

The swift acceleration of history, which began last summer, is far from ending. 1990 will be the year in which to consolidate the positive changes which have taken place in Europe in the last months, and to lay the foundations of a new architecture of our continent.

We are perfectly aware of all this and we shall draw on it to ensure that this meeting provides us with an opportunity to give a further boost to the cause of peace and stability.

Our primary task here is to give substance to the Open Skies idea for what it signifies in terms of mutual confidence, transparency and awareness of the military capabilities and intentions of the other side.

We have covered so much ground since the time Khrushchev greeted a similar proposal by the President of the United States by retorting that the Soviet Union would never allow anyone to spy in its own bedroom. And we have never really been sure whether secrecy was a means of concealing strength or weakness.

With inadequate intelligence about the adversary, its capabilities are more likely to be over-estimated and the response excessive.

Today we are living in a wholly different climate, even in psychological terms, as demonstrated by the ready endorsement of the Open Skies idea.

Ever since it was first broached, the Italian government has wholeheartedly backed President Bush's initiative for a system of free, mutual air observation of the territories of the member countries of the Atlantic Alliance and the Warsaw Pact.

Such measures are extremely useful for two main reasons: First, they will help to strengthen mutual trust and confidence, consolidate and enhance transparency, and make dialogue more concrete and constructive.

Second, there will be an important experiment for the verification and monitoring of military activities that could then be used in future disarmament agreements.

The originality and the vast scope of the Open Skies system, extending from San Francisco to Vladivostok, will act as an incentive to contemplate extending it after the initial running-in phase, to the participation of other countries.

This will also enable us to offer a substantial complement to the results that will emerge from the negotiating in Vienna on confidence-building and security measures.