

NPT 2<sup>nd</sup> Prepcom

P5 Conference

Side event organized by the PIR Center

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Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues, let me thank the Russian Permanent Mission and the PIR Center for organizing this meeting on the eve of the 2<sup>nd</sup> NPT Prepcom. I would like to share with you some comments about the project, or the objective, or the idea, or the challenge, whatever you call it, of a WMD Free Zone in the Middle East. Within the NPT framework, we know that progress on this front is expected by the ninth NPT review conference in 2015.

As it comes from the study of recent History, let me first insist on the fact that a zone free of WMD in the Middle East can only be the result of a long term process. This idea often appears to be the way to provide an advance justification to a short term failure but it simply cannot be different:

1. Unlike existing nuclear free zones, a Middle East zone would also involve chemical, biological weapons along with means of delivery. That is the scope.
2. A Zone would have to be negotiated whereas WMD are in place or whereas acquisition programs are suspected of being developed.
3. There is no verification protocol for the BWC.
4. Several countries within a “would be” Zone suffer from historic enmities involving *de facto* security dilemmas.
5. The Iranian nuclear crisis has become a new factor to take into account in the prospect of a Zone in the region since the beginning of this century and civil war rages in Syria. Unfortunately, the case of Syria must be highlighted. We all know that recent developments have raised concerns that the regime still in place might use chemical weapons. Security of the chemical weapons stockpile is another concern. The Syrian issue has been debated for two weeks at the 3<sup>rd</sup> CWC revcon in The Hague. The current situation in Syria shows us that chemical weapons are neither a fantasy, nor a taboo, nor even a matter of States positions. Chemical weapons and programs must be erased from the region and this is a matter of

urgency, whatever the nuclear issue. Let me say that this can be argued at least in terms of human security.

This brings me to the short term. A new process, revitalized by the last NPT revcon, is ongoing. We have all seen many signs of it for nearly two years now. A facilitator to a dedicated conference was chosen: Ambassador Laajava, as was a host country: Finland, and extensive consultations took place in 2012. The EU in 2010 had made a commitment to facilitate the work of the facilitator by organizing a seminar gathering the actors involved in the project. That was done twice, *via* the EU Non-Proliferation Consortium, in Brussels in July 2011 and in November 2012. And I must say, being in charge of the organization of these two events, that the second one was decided precisely because the first one had been perceived as a huge success, with more than 200 participants from all the countries of the region plus many others. By and large, it can be argued that we stand at the beginning of a new process.

It is worth noting at this stage that the EU involvement in the WMD Free Zone in the Middle East project comes within two different and complementary frameworks. The first one is regional: the Mediterranean and the Middle East zone of cooperation and dialogue, the second one is thematic: the NPT framework. These two frameworks must be maintained and encouraged in order to keep the project balanced: fundamentally a WMD Free Zone in the Middle East is a regional security project, not a nuclear free zone agreed upon amongst non-nuclear weapon states.

As it is mentioned in the 2010 action plan, the objective is very ambitious and most welcome since the process was switched off in the middle of the 1990's. At the same time it must be recognized that the 2010 commitment suffers from two fundamental weaknesses:

1. First, it was formulated in the absence of one major stakeholder in the region.
2. Second, it appears that regional crises directly linked to its purpose, which is the final prohibition of WMDs in the region, worsened in 2011 and 2012: I am talking about the Iranian and the Syrian situations.

In these conditions, if you add the current political instability in many countries in the region, it is unfortunate that the Helsinki conference could not be held in 2012 but I really cannot see, if the

conference had eventually been held, how it could have been a success. A little box would have been checked for 2015, that is all.

Having said that, the frustration of Arab countries since last November is perfectly understandable and legitimate because a mutual commitment was taken in 2010 to have a conference in order to make progress towards the final goal, which is still a very noble cause. But can it be honestly said: I know who is responsible for that failure?

The P5? The P5 is not even in charge, the 3 conveners are.

Israel? Everybody knew Israel would not push for a conference.

Iran? Amazingly, Iran announced its participation to the conference when everyone knew that the event would be postponed.

Ambassador Laajava and his team? They worked nights and days during one year.

The very truth of the matter is that the postponement of the Helsinki conference is a shared responsibility. And it eventually came to my mind that this is simply because nobody firmly wanted the conference to be held in 2012, nobody but the European Union and the UE member States, which was not enough.

Then, maybe should we come back to basics.

1. First, 2012 has not to be fixed in stone. Allow me here to make a comparison. At his Prague speech, 4 years ago, President Obama called for securing all vulnerable nuclear materials around the world within 4 years. If we had to assess his pledge now, of course it would be dishonest to say that the goal has been reached so far. But 4 years was a formula indicating that nuclear security had become a matter of urgency. In the same way, hosting a conference on a WMD Free Zone with all stakeholders has become a matter of urgency but the quality of the process is much more important than the conference itself as a pledge.
2. Second, whenever the conference takes place, diplomatic progress in the resolution of the nuclear Iranian crisis is still one of the two keys in order to keep the NPT as the cornerstone of the nuclear non-proliferation regime, the DPRK crisis being the second one.
3. Third, the Syrian civil war must come to an end. Paradoxically, these two crises demonstrate to what extent a WMD Free Zone in the Middle East is a compelling need whereas absence of

progress in their resolution has made the revival of the process about a zone impossible so far.

4. Fourth, everything appears as if the purpose of a conference has become a poor bargaining chip in regional relations between Israel and Arab States: “give up your nuclear weapons, we will join the CWC” to make it simple. But it cannot work that way. It has never worked that way. And this brings us to the agenda of the Helsinki conference. This is the key. Many ideas have been formulated since 2010 in order to give substance to the discussions. Please have a look to the dedicated website that the EU Non-Proliferation Consortium has put online last October for instance. We must have something like thirty background papers especially prepared for our July 2011 seminar and our November 2012 seminar. Many practical and reasonable ideas have been proposed in order to move forward. Confidence building measures, technical measures, cooperation on the ground between scientists, implementation of Resolution 1540 and assistance in law enforcement, export control improvements, nuclear safety and security, multilayered approaches, thematic working groups, etc. The substance of the conference is an issue *per se*, naturally. It needs to be negotiated amongst all the parties.

Let me conclude on this point: a conference on a WMD Free Zone in the Middle East is definitely a challenge for the next NPT review conference. It has to be held as soon as possible, but it is a challenge among others within that framework. The real challenge is the regional security realm beyond the NPT cycle of review conferences. The Helsinki conference will be one piece of a bigger picture then. It is obviously important to stay focused on this goal as an interim step and as a confidence building measure *per se*. But maybe shouldn't we dramatize too much the fact that a conference has not taken place yet.