx of irregular migrants which is impacting negatively on the limited resources of a small country like Malta. This year so far, Malta has already received 2522 boat people aboard 80 boats. This situation emanating in the Mediterranean and its serious effect on Malta demands concerted action by all with a view to securing an appreciation of the seriousness and urgency of the issue. Malta remains wholly committed to honour its international obligations in addressing this pressing humanitarian problem. At the same time, Malta welcomes the adoption of the EU Pact on Immigration and Asylum which will contribute to a holistic approach to tackle illegal and legal immigration. Moreover, Malta is looking forward to work closely with countries of origin and transit and within the context of the EU Pact to resolve the short-term and long-term problems faced by certain countries, including Malta.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me conclude by underscoring that Malta will remain deeply committed to maintaining its vocation and role as a proactive force of peace, stability and prosperity in all relevant fora, and will seek earnestly to ensure that Mediterranean issues are always given the importance they deserve on the agenda of international organizations. Indeed, Malta's accession to the European Union has definitely complimented our deep and sustained engagement with Mediterranean issues and appreciation of the region's intricate politics and sensibilities.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.