

Defence: 14th Meeting of the Ministers of Defence of the 5+5 Defence Initiative.

Rome, December 12th, 2018

"This initiative represents the shared will to create a common culture of security", the Italian Minister of Defence said.

The 14th Meeting of the Ministers of Defence of the 5+5 Defence Initiative member countries was held today.

The agreement originally proposed by Italy and signed in Paris in 2004 aims at fostering cooperation on common defence and security issues, as well as at supporting regional stability. It is also intended to promote mutual understanding among the countries of the two shores of **Western Mediterranean**, notably France, Italy, Malta, Portugal, and Spain in the North and Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia in the South.

In today's long meeting, the **Ministers of Defence** have taken stock of the beneficial effects intense cooperation may bear and considered several courses of action to add further momentum to it. The meeting has also represented an opportunity to conduct a high-level analysis of the threats and challenges to security in the Mediterranean, with a focus on illegal trafficking managed by criminal networks and radicalised terrorist elements.

"Terrorism, migrations, crime are just some of the factors that originate in many hot beds across our neighbourhood - e.g. in the Sahel region - causing instability and dangers. As this is something that concerns us all, we have to grasp the nature and effects of it and plan the required response together."

Over the last years in particular, the **5+5 Defence Initiative** has focused on consolidating relations and cooperation in the fields of **counter-terrorism**, maritime surveillance, **search & rescue**, and support of military forces to civil protection. The meeting has also largely focussed on joint education and training initiatives as an instrument to improve, enlarge the scope of, and standardise the operational procedures of the ten member countries, which hold the Presidency on a rotational basis. In 2018, Italy has been responsible to organise and develop the many activities agreed during the previous year. Out of 45 activities approved for 2018, 19 have been led by Italy.

For a long time, the **Italian Ministry of Defence** has been committed to initiatives to tackle security-related risks in the Western Mediterranean. In fact, this area requires further commitment due to instability factors that may undermine the security of the region, of the neighbourhood, and of the international system.

Cooperation among western Mediterranean countries is something inescapable if we are to achieve regional stability. Not only economic relations and intense political and diplomatic negotiations will contribute to such stability, but also a recognition of the contribution of the military to an improved regional security framework through its usual flexibility of employment.

Over the last years, given the complexity of the situation in the area, Italy has adopted a wide-ranging bilateral cooperation policy with the Mediterranean countries. Above all, it

has supported several political initiatives and related investments, including-inter alia-the **NATO Mediterranean Dialogue**, the EU Barcelona process, and the Union for the Mediterranean. The 5+5 Defence Initiative aims at contributing to the stability of the region and to fostering better mutual understanding between the two shores of the Mediterranean basin.

Under the Italian Presidency, the cooperative efforts have received further momentum, as all participating countries have recognised.