

MESSAGGIO SCRITTO DEL VICEPRESIDENTE DEL CONSIGLIO E MINISTRO DEGLI AFFARI ESTERI, On. ANTONIO TAJANI, IN OCCASIONE DELLA 5th Soft Power Conference

(Venezia, 26 - 27 agosto 2024)

[COURTESY TRANSLATION]

I would like to thank the organizers and warmly welcome the participants to this important event. It is particularly significant that today's event is hosted in Venice, a city that has built its greatness over the centuries on the basis of an *ante-litteram* "soft power" - diplomatic, commercial, cultural - acting as a bridge between the East and the West. A characteristic that I personally wanted to emphasize when I inaugurated in April, together with the Minister of Commerce of Beijing, an event in Venice aimed at celebrating the figure of Marco Polo and the relations between Italy and China.

In light of an increasingly complex international framework, it is both timely and appropriate to reflect on the importance of "soft power".

As we witness new, increased use of military force in the Middle East and Ukraine, where Russia's aggression has brought war back in Europe, we must confront the proliferation of disinformation campaigns aimed at delegitimizing Western institutions and media, attacking democratic values and polarizing public opinion.

This challenge requires increasingly strong and coordinated efforts. For this reason, I decided to include the fight against disinformation among the priorities of the meeting of G7 Foreign Ministers that I hosted in April in Capri.

I also signed together with the Secretary of State Blinken an important protocol of cooperation with the United States aimed at countering disinformation and "fake news" that create confusion within the public opinion of democratic countries and can even influence the regular and transparent conduct of electoral appointments.

This effort must go hand in hand with renewed action to pursue peace and dialogue by promoting our principles and values, particularly with our global partners. An example of such effort is our military personnel engaged in peace

missions around the world, including Lebanon, Kosovo and Niger, as they earn appreciation and acknowledgment for their contribution to peace and dialogue.

Italy is a cultural superpower. Our language, with more than 2 million people studying Italian around the world, is an increasingly important tool to strengthen Italy's influence within the world stage.

Another tool that I made strategic for our foreign policy is Development Cooperation. This Government has changed the paradigm of our relationship with Africa, basing it on an equal partnership, also inspired by the Mattei Plan, and sharing our knowledge and know-how. Sport is also a key tool to promote peace and dialogue. Through major sport events and thanks to our sport champions, we promote the values of peace, dialogue, inclusion and tenacity.

Teamwork is crucial. Embracing a teamwork effort, Italy is fully committed to fostering peace, stability and growth, also through its role in Europe and as current President of the G7.

I wish everyone a stimulating and productive discussion.