

With other member countries of the Atlantic Alliance, we have contributed to proposals for an Open Skies regime that could be acceptable by all of the 23 countries. We are perfectly receptive to any suggestions and ideas from any other party.

We have instructed our negotiators to engage in flexible and earnest dialogue when drafting the technical aspects that will be discussed after the ministerial meeting.

Italy is ready to open up her territory to the air observation aircraft of the Eastern European countries, reducing restrictions to the bare minimum, with the exclusive purpose of guaranteeing air safety.

We also confirm our readiness to take part in a second round of the negotiations, expected to take place in Budapest this spring.

But we have gathered here today with a further purpose: to give a decisive impetus to the Vienna talks on the reduction of conventional forces.

Proposals for reductions have been gathering pace, recently. The disarmament race cannot be run unilaterally or in a state of uncertainty because our goal remains that of achieving a balance of forces, a recognizable and controlled force balance. But we have to make haste, as I recalled last month in Vienna together with our colleagues Dumas and Genscher.

Another reason for moving with dispatch is connected with the spring elections to be held throughout the Eastern European countries. Public opinion that has been kept silent for so long will want to express the people's expectations through their parliamentary representatives.

We must not create the impression that there can be an excessively long hiatus between the timing of the negotiations and the political decision making.

In Ottawa, we are therefore looking for a decisive step forward toward overcoming the constraints that still prevent an agreement for the reduction of conventional arms in Europe from being concluded by the summer. As to the definition of tanks, and to regional differentiation and storage, we would like the conversions that emerged in the Vienna negotiations to be now consolidated.

The Western countries have also recently advanced new proposals to overcome as rapidly as possible the differences that still exist regarding the two main outstanding negotiation issues, aircraft and military personnel. We appealed to our negotiating partners in the East not to let slip this invitation to compromise,