

*REMARKS OF PRESIDENT OF THE ITALIAN CHAMBER OF
DEPUTIES LAURA BOLDRINI,
TO THE JOINT SEMINAR OF MEDITERRANEAN
AND
MIDDLE EAST SPECIAL GROUP AND SUB-COMMITTEE
ON TRANSATLANTIC ECONOMIC RELATIONS*

Florence, 27 november 2015

* * * * *

Ministro Gentiloni, Presidente Manciuoli, Generale Graziano, Signor Sindaco, onorevoli parlamentari, Signore e Signori, sono lieta di essere qui. Please allow me to continue in English.

Almost exactly a year ago, I addressed many of you at the Seminar Italy hosted in Catania. We had chosen Sicily because of the key role the island has played in hosting the hundreds of thousands of migrants and asylum seekers who have crossed the Mediterranean over the last decade. A year later, many things have changed. A year later, what seemed to be unprecedented numbers of boat people arriving in Italy appear quite small compared to the flow of men, women and children landing on the shores of Greece – almost 720,000 so far this year. While we speak, dozens, if not hundreds, of wet people are clambering out of rubber dinghies on the shores of Lesbos. Many have died – over 3.500 have lost their lives in the Mediterranean so far this year, including almost 600 in the short stretch of sea which separates Greece from Turkey.

And, as we speak, many thousands of refugees are stranded in the rain and cold at border crossings in the Balkans as states along the route to central Europe allow certain nationalities access to their territories and block others, despite the fact that asylum is an individual right. A year ago, it would have been unthinkable that hundreds of thousands of refugees would walk all the way to central Europe.

Two weeks ago, news of the horrific attacks in Paris shocked the world. The carnage is the deadliest Europe has seen in more than a decade and the worst on French soil since the Second World War. And, in the days before and after Paris, hundreds of civilians have lost their lives in Beirut, Bamako and Baghdad at the hands of terrorists claiming to act in the name of God. Across Syria, innocent people continue to die and are trapped between Assad's barrel bombs and the massacres carried out by DAESH.

We cannot fail to react to the killings, but we must bear in mind that we should seek political solutions first and foremost, beginning with the conflict in Syria and with

efforts to prevent and address the radicalisation of youth, both in Europe and in the Arab world.

The fight against DAESH cannot be based on a purely military response, or on a military response which lacks a political strategy. Over the last fifteen years, we have – or should have – learned that military action in the absence of a long-term strategy can create more problems than those it set out to solve. We should therefore upscale efforts to crack down on the flows of money and weapons to Islamist groups in Iraq and Syria, to ensure that oil extracted in areas controlled by the so-called Islamic State does not end up in our petrol stations, to help the Iraqi and Kurdish forces fighting DAESH, and to support the Vienna talks and their inclusive approach, which involves all regional actors, to trying to broker peace in Syria. At home, we should combat marginalisation, which can lead those who feel excluded to embrace the ideology of violent militant Islamism.

War, violence and persecution are the drivers of the greatest refugee crisis since World War II. Terrorism kills and instills fear in our citizens. Climate change, if unhalted, will cause massive natural disasters and displace millions. Our security is under threat from all these phenomena.

Our security, ladies and gentlemen, will not be assured if we suspend human rights in order to defend them. Emergency measures may be necessary in times of extreme crisis, but we cannot limit our citizens' liberties indefinitely. We have already seen this.

And our security will not be assured if we build barbed-wire fences to protect our borders – against the people we should be protecting based on our treaties and to fulfill our international obligations. The refugees landing on our shores and crossing our countries are not a security threat – they are fleeing the very same terrorists who have struck in the heart of Europe. To those who point to the two terrorists who may have entered the UE posing as refugees, I say, “Can we look at 870,000 people with suspicion and hostility because two of them – 0.0002% - may be criminals?” And I do not need to remind you that most of the Islamist terrorists who have carried out attacks on European soil since 2004, including those responsible for the massacres in Paris this year, had European passports.

Our security will not be assured if we fail to grasp the historic opportunity offered by the COP 21, which will start in Paris in a few days' time. The COP 21 is not just an international conference on the environment, but a veritable peace summit. Without an ambitious, binding agreement to limit emissions drastically and without financing for mitigation and adaptation, there will be many more conflicts and many more people on the move globally.

As Europeans, as NATO members, we have a duty to act and to do so with our partners from the southern shores of the Mediterranean. We have to do so in a united manner, which reflects the values our alliance is based on. If we fail to do so, we will also fail the next generation, who will inherit a dangerous world. A world in turmoil.

I am certain that we will be up to the task. But we must act now. There is no time to lose.

Thank you for the attention.