

OPENING ADDRESS

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It is with the greatest pleasure that I welcome you on behalf of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in particular of the Director General for Political Affairs to this Seminar. The participation to this event of so many high level personalities of several countries and of different sectors - from Parliaments, Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs, Embassies, scientific institutions and Institutes of Strategic Studies - is a confirmation of the importance and sensitivity of the subject which this Seminar intends to discuss and also of the good timing in which this event takes place.

During the past two years, after the Rumsfeld Report has underlined in a new and more precise manner the emergence of a missile threat by the then so called rogue States, and especially during much of the past year, the international discussion on missile defenses and in particular the NMD programme has been intense among governments and in the public as well.

After the failure of the third American test in July and especially after the decision by the Washington Administration to put off a deployment decision, substantially leaving it to the new Administration, the discussion at least in public was more subdued. With a new Administration in place in the US the debate will certainly gather new momentum.

As you know, we have joined many other governments in welcoming the Clinton statement at the beginning of September to delay a decision on NMD deployment. In fact the aspects and questions involved in missile defences are manifold and are of political, strategic, technological and also economic nature. They include careful consideration of the impact on several spheres of a transition to new forms of protection against missile proliferation and capacities. The international discussion on all this and especially among the main actors involved - that is the United States and Russia since NMD deployment would require a modification of the ABM Treaty - has been intense but not conclusive.

Even though the decision in September to delay was probably largely influenced by uncertainties on the technical feasibility and especially reliability of the system envisaged, we have considered that decision as a wise step that would allow further and deeper discussion between the US and Russia as well as among the Allies.

The programme of the Seminar will allow a free discussion on the main aspects involved: the threat and its forms, the technology of missile defenses and in particular the NMD programme, the effects on strategic stability, on arms control and non

proliferation, possible alternatives other than NMD. Each of them is of course extremely relevant.

It could be useful if I summarize at the outset in a very sketchy way the general approach we have taken on this complicated subject:

- we understand that the world has changed since the end of the cold war and that international stability today must take into account the emergence of new actors which may have a capacity in the future to threaten that stability by means of weapons (including of mass destruction) delivered by missiles.
- This is an evolution, which clearly concerns all States. Due to our geographical localization we are certainly sensitive, perhaps even more than others, to that possibility in the future. This does not necessarily mean that we share all the estimates made on the nature and extent of the prospective threat.
- We consider that the ABM Treaty has been in the past and still is the cornerstone of the general strategic stability. This stability has been enhanced by the process of disarmament, in its several aspects, and especially by the agreements between Washington and Moscow on reductions of strategic ballistic missiles.
- Since deployment of a defense system like NMD would require amendments of the ABM Treaty the possibility of amendments and their content must be discussed between the two main signatories. We have therefore welcomed that both sides have considered that agreement a cornerstone of strategic stability and that they have been engaged in extensive discussions at several levels on this subject. We strongly advocate and are confident that these discussions will continue in the future.
- We have appreciated that in recent months the two sides have decided some initiatives, designed to reinforce stability and confidence, for instance in the field of early warning and prenotification of launches.
- While we have appreciated the exchanges of views that have already taken place among the Allies we expect that any future approach on the matter of missile defenses will be thoroughly discussed in the Alliance.
- We are of the opinion that any initiative which purports to counter a future ballistic threat should involve Russia (as a counterpart in the ABM Treaty).
- It cannot be excluded from the beginning that adequate defenses can be envisageable which do not require a modification of the ABM Treaty.
- We think that one area, among others, which must be taken into account in any possible evolution towards antiballistic missile defenses is the eventual impact of those defenses on international efforts to further nonproliferation and arms control.
- Non-proliferation and arms control in the missile field as well as in NBC fields should be strengthened taking into account general technological evolution.
- In this context, measures of a different nature than control of technology exports can also be useful. For instance a large acceptance of a set of engagements constituting some sort of international code of behavior in the missile field can be relevant.

I thank you for the attention and wish you a good discussion.