



Permanent Mission of Italy
OSCE

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STATEMENT

MEDITERRANEAN PARTNERS FOR CO-OPERATION GROUP

Vienna, 15 March 2021

Italy aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the EU Member states. Allow me now to add some remarks in my national capacity.

At the outset, I wish to express my congratulations to you on your new role as Chair of this very important Group.

I would also like to thank the Director Flavia Palanza for her thoughtful and informative keynote speech. I am convinced that the **European Investment Bank** can provide a significant contribution to the post-covid recovery of the Mediterranean region. I am indeed confident that the Bank will redouble its efforts to this goal, and the words heard today encourage me in this respect.

I welcome the active engagement of our **Partners and fellow Ambassadors** in this discussion. Their voices are the main reason we are here today, as we risk to overlook the Mediterranean dimension of the pandemic. In this regard, I thank **Poland and Sweden** for keeping this topic high in the Agenda of our Organization.

Italy hopes that our common endeavor could be translated in **some concrete action** to assist the efforts of our partners.

Unfortunately, the reality we are living in is still dramatic: while the number of casualties is rather restricted among **Southern Mediterranean states** - if compared to Euro-Atlantic and Euro-Asian regions - Covid-19 will certainly affect

considerably socio-economic indicators, further exacerbating - in some cases - fragile social environments.

We are particularly concerned about the negative consequences of the pandemic on specific areas, such as: the regional trade, bearing in mind the already low level of economic integration among Southern Mediterranean countries; **tourism**, a crucial sector for the economies of our partners; and **foreign direct investment**, the engine of many economic systems in the region.

We are also alarmed by the situation of **vulnerable groups**, including women, youth and older, and by the increasing trend of socio-economic **inequalities** and their adverse effects on security and stability. The interlink between **climate change** and the present and future pandemic is a matter of great concern as well.

Against this backdrop, we cannot remain passive and the **OSCE should do its part** to help the recovery in the Mediterranean, in synergy with other Organizations. In particular, this Organization could be an excellent platform for exchanging experiences, practices and knowledge, which may be crucial for the recovery. **Digitalization and smart working** are, for example, domains where the OSCE learnt a valuable lesson to be shared with our Partners, for the benefit of public and private sectors.

Of course, we all need to invest on it, in the interest of Partners and all participating States. As a good example of collaboration, let me mention a project that Italy is sponsoring in a different context. I am referring to the “**Union for the Mediterranean Grant Scheme for employment promotion**”.

This tool is meant to help non-profit organizations in the Mediterranean develop instruments “to enable people to find jobs, continue to gain a living and improve their work and living conditions”. Moreover, this Scheme supports projects that encourage entrepreneurship and improve the business climate for Micro, Small and Medium-sized enterprises, as crucial providers of employment in the Mediterranean region. In other words, this initiative intends to improve the economic resilience of citizens, especially vulnerable demographic groups, by developing employment-related capacity and new paths of training and skills attainment. I believe that a reflection on projects particularly aimed at Micro, Small and Medium-sized enterprises can be relevant for our discussion today.

Thank you.