The solution to the Syrian crisis is political (Corriere della Sera)

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We are not, nor will we ever be, idle spectators of tragedies such as that of Syria, which is an immediate moral as well as security concern to all of us. Italian and international diplomatic efforts are actively and constantly focused on somehow finding a solution. The fact that one has not been forthcoming thus far is owing to a series of objective difficulties that make this crisis “different” from previous ones. Syria is not Libya, on which the Security Council was able to find almost immediate consensus on stopping the regime’s repression. As opposed the Assad, Gaddafi did not have strategic allies among the five permanent members of the UN Security Council; the Libyan opposition was united, and not fragmented like the Syrians are; the Libyan people were a homogeneous population determined to turn the page, while the Syrian population includes minorities seeking future guarantees before taking a side. Thanks to Gaddafi’s limited military apparatus, the situation on the ground in Libya worked in favour of the anti-regime forces, while Assad’s much more substantial military strength has not yet been exhausted. Finally, the NATO intervention in Libya did not carry the risk of regional spill-over so obvious to the chaos in Syria, as the latest deadly attack by Damascus on Turkish soil showed. The sum of these complexities must be fully understood and kept in mind.

Clearly the solution to the Syrian crisis cannot but be a political one. It is a known fact that the Italian government has made repeated and even high level efforts to convince our Russian friends to join with us in pressuring the Syrian regime to seek a solution. Similar efforts by our partners and by the Arab League, which have tried in vain to obtain a binding Security Council decision to implement the “road map” for political transition outlined this past June in Geneva, which Russia agreed to in principle. In response to the diplomatic stalemate in the Security Council and the radicalisation of the clashes on the ground, international diplomacy has enacted a complex and detailed strategy whose outcome we are confident will be fruitful. I discussed it in New York last week with my minister colleagues of the Core Group of the nations most heavily concerned with the Syrian dossier. The strategy pivots on the acceleration of efforts to assist and unify the opposition forces around a shared political platform and leadership. Why has this aspect become such a high priority?

Because an opposition without a single political representative, recognised as such by its various groups, will be unable, on the one hand, to create an internal context capable of

forcing the regime to negotiate the terms of a political transition that, in order to be credible, cannot fail to consider Assad's exit from the stage: and, on the other, to see to it that the opposition itself is able to advance its political demands consistently and put an end to this violent trading of blows. Italy has set up a vast network of contacts with the various components of the Syrian opposition. We held a meeting two weeks ago in Rome with a large group of opposition and minority representatives in the hopes of broadening consensus on the democratic principles of the new Syria already largely contained in the two important documents signed in Cairo in July, but which must be reinforced and, above all, put into practice. We are working with our partners on holding a meeting with the opposition in Qatar sometime around mid-October to bring additional impetus to the process. Shared reinforcement of the opposition is necessary in order to create the space necessary for the Brahimi mission to manoeuvre, and is also an instrument for the effective pursuance of the still unwavering efforts to persuade Russia that there is a political alternative to Assad that can be more reassuring to Moscow than a protracted status quo that encourages extremists and radicals on the ground. These diplomatic efforts are in addition to the pressure on the Damascus regime with regard to which we plan to adopt further sanctions this month within the context of the EU.

The other front on which we are heavily engaged is, obviously, the humanitarian front, where Italy and its principal partners are doing much inside Syria and those neighbouring countries being forced to manage refugee flows. Within the context of the Interministerial Syria Table, we are considering the idea of additional allotments of aid to the Syrian people. We are in constant contact with the countries of the region – where my special envoy for humanitarian questions, the Hon. Boniver, was in recent days – in order to support them in confronting the emergency and maintaining internal stability. Finally, Italy is already working on building the Syria of tomorrow, organising training courses for young Syrians and promoting international coordination (meeting of the Core Group in Rome on 29 August).

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