

GREEK CHAIRMANSHIP COMMUNIQUÉ

3rd Rhodes Ministerial Conference for Security and Stability “The Spirit of Rhodes: Shaping a Positive Agenda for Stability and Prosperity”- Rhodes, Greece, 21-22 JUNE 2018

COMMUNIQUÉ

The 3rd Rhodes Informal Ministerial Conference for Security and Stability took place on the 21 and 22 of June 2018, under the theme “The Spirit of Rhodes: Shaping a Positive Agenda for Stability and Prosperity”. The participating Ministers of Foreign Affairs and High Officials from the United Nations, Albania, Algeria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates as well as from the Gulf Cooperation Council and the League of Arab States, had the opportunity to reiterate their determination to promote, amid diverse security challenges for the Eastern Mediterranean, a positive agenda of dialogue and cooperation for the benefit of their strategically, economically and culturally important neighbourhood, making it a safer place for its people to prosper. The 3rd Rhodes Conference was also attended by High Officials from Colombia, Indonesia and Vietnam in the capacity of observers.

The participants addressed a broad spectrum of important issues in the Eastern Mediterranean, which due to their transnational nature, call for the joint action of regional actors. Namely, the discussions focused on three main thematic areas:

1. First Session “Common Challenges in our region”

In view of the challenges multilateralism is currently facing, demonstrated by the alarmingly increasing difficulties of International Organizations to carry out their mission in an affective manner, participants reaffirmed their unwavering support to the existing international normative framework and International Law in particular.

Participants stressed the importance of conflict prevention as a life preserving and economically beneficial mean to promote stability. Furthermore, they highlighted regional ownership and active regional participation in their resolution. In this respect, participants agreed to consider eventual joint visits to regions affected by conflicts, offering their good service, advice and mediation.

Participants acknowledged that the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains central to the challenges that the region faces. In this respect, participants expressed their concern with regard to the recent escalation of violence as well as the continued crisis in the Gaza Strip and urged for the resumption of peace talks. Furthermore, they reaffirmed their support to a two states solution.

Participants noted that the defeat of Daesh in Syria and Iraq is affecting the security of several states, as Daesh fighters who escape arrest relocate to their home countries or new terrorist hotspots. The countries of Eastern Mediterranean face the greatest challenge due to their proximity. Positive developments in Iraq and the need for international assistance for reconstruction and capacity building in the country was particularly stressed.

At the same time, participants noted that the Syrian conflict has entered a new phase, which affects the prospect of peace and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean region. While the prospect of a peaceful Syria appears more promising after the defeat that Daesh has suffered, serious challenges emerge: with half of the Syrian population displaced by the conflict, setting the appropriate conditions for their safe return is a major concern and challenge. More importantly, participants agreed that the near-total destruction of infrastructure in these areas poses an enormous reconstruction challenge requiring significant funds, evoking the prospect of renewed militancy in the event of failure to tackle it.

As to the refugee and migration crisis, participants noted that no sustainable and viable solution is achievable without addressing the root causes; primarily putting an end to conflicts and restoring viable economic conditions to the countries of origin. Participants expressed their solidarity to Jordan and Lebanon that carry disproportionate burden in tackling the refugee crisis and urged the international community, in particular the EU, to engage more actively in assisting local authorities to address social and economic consequences.

The issue of returning foreign fighters is a major concern for the states of the Eastern Mediterranean region. In this respect, participants agreed that the terrorist threat is transnational in nature, interlinked with human trafficking and cross-border organized crime and therefore, requires a region-wide approach to tackle it. They stressed the need to take actions to strengthen border security and management, particularly in sensitive border areas, inter alia in south Libya.

Participants also expressed the need for a political solution to the Yemen crisis.

2. Second Session “Shaping a New Security Structure”

Following the discussion they had at the previous 2nd Rhodes Conference 2017 on the issue of “Enhancing security and stability”, participants reiterated their determination to act jointly on a positive agenda in order to promote dialogue and cooperation for the benefit of their common Eastern Mediterranean neighborhood. They also acknowledged the urgency for concerted actions to mitigate common security challenges, build trust and confidence among states and provide cooperative solutions to the needs of their citizens.

Participants agreed to strengthen security in all its dimensions and to promote joint actions in the fields of prevention, mediation and crisis management. They also agreed to enhance contacts and cooperation not only at the state level but also among societies and communities, as well as with international and regional organizations active in the field of security in the Eastern Mediterranean. In this respect, participants discussed concrete steps to be taken jointly in order to promote a more systematic and structured cooperation guided by the “Spirit of Rhodes”.

Proposals for cooperation were made within the following Fields of Partnership: a) Economic, Scientific, Technological and Environmental Cooperation, b) Human Aspects of Security and Humanitarian Cooperation and c) Security and Confidence. They included indicatively: the fight against terrorism, issues related to foreign fighters, border security, mass migration challenges including those pertaining to economic development, maritime security, humanitarian needs in

conflict affected areas, energy security, environmental protection, water management and water scarcity, protection of cultural property.

Participants agreed on the next steps towards establishing an “East Mediterranean Security Conference” (EMSC) as a permanent Forum for dialogue and cooperation. The EMSC will serve as a flexible, lean and “soft” security instrument that will maintain its evolutionary, transparent and open character to enhance regional ownership, solidarity and connectivity between its participants, based on the respect of International Law, International Humanitarian Law and the principles enshrined in the UN Charter, in particular equality, inclusiveness and good neighborly relations. It will also seek to establish cooperative forms of interaction between state institutions and security agencies, as well as among representatives of public and private sectors, civil society, youth and academics, complementing efforts of other international and regional organizations. Participants agreed with the proposal to hold annual ministerial meetings of the EMSC and stressed also the need to work jointly at all possible levels at the interval time between Ministerial Conferences.

In order to achieve the above objective, participants agreed to work on a joint statement to be signed no later than the end of 2018 in which they will set the principles and guiding lines of their cooperation within the EMSC. To facilitate this work, participants considered appointing a Senior Coordinator with the mandate to conduct consultations with all participating states and to present his recommendations by the end of 2018. His work should provide for a joint declaration on establishing the EMSC to be adopted at the next Ministerial meeting in 2019.

3. Third Session “Digital Economy”

The Rhodes Conference provided an opportunity to participants to share their thoughts, perspectives and concerns about challenges of the fourth industrial revolution, serving as a catalyst for the planning and development of regional, bilateral and multilateral collaborations in the sectors of new technologies and innovation. The prospect of enhancing and expanding ongoing projects through synergies, networks and partnerships of collaborative eco-systems such as the “Cyprus-Egypt-Greece Collaborative Innovation Network-(CEG COIN)” was also mentioned.

Participants acknowledged the existence of a broad field of cooperation in the framework of the new digital landscape in areas such as:

- The development of mobility and a more systematic cooperation through the exchange of pupils, students, teachers and researchers
- The creation of tools for the advancement and certification of the workers’ digital skills
- The establishment of consortia in academia but also in the public and private sectors
- The support of start-ups and the development of partnerships in the ICT sector
- The designing and certification of training programs through synergies with the industry, universities and sectors of the government
- The reduction of wholesale prices for roaming services among mobile phone operators
- The development of hubs (research teams from cooperating countries) and the sharing of know-how for the exploitation of artificial intelligence in the sectors of biomedicine,

industry, natural resources management, banking, big data management between partners and cyber security

- The transfer from businesses and research institutes of know-how and good practices in the sectors of ICT
- The promotion of digital innovation and space technologies by creating the “Rhodes Space Forum”.

Finally, regarding initiatives and commitments undertaken by participants at the 2nd Rhodes Ministerial Conference (22-23/5/2017), the latter expressed their appreciation for the convening on June 20 in Rhodes, of an Interactive Seminar for young diplomats organized by the Diplomatic Academy of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, entitled “Energy Security for Peace and Stability”. The seminar explored the concept of energy security from the viewpoint of producer, transit and consumer countries, highlighting, in accordance with the “Spirit of Rhodes”, the mutually reinforcing nature of Energy Security, Peace and Stability which are core elements of the Positive Agenda for Stability and Prosperity.

Participants also expressed their appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Cyprus for hosting in Nicosia on 13-14.12.2017, a Youth Forum under the theme “Youth for Peace: building bridges to counter radicalization and extremism”. The Forum was organized by the Youth Board of Cyprus under the auspices of the Ministries of Education and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus, taking up an issue which featured prominently on the agenda of the 2nd Rhodes Ministerial Conference. Cyprus proposed to host a Youth Forum for a second, consecutive year under the theme “Cyber Security and New Forms of Technology”. This proposal was warmly greeted by participants who expressed their readiness to lend support.