



PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN
ASSEMBLEE PARLEMENTAIRE DE LA MEDITERRANEE
الجمعية البرلمانية للبحر الأبيض المتوسط

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Opening Remarks by Hon. Pedro Roque

PAM President

On the occasion of

The international Conference

**“Promoting better regional cooperation towards smart
and humane migration across the Mediterranean”**

Valletta, 16 November 2017

Mr. Speaker, Hon. Angelo Farrugia,
Excellencies,
Dear colleagues,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure and an honour for me to have the opportunity to open this international conference that aims at addressing one of the most urgent and pressing issues for the Mediterranean region: the mass migrations from Africa to Europe.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean is fully aware of the relevance that migrations have assumed for the entire planet. We are talking of an unprecedented phenomenon that, because of its scope, presents many different aspects, compared the last century, which result in a wide range of challenges for all of us. Those who chose to move, or are forced to do so, are different from each other. They have different needs, and their decisions to leave their countries are due to a multitude of factors. There is, of course, a clear difference between refugees and economic migrants. While most refugees one day shall eventually return to their home countries, the ongoing exodus from Africa is a one-way ticket forced by poverty and starvation.

The consequences of mass movement are numerous. Migration generates security, health, economic and social concerns for the receiving countries. The phenomenon is so complex that require the efforts of the entire international community to be addressed. Parliamentarians are no exception. As PAM, we are well aware of these issues, and we want to do our part to contribute to address migration-related matters in the best possible way.

Keeping this in mind, PAM has agreed to co-organize this conference, together with the Parliament of Malta and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, due to the importance of the topic, and I wish to thank both of them for their efforts in holding together this event. We are strongly convinced that cooperation is crucial, especially at the inter-parliamentary level, on such a complex issue.

The situation in our region is worrisome. The lack of progress in the negotiations between Israel and Palestine, or the latest military developments in Syria or Libya are just a few examples of this scenario. One can feel a sense of frustration regarding the incapacity of the international community to act in a coherent way. There is also a growing sense of insecurity in our countries, fed by the many terrorist attacks that continue to affect our cities and citizens.

At present, Migration is the main challenge to be faced in the Mediterranean. In the very recent years, the rate of people's movements across its basin has increased exponentially, pushed by conflicts and political instability in the MENA region, as well as by poverty, unemployment, poor governance, and the lack of capacity in mitigating the consequences of climate change in sub-Saharan Africa. This latter is also affected by the continued terrorist activities carried out by criminal groups such as Boko Haram.

Let me recall that the population of Africa is expected to double by 2050 to reach 2.3 billion, and double again by the end of our century to exceed 4 billion people.

I have already mentioned the multi-faceted aspects of migration, and I would like to give you a couple of examples: first, the case of Jordan. The country is shouldering the cost of most of the humanitarian assistance provided to Syrian refugees, who exceed 1.5 million and have reached 20% of the national population. Furthermore, only one third of the international assistance pledged to Jordan has been received.

Another example is Italy. Italy is sustaining alone the burden of the flow from the central corridor. As a consequence of a growing domestic pressure, the Italian Government, pragmatically, started direct negotiations with the Libyan authorities (both in Tripoli and Tobruk),

the tribes of the Libyan southern communities on the routes across Sahara, and the Command of the Coast Guard. As a matter of fact, since this measure has been implemented, the number of migrants reaching the shores of Italy has decreased. However, this was a unilateral decision, taken due to the lack of consensus at the EU level for a coherent strategy, which would be preferable. In addition, it is not a kind of measure that solves the issue of the migrants *tout court* because there are many other aspects, such as the condition of migrants in Libya and the respect of their human rights, which also needs to be addressed and solved as a matter of urgency.

I could continue with this list, mentioning other countries like Lebanon, Greece, and Turkey, which are struggling to cope either with the influx of asylum seekers or economic migrants, while maintaining their primary obligation to their own populations to provide services, jobs and security.

We should keep in mind that migration has always existed, and that not long ago the countries that are now receiving migrants were actually countries of origin. Therefore, migration needs to be managed and regulated, but it cannot be, and it will never be, stopped, because of a very simple reason: people will keep moving.

I am confident that this meeting will help us all to have a better understanding of the current situation and also to provide us with a fruitful exchange of opinions and ideas on how to tackle, from a legislative perspective, key issues related to migration. I repeat: migration will not stop, therefore we have to minimize its impact and work on the opportunities that it offers. The agenda of this conference clearly aims at this, and I sincerely hope that this meeting will also contribute to further cooperation between PAM and IPU on a wide range of topics of common interest.

Before concluding, let me reiterate the readiness and commitment of PAM to contribute to the international debate and efforts to promote a shared and comprehensive response to the migration phenomenon, now and in the years to come. I would like to recall that the conclusions of this conference will be used for the works of the United Nations Global Compact on Migration in Mexico in the coming weeks, as recently agreed between PAM and the President of the UN General Assembly.

Thank you for your attention, I wish you all a successful meeting.