

Bridging two worlds

INTERVIEW WITH TONIO BORG

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, MALTA



TONIO BORG graduated “cum laude” in law at the University of Malta in 1979. He practised law at the Courts of Justice between 1980-1995 specialising in human rights cases. He was elected to Parliament in 1992. He served again as Home Affairs Minister and in 2004 he was appointed Deputy Prime Minister and Leader of the House of Representatives. In March 2008 he was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs.

What are your diplomatic and foreign affairs priorities for the coming three years?

Now more than ever, cooperation and dialogue are crucial for the maintenance of good relations in the region. It is very important that the Mediterranean countries themselves identify and agree on the best steps forward. And the recent 5+5 Malta Summit presented an excellent opportunity to do just that. The robust participation at the Summit is a sound confirmation that the Mediterranean is a top priority for us all. Malta is pleased to have had such a distinguished high level turnout as all ten countries were represented at the level of Head of State or Government. It was an honour for Malta to chair such an auspicious event and to welcome the Presidents of France, Tunisia and Mauritania; the Prime Ministers of Italy, Spain, Portugal, Algeria and Morocco; and the President of the Libyan Congress. The European Commission, represented by its President Barroso and the Commissioner Füle; the Arab Maghreb Union; the League of Arab States; the Union for the Mediterranean and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean were invited as active observers.

What is the importance of the 5+5 Dialogue to regional and world affairs?

The Second 5+5 Summit that was hosted by Malta on 5-6 October is a landmark in Mediterranean regional politics. It was the very first Heads of State or Government meeting that was in the wake of the wave of transformation that has swept through the Arab World. We are living through a very sensitive

and momentous period in history. While the newly established democracies in the southern Mediterranean are in the process of building their national institutions and finding their place in the international scene, many countries are struggling to contain the effects of the global economic crisis. The Mediterranean area was a very different place when the first 5+5 Summit took place in Tunis in 2003.

The Malta Declaration also deals with the themes of political dialogue; regional security and stability; economic and social issues; education and youth; migration and development and global issues. It lays emphasis on the desired tangible deliverables that may provide assistance and value added to the ongoing transformations taking place across the Mediterranean. It has particularly underscored the pertinence of economic cooperation and technology transfers in order to facilitate the creation of job opportunities, fertilise private enterprise especially SMEs and promote investments and also youth enhancement and empowerment as a fundamental element for the development and prosperity of the Mediterranean region. The Heads of State and Government also discussed the current regional developments occurring in the Middle East, in Syria and in the Sahel with a focus on Mali.

The 5+5 Dialogue continues to be a primary contributor to regional cohesion and cooperation and as a complementary forum to wider organisations. The Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean has an important role to play in this regard. This 5+5 Dialogue’s regional standing has the potential, as

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identified during the Malta Summit, to bring to fruition concrete projects in areas such as political dialogue and cooperation, regional trade, the development of key energy and transport infrastructures and other social and economic initiatives which contribute to the realisation of the vision for a Mediterranean region of peace and prosperity for its citizens.

How different are your approaches to diplomacy with regard to Europe and North Africa?

The various Mediterranean initiatives undertaken and implemented since the end of the Cold War sought to underscore that the Mediterranean Sea is not a dividing sea between northern countries and southern countries. On the contrary, the Mediterranean Sea is rather perceived as a bridging sea between the two riparian flanks that ought to seek establishing and promoting confidence building measures of peace, security, stability and prosperity in the region.

The Mediterranean States have come to a strategic decision: either remaining a region of instability and division or become a region where creative forces of its people are matched by the cooperative approach of its States. The concrete projects being implemented by the Union for the Mediterranean as a reformed successor of the Barcelona Process, the European Neighbourhood Policy and other sub-regional fora like the 5+5 dialogue, have led the region to pursue a comprehensive and proactive foreign policy in the Euro-Mediterranean.

The political transformation being experienced in the Mediterranean and ensuing from the Arab Spring render the commonality of regional approaches to these objectives all the more indispensable. The new geopolitical dynamism emerging from the Mediterranean require more cooperative relations between North and South and a growing call for political reform in the Arab world needs to be supported by the international community that continues to hold the centrality of the people as the


main beneficiary of the process of reform. A number of additional common approaches to strategic questions need to be undertaken if the challenge of superseding sources of instability in the Mediterranean is to be achieved in the years ahead. The rationale behind Malta's insistence in 2008 of establishing an EU-LAS structured dialogue has convinced it of its relevance and necessity in enhancing inter-regional dialogue and I now look forward to the holding of the second EU-LAS ministerial meeting in Cairo next month in what is being referred to as Malta II meeting.

What is Malta's position on the crisis in Syria?

Malta remains highly concerned about Syria's precarious situation as the country descends into civil war. We recently had the privilege to host the 5+5 Summit in which the ten Heads of State or Government of Western Mediterranean States discussed extensively the Syria crisis.

We welcome the latest decisions taken at the UN Human Rights Council vis-à-vis the widespread and systematic violation of human rights occurring in Syria. The Resolution on Syria adopted on 28 September, is crucial in holding the perpetrators accountable for the tragic executions and vicious abuses against the people of Syria.

We are equally concerned by the spill-over effects of the Syrian crisis on neighbouring countries. This is giving rise to a tragic humanitarian crisis as hundreds of thousands of refugees flee the violence into Syria's neighbours – Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq. More than half of these displaced people are women and children. This large influx of refugees is exerting high financial pressure on the receiving states.

Malta remains committed to collaborate with the international community at the highest levels, especially at the UNSC, which is crucial in bringing this to a peaceful end and in pushing for Syrian political transition that is ultimately unavoidable. 

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