

Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies (MEDAC)

“Good Offices: A Swiss Speciality”
Hon. Didier Burkhalter
Federal Councillor of Switzerland



Med Agenda — New Series

MEDAC Publications in Mediterranean IR and Diplomacy

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Malta, March 2016

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Introduction

The Hon. Didier Burkhalter, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, during his visit to Malta, addressed MEDAC students and staff.

On 9th March 2016, the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies welcomed the Hon. Didier Burkhalter, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland. Dr. Joe Borg, Chairman of MEDAC, introduced Minister Burkhalter and highlighted the commitment of the Swiss Government to MEDAC and expressed profound appreciation in this respect. Minister Burkhalter delivered a keynote address on the theme 'Good Offices: A Swiss Speciality' to the students pursuing the Masters degree in Diplomatic Studies at the University of Malta.

MEDAC was established in 1990 as a joint venture between the governments of Switzerland and Malta as a contribution towards Mediterranean peace and prosperity. Since then both Switzerland and Malta have seen MEDAC develop as a centre of excellence for the training of young diplomats from the Mediterranean region and beyond.

In his keynote address, Minister Burkhalter highlighted the numerous attributes that constitute the key elements of Swiss foreign policy in the provision of good offices and and mediation in international relations. The students of MEDAC were able to interact with the Hon. Minister Burkhalter in the dynamic question and answer session that was moderated by Prof. Stephen Calleya, Director of MEDAC.

“Good Offices: A Swiss Speciality”

by the **Hon. Didier Burkhalter**
Federal Councilor of Switzerland

Address delivered at the
Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies MEDAC
Msida, Malta, 9th March, 2016

Ladies and gentlemen
Dear friends

It is a great pleasure for me to visit the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies and be with you here today.

MEDAC was co-founded by Malta and Switzerland more than 25 years ago. It is not only the most important bilateral cooperation project between our two countries but also a beacon of Malta's university education infrastructure. It provides us with an excellent channel for conducting a continuous exchange on bilateral and international affairs.

We live in an era marked by growing uncertainty and insecurity. We are confronted with a multitude of crises and violent conflicts. Geopolitics and regional rivalries are on the rise again. Terrorism and fragile states figure high on the security agenda too. Humanitarian needs have reached new heights.

The consequences of the instabilities in the MENA region are manifesting themselves ever more strongly in Europe too. The notion that European and Mediterranean security are interlinked, which Malta and others managed to anchor into the Helsinki Final Act more than four decades ago, has never been more relevant than today.

With its focus on Mediterranean issues, MEDAC provides knowledge that goes right to the heart of today's policy debates. Malta as a country also plays an important role, building bridges between the states situated on the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean.

The idea of bridge-building is also an intrinsic part of Switzerland's identity and foreign policy. It is part of our political DNA. As a multi-ethnic country with four national languages, Switzerland has relied on dialogue and compromise to ensure its domestic cohesion for centuries.

These essential values also mark our foreign policy. As a European country that is not part of the EU or NATO, has no colonial history, pursues no hidden agenda, and is present around the world, Switzerland has established itself as a credible promotor of dialogue and peace. We are engaging in this sort of bridge-building bilaterally and in roles such as our Chairmanship of the OSCE two years ago. In a world marked by fragmentation and polarisation, the need for bridge-building is rapidly growing.

A few weeks ago, the Swiss government adopted a new foreign policy strategy for the next four years. Swiss contributions to peace and security are a cornerstone of this strategy, and we are in the process of further sharpening our profile in this field.

This short address today does not permit me to outline the whole spectrum of our engagement for peace and security, so let me just focus on what I consider to be the essence of our bridge-building activities – namely the ‘good offices’ that Switzerland provides. Good offices really are a Swiss speciality.

Switzerland provides two types of good offices: safeguarding foreign interests, and mediation and facilitation. Both types are about bridge-building, if in different ways.

Let me start with safeguarding foreign interests. Acting as a protecting power, Switzerland assumes a state’s consular and diplomatic responsibilities in cases where ties with another state have been broken off. Protecting-power mandates aim to maintain low-level relations and provide consular protection to the nationals of the other state concerned. Switzerland has a long history and much expertise in this field.

The heyday for Switzerland as a protecting power was during the Second World War, when we had overall 219 mandates for 35 states. Today, we have fewer than 10 mandates. This is because there are fewer inter-state conflicts and because states in our globalised world really think twice before breaking off diplomatic ties. Still, the role of protecting power remains important. The number of mandates may even rise again if the trend of polarisation continues.

Until last summer, Switzerland represented the interests of the United States in Cuba – which it had done for more than 50 years! Another case concerns Switzerland’s representation of Russia in Georgia and vice-versa. But since we are in Malta, let me take an

example from the MENA region to illustrate Switzerland's role as a protecting power.

Since 1980, Switzerland has represented the United States in Iran. This is the most comprehensive and complex mandate we have had recently. All consular services for US citizens or dual-nationals in Iran are dealt with by the Foreign Interests Section of the Swiss embassy in Tehran. The Section is headed by Swiss nationals and staffed with local employees.

This mandate also provides a channel of communication between Washington and Tehran which is used on a regular basis for confidential communication. Over the years, Switzerland has gained the trust of both parties which has allowed us to contribute to some important developments in the relations between these two countries. The latest example concerns the secret negotiations that led to the prisoners' exchange in mid-January 2016.

I may add that the Federal Council welcomed the agreement reached by the E3/EU+3 (Germany, France, the United Kingdom, China, Russia, USA) and Iran to resolve the nuclear dispute. This agreement has shown that it is possible to find political solutions in the region through diplomacy and negotiations.

Switzerland has recently been asked to represent Iranian interests in Riyadh and Saudi interests in Tehran. Our diplomats are currently negotiating the modalities of these mandates after these two countries broke off diplomatic relations at the beginning of the year. I firmly believe that a minimum of contact between Iran and Saudi Arabia is crucial for regional stability, and here too Switzerland is committed to playing its part.

The second type of good offices concerns mediation and facilitation. Here too, the basis for our activities is the impartiality and credibility of Switzerland's foreign policy. Mediation is largely about trust – trust that can only be established in the diplomatic arena over years and decades.

Switzerland usually starts its engagement long before a mediation process takes shape or even becomes a possibility. Once mediation enters the realm of the possible, a lot of support is needed to prepare the parties for the specific challenges and requirements of a mediation setting, and this support is also part of our good offices. Indeed, Switzerland has been able to build up expertise in this line of work through various engagements in Colombia, Western Sahara, South Sudan and Uganda and other contexts.

Through our support parties get used to the idea that compromise is a necessary part of mediation. The areas we cover mainly concern process design, power and wealth sharing, human rights and social issues, as well as security arrangements, including ceasefire and security-sector reform. We also support preparations for negotiations where a mediator is not present. Our work then focuses strictly on content, offering expertise, for example on federalism as we are currently doing in Myanmar, or on process design as in the cases of Thailand and Indonesia.

There have been cases where Switzerland has acted as sole mediator, such as our mediation between Armenia and Turkey in 2009. Mediation, however, is a complex affair and is increasingly being done in groups or with international organisations.

For example, Switzerland has provided mediation support for the OSCE in the Ukraine crisis, where Swiss Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini led the Trilateral Contact Group until last summer. We have also provided the OSCE with experts in the fields of humanitarian affairs and ceasefire management. Indeed, with Ambassador Toni Frisch, Switzerland is today leading the discussions in the humanitarian working group of the Trilateral Contact Group in Minsk.

Another example is our support for the UN's efforts to find a political solution to the crisis in Syria. Here, Switzerland placed an expert on security arrangements at the disposal of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura to help draft the 'Cessation of Hostilities' – which seems to be holding and has contributed to reducing the violence on the ground. We are also supporting the political talks in Geneva by making two additional experts in political and constitutional reform available to the UN-led mediation.

In the Syrian context furthermore, Switzerland is active in a number of initiatives in what is known as informal diplomacy and which are part of our mediation-support activities. Through this, we are seeking to strengthen the formal dialogue process in Geneva.

Lastly, Switzerland is also acting as a facilitator in bringing together parties to a conflict without itself engaging in mediation. I am thinking of our host activities within the context of International Geneva, where we have supported UN efforts to restore peace not only in Syria but also in Yemen and Libya. I am also thinking of the various rounds of the Iranian nuclear programme negotiations in Geneva, Montreux and Lausanne. Yet another example of our facilitation efforts is the recent meeting of the Presidents of

Armenia and Azerbaijan in Bern to discuss matters related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Ladies and gentlemen

Demand for mediation and facilitation today is high. To meet this demand, Switzerland is increasing and further professionalising its mediation capacities. It is also strengthening Geneva as a hub for peace negotiations and global governance.

Let me be clear: resolving today's complex crises is exceedingly difficult. There are limits to what we can accomplish from outside, which is why we should be guided by a spirit of humility in this regard. But our efforts should also be characterized by perseverance and stamina. No conflict is unresolvable, and Switzerland remains committed to advancing peace and security – both in the Mediterranean region and elsewhere.



About the author

The Hon. Didier Burkhalter Federal Councilor of the Swiss Confederation



□ Hon. Didier Burkhalter

Didier Burkhalter was born on 17th April 1960 and grew up in Auviernier on Lake Neuchâtel. He graduated in Economics from the University of Neuchâtel and then worked in a range of positions at the university and in the private sector. Mr Burkhalter is married with three children.

Mr Burkhalter has been a member of the liberal FDP since 1985. In 1991 he was elected to the Neuchâtel city government, where he remained until 2005. In 2003 he was elected to the National Council and in 2007 he became a member of the Council of States.

Election to the Federal Council

On 16 September 2009 the Federal Assembly elected Didier Burkhalter to the Federal Council. From 2009 to 2011 he headed the Federal Department of Home Affairs (FDHA). Since 1st January 2012 he has been head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. On 4th December 2013 the Federal Assembly elected Didier Burkhalter as president of the Swiss Confederation for 2014.

The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA)

The FDFA protects Switzerland's interests abroad and implements the Federal Council's foreign policy. This involves fostering and expanding relations with neighbouring states and the EU. The FDFA also wants to improve its services for Swiss living abroad by modernising its technology.



The Hon. Didier Burkhalter, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland (centre) together with (L to R) Dr. Chris Soler, MEDAC Board Member; Prof. Stephen Calleja, MEDAC Director; Amb. Alfred Zarb, MEDAC Board Member; Dr. Joe Borg, MEDAC Chairman; Dr. Derek Lutterbeck, Holder of the Swiss Chair at MEDAC; and Amb. Giancarlo Kessler, Swiss Ambassador to Malta



(L to R) Prof. Stephen Calleya, MEDAC Director greeting the Hon. Didier Burkhalter, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland on his arrival to MEDAC.



(L to R) Dr. Joe Borg, MEDAC Chairman and former EU Commissioner welcoming the Hon. Didier Burkhalter, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland.



(L to R) Dr. Derek Lutterbeck, Holder of the Swiss Chair at MEDAC greeting the Hon. Didier Burkhalter, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland.



(L to R) Amb. Alfred Zarb, MEDAC Board Member greeting the Hon. Didier Burkhalter, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland. Prof. Stephen Calleya introducing Amb. Zarb.



(R to L) Prof. Stephen Calleya, MEDAC Director with the Hon. Didier Burkhalter, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland.



(L to R) Prof. Stephen Calleya, MEDAC Director and the Hon. Didier Burkhalter, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland discussing the global network of more than 700 MEDAC Alumni.



(R to L) The Hon. Didier Burkhalter being introduced to H.E. Amb. Gudrun Sräga, Ambassador of Germany to Malta, and Dr. Monika Wohlfeld, Holder of the German Chair in Peace Studies and Conflict Prevention.



The Hon. Didier Burkhalter meeting with MEDAC lecturers.
(L to R) Ms. Lourdes Pullicino, Dr. Omar Grech and Dr. Monika Wohlfeld.



The Hon. Didier Burkhalter, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland signing the MEDAC guestbook.



(L to R) Prof. Stephen Calleya and the Hon. Didier Burkhalter en route to the MEDAC lecture room.



The Hon. Minister Burkhalter being welcomed by MEDAC students.



(L to R) Dr. Joe Borg, The Hon. Didier Burkhalter, Prof. Stephen Calleya in discussion.



Dr. Joe Borg, Chairman of MEDAC, introducing the Hon. Minister Burkhalter.



The Hon. Minister Burkhalter addressing MEDAC students.



The Hon. Didier Burkhalter, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland delivering his keynote address.



MEDAC lecturers and dignitaries in attendance.



The Hon. Minister Burkhalter delivering a keynote address on the theme 'Good Offices: A Swiss Speciality' to the students pursuing the Masters degree in Diplomatic Studies at MEDAC, University of Malta.



The students of MEDAC interacting with the Hon. Minister Burkhalter in the dynamic question and answer session.



Question and answer session was moderated by Prof. Stephen Calleya, Director of MEDAC.



Students meeting with the Hon. Minister Didier Burkhalter.



MEDAC director Prof. Stephen Calleya (right) expressing everyone's gratitude to (L to R) the Hon. Didier Burkhalter and the Swiss Amb. Giancarlo Kessler on this memorable occasion.

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About MEDAC



The Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies (MEDAC) is an institution of higher learning at the University of Malta offering advanced degrees in diplomacy and conflict resolution with a focus on Mediterranean issues.

MEDAC was established in 1990 pursuant to an agreement between the governments of Malta and Switzerland. The Academy is currently co-funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Malta. The Geneva Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (HEID) was among MEDAC's first foreign partners. More recently in 2009, MEDAC concluded an agreement with the Federal Republic of Germany, represented by the Foreign Office, in turn represented by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and established a German Chair in Peace Studies and Conflict Prevention.

In 2015 MEDAC celebrated its 25th anniversary. Since its inception, MEDAC has acquired a solid reputation both as an academic institution and as a practical training platform. We are fortunate to count over 700 alumni from 59 different countries who have completed successfully the post-graduate courses offered by the Academy. The EU's enlargement towards the Mediterranean, that included Malta in 2004, and the recent transformation of the political landscape throughout the Arab World have resulted in an ever increasing demand for MEDAC's programme of studies.

Academy Courses

- Master of Arts in Diplomatic Studies (M.A.)
- Master of Diplomacy (M.Dip.)
- Joint M.A. with George Mason University (Virginia, USA) on Conflict Resolution and Mediterranean Security
- Diploma in Diplomacy (DDS)

See details of all courses on the website:

www.um.edu.mt/medac

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Med Agenda

New Series

“Med Agenda”, MEDAC Series in Mediterranean IR and Diplomacy, is aimed at publishing and preserving distinguished studies, speeches and articles dealing with international relations, diplomacy and security in the Mediterranean region. The authors are invited speakers, academics and diplomats, at MEDAC conferences and lectures, as well as MEDAC experts.



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