Interview of Minister Alfano with Ria Novost

2017-03-27

Mister Minister, soon you are to meet again with Sergey Lavrov; it will be your second meeting after the G20 Foreign Ministers Meeting in Bonn. What are the points you intend to discuss with your Russian counterpart?

My meeting with Sergey Lavrov will offer a valuable opportunity to discuss the principal international dossiers, in connection with which we consider Russia to be an unavoidable interlocutor. We will dedicate ample space to the evolution of the intra-Syrian negotiation process, as well as the stabilisation of the political and security situation in Libya, which is an absolute priority for Italy also in the light of its geographic vicinity and the risks posed in terms of security and migration. We will also discuss the situation in Ukraine, for which we continue to push for a timely and sustainable political solution.

Our common presence in the United Nations Security Council in 2017 will lead us to exchange opinions on several initiatives that Italy intends to promote within that context, both aimed at protecting cultural heritage as a factor of stability and at enhancing the role of women in conflict prevention. We will also take stock of our bilateral dialogue on combating global challenges, first of all violent extremism, and on the development and opportunities in our cultural, scientific, and technological partnerships, which are already sound and fruitful.

After the reunification of Crimea with Russia, the U.S. and the EU decided to inflict sanctions on our Country. Don’t you think that anti-Russian sanctions should be lifted as soon as possible, also because they are against Europe’s own interests?

I’ve said this many times over and I can only confirm that the sanctions are an instrument and not an end in itself. This means that their adoption is instrumental to an end, that of re-establishing a constructive dialogue with Moscow, which has taken political decisions that we did not agree with. Their duration is connected to the implementation of the Minsk Agreement. Only a constructive effort towards the achievement of this objective will make it possible to review the sanctioning regime. We undoubtedly hope that this moment might come soon, bringing with it new opportunities for the economies and businesses of our two Countries.

The Ukraine crisis is still far from being solved. Unfortunately, the recent development of events, especially Kiev’s new blockade of the transports into the Donbass, has further complicated the situation. In Rome, it has been often repeated that there is no alternative to

the Minsk Agreement but the parties to the conflict accuse each other of not respecting the agreements. What, in your opinion, should or could Europe do to contribute to settling this crisis?

The resumption of fighting in the Donbass at the end of January is a reason of great concern for us because it sheds light on the fact that the region's stabilisation process is still complicated. This situation should in no way represent a hindrance and should instead spur us to more vigorously support the effort to mediate within the existing negotiating formats of the Normandy Group and of the OSCE-mediated Trilateral Contact Group. However, it is essential to be able to count on the political will of the parties to reach a compromise, avoiding radical positions and reciprocal provocations that don't help negotiations. In this phase, a compromise is not only possible but necessary. It is therefore important that the EU and the whole international community continue to support the work of the Normandy Format with the aim of outlining a final roadmap towards the implementation of the Minsk Agreement.

Almost immediately after your appointment to Foreign Minister, you hinted at your wish to go back to the G8 format. When do you think could Russia go back to the Group? Could the G7 Summit in Taormina in May evaluate this problem?

The relevance of dialoguing with Moscow on matters of common interest is a common conviction both within the EU and NATO. We think there is room for this orientation to develop also within the G7. As I have already said, I hope that the G7 in Taormina will be the last and that the next summit, after Taormina, will be a G8 and include the presence of Russia. This scenario however depends on a constructive and cooperative attitude by Moscow. We are confident that Russia will soon go back to being the reliable partner whose propositional contribution on the international scene we have appreciated in the past.

Italy favourably welcomed the joint efforts by Russia and Turkey on the Syrian dossier. In this context, you also recalled the importance of the Astana Conference. How do you see the possibility of a political solution in Syria and the role of Russia in this process?

Italy has manifested, in all the multilateral forums and in the intense series of contacts with the Countries most involved in the Syrian conflict, its support for the initiatives aimed at promoting a ceasefire and the resumption of the Geneva process, the only one capable of producing a politically inclusive and credible solution.

Italy's seat on the Security Council coincided with a renewed impulse to the efforts promoting a political solution to the Syrian conflict that is now in its sixth year. In this sense, the Russian-Turkish initiative for a ceasefire has represented a positive factor as it facilitated a considerable reduction in the level of violence, thus contributing to the resumption of the UN-sponsored Geneva talks. Today the Astana process, which we deem to be useful, is going through a difficult phase, as testified by the ever-more frequent breaches of the truce. We

hope this phase might soon be overcome and that the Astana process might lead to doing away with the most serious violations [of the truce] and to adopting measures (like releasing prisoners, giving access to humanitarian aid) capable of making the Geneva political process progress in a climate more favourable to reaching a solution. From this perspective, we believe that Russia can and must play a leading role in putting the truce back in place and in unblocking the access of humanitarian aid to the areas under siege by the regime, putting an end to a very serious behaviour from a viewpoint that is ethical in addition to that of international humanitarian law.

As for the prospect of a political solution, we confirm our support and trust in the mediation of De Mistura in his effort to keep the Syrian parties committed to the Geneva consultations in which to discuss, through the intermediation of the UN, all the most pressing issues concerning the future of Syria, while attempting to avoid closures and taking rigid stands on principle. In this respect, we reiterate that all the Countries of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG), with no exceptions, must be coherent with the commitments made in December 2015. Those commitments, as we know, led to Resolution 2254, an absolutely crucial resolution that represents the cornerstone and roadmap for a credible and sustainable political solution. And all the members of the ISSG have the precise responsibility of supporting its enforcement. In this respect, Russia could play a decisive role, seeing the positive influence that Moscow is capable of exercising on the Syrian parties and, in particular, on the Damascus regime, inducing it to negotiate in good faith. There can be no peace in Syria, nor a possible defeat of terrorism, without a credible political transition.

There is another very important problem for Italian interests in the Middle East, namely the reconciliation of Libya. How do you judge the possibility that they could open up on this problem with the cooperation of Russia, considering that Moscow has encouraged contacts between Tripoli and Tobruk?

We are convinced that a coordinated action by the international community can make the difference in this situation; we count on Moscow’s constructive attitude as it has constantly shown support for the Libyan Political Agreement, consistently with its position of Permanent Member of the United Nations Security Council. Cooperation with Russia on the dossier is already very intense, as not only shown by the frequent bilateral talks but also Moscow’s participation in all the high-level meetings on the dossier, namely the meetings in Rome which preceded the Political Agreement by a couple of days and later the meetings in Vienna and in New York.

In this context, any initiative capable of encouraging contacts between the parties and favouring the national reconciliation under the Political Agreement can only be welcome. Not only Russia but the entire International Community is committed to moving in this direction in order to favour greater inclusivity and the better functioning of institutions because we cannot

allow Libya to fall back into chaos, especially in consideration of the negative fallout this can have in terms of terrorism and human trafficking.

For many years Italy and Russia were bound by relations defined by both parties as a strategic partnership. How do you see our bilateral relations in the near future? And how do you judge the cooperation between Italy and Russia in the international arena?

Our bilateral relations have always been extremely profitable, from both the political and economic point of view. Despite the difficulties connected to the Ukrainian situation, we firmly believe in dialoguing with Russia and we have worked also to convince our partners that there is no international crisis or global challenge from which we can exclude dialoguing with Moscow. The intensity of our contacts, at all levels, proves that there are sensitive and relevant aspects of our security over which both Italy and Russia feel the need to dialogue and cooperate. Also from the economic standpoint, in a cycle made difficult both by the general slowdown in the world economy and by international sanctions, we have been capable of opening innovative partnerships, exploring new options in line with international rules.

In Moscow I am also due to meet with Deputy Prime Minister Dvorkovich, with whom I co-chair the [Italy-Russia] Economic, Industrial and Financial Cooperation Council. In November of last year, after a four-year-long pause, the plenary assembly met again with great satisfaction among the institutions and the economic and business sectors. The Meeting was a clear sign of our long-standing commitment in favour of the stable and constant relaunching of our bilateral partnership. It is with this propositional and constructive spirit that we will face the upcoming months.

On the eve of the European Union Summit in Rome, French President François Hollande launched the idea of a different-speed Europe to restart the European integration process. Does Italy share this vision? And what should now be done against the danger of disintegration following Brexit?

In Versailles last 6 March, the leaders of Italy, France, Germany and Spain expressed the will to jointly undertake a common reflection on the vision of the European Union over the next 10 years in view of the Rome Summit of 25 March.

One of the first and most important results of this reflection is that it is now necessary to get going because – as Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni recalled last 15 March before the European Parliament – “an unmoving Europe is destined to backtracking”.

If we cannot all walk along this path together, the route to take is that of a “differentiated integration” based on the principle of flexibility. Italy’s view is that of working together with the other European partners for a Europe based on “concentric circles”, capable of pushing

forward a common project with the States that want to head towards an “Ever closer Union”, starting from sectors like Defence and the European pillar of social rights.

Faced with the danger of disintegration following Brexit, up to now Italy has been among the major players in Europe’s response to the institutional crisis opened by the United Kingdom, contributing to transforming a negative event into an opportunity to improve and redesign the Union: a Union quicker in taking decisions, more attentive to the needs of its citizens and capable of counting more on the international scene.

And this is what we started to do yesterday with the launch of the Rome Agenda of 25 March. The Agenda helps to restore vision to the European project, indicating to European citizens and to the rest of the world the idea of the Europe of the future: a safe Europe, a prosperous Europe, a social Europe, a stronger Europe on the global scene, starting from the awareness that “Rome 2017” represents a point of departure and not only a point of arrival. However, this time we have an extra strength compared to the past: by restarting from Rome, we have begun plotting the route to undertake over the next ten years to start building the Europe of tomorrow.

Source : https://www.esteri.it/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/interviste/2017/03/intervista-dell-onorevole-ministro/