

**Intervention by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nikos Dendias, on the “Actual challenges for the Greek Foreign Policy” at the teleconference organized by the Foreign Policy and United Nations Association of Austria (17.05.2021)**

“Mr. President of the Foreign Policy and United Nations Association of Austria,

Distinguished guests,

Dear friends,

First of all, I wish to thank you for the invitation to participate in today’s event and for the opportunity to address such a distinguished audience.

I will be making an overview, in brief, of the challenges that the Greek foreign policy is currently faced with.

I will begin by saying that I take pride in the fact that Greece follows a *principled* foreign policy.

These, of course, include the peaceful resolution of differences, the non-use of force in international relations and the promotion of good neighborly relations.

For us, these are not some noble yet theoretical axioms. They are the rules we practice and abide by.

Of course, the upkeep of lofty principles in a vacuum is one thing; in the real world, it’s another.

In Greece’s immediate neighborhood and in particular in the Eastern Mediterranean, well, that’s a whole different story.

Because one’s neighborhood is important.

And in Greece's case:

- up north you have the Balkans that used to be called Europe's powder keg.
- whereas in the South and the South-East, you have an explosive mixture of some of the world's most complicated, unresolved, international political issues.

In other words, in Greece's wider neighborhood there are issues, new and persisting ones, and multiple challenges of political, geo-political and security nature.

Against this backdrop, Greece, the first country in its region to become both an EU and a NATO member-state, is following, as I mentioned, a principled foreign policy.

In the Balkans and in particular the Western Balkans, we are convinced that the only way to consolidate stability, development and prosperity is through the promotion of a credible, merits-based and in accordance with the set conditionality European perspective.

This vision was first adopted in 2003, at the Thessaloniki Summit.

The Thessaloniki agenda, for the first time encapsulated this vision for the region into a document that would since be a reference point.

This also speaks volumes of Greece's commitment to this strategic goal.

Ever since, Greece remains one the region's most active players, a promoter of a positive agenda across the board.

In this context, we have taken the initiative to create, in most cases along with Cyprus, but also to participate, in various multiple schemes of trilateral and multilateral cooperation in the region;

We are engaged in promoting good neighborly relations, dialogue and understanding in a region that has much suffered in the past from lack of those.

Our main objective behind such initiatives and overall involvement is to pursue the strategic goal of the Western Balkans European perspective, after having successfully backed their NATO bid.

But the pursuit of this strategic goal is not a path covered with petals.

It requires painful yet necessary reforms to make sure that the region is ready for the next step towards the EU.

It also requires taking difficult decisions and sticking with them.

In fact, EU candidate countries in the region could not have hoped for a more ardent supporter than the one they have found in Greece. Our continued support comes with a fundamental string attached: fulfilling the set conditionality.

Because without the set conditionality, without reforms, this whole effort of promoting the Western Balkan region's stability and development would be an empty shell.

Actually, the transformation process, leading to the full adoption of the EU standards and ultimately to EU accession serves mainly the Western Balkans interests.

And, the pursuit of the EU perspective is the best way to protect the region from third Actors' attempts to dominate it for the pursuit of their own agendas;

Their actions are alien, if not in direct contradiction, to the region's interests.

*This*, dear friends, is the biggest challenge for Greek foreign policy in the Western Balkans.

Making sure that:

- the European perspective vision would prevail over and not be hampered by outside influences,
- these influences will not be allowed to manipulate the region's populations on the basis of their religion or any other affiliation whatsoever.
- these forces will not be allowed to flood the region with migrants, as they have unsuccessfully tried in the recent past, turning the Western Balkans into a (quote) "*dump place*" of tortured souls.

Which brings me to the Eastern Mediterranean neighborhood;

where I'm afraid challenges & stakes not just for Greece's foreign policy but for the region's stability are much higher.

This is a region that cannot consume its own History; it is rather, more often than not, being consumed by its history.

A place where major stakeholders, with increasingly diverging views and approaches to what the international

order should look like, compete with one another to maintain their footholds or gain new ones.

A place with some of the world's most emblematic persisting issues, such as the Israeli-Palestinian Issue & the Cyprus Question.

A place with open crises: in Syria, Libya, Yemen.

A place filled with cultural, religious, political barriers, subject to spheres of all kinds of influence, including extremist elements that are ever present.

A place where stability and security situations, even peace-threatening situations have a common denominator: Turkey.

Not the only common denominator, true; there are others.

But rarely you have a country that has its tentacles lurking over so many issues and crises in such a dangerous, peace-threatening even, way.

Against Greece in particular, Turkey has been violating our sovereignty on a daily basis.

It is challenging our sovereign rights, trying to re-write history, re-fashion geography and change the treaties that even Turkey has signed and should be respecting.

All this in the name of a neo-Ottoman vision with a name: the Mavi Vatan or Blue Homeland vision.

The pursuit of this neo-Ottoman vision has been affecting - infesting, rather- Syria, Iraq, Libya, the Israeli-Palestinian question, the Cyprus issue, relations among Muslim states, relations among Gulf states.

Greece is making an effort to create space for dialogue and cooperation for the promotion of good neighborly relations, development, tolerance and understanding.

Turkey is doing the exact opposite, by:

- Feeding off conflicts and attempting to manipulate those involved (this is the case in Libya, for instance, or in the Israeli-Palestinian question),
- violating the sovereignty of states (Greece, Cyprus, Syria, Iraq),
- threatening Greece with war if we exercise our right, inherent in the International Law of the Sea, to expand our territorial waters in the Aegean beyond the current 6 n.m. Let me stress that UNCLOS is part of the EU acquis. We are faced with war if we implement the EU acquis.
- signing illegal agreements (as were those concluded with the former Libyan Government), in order to usurp other nations' sovereign rights,
- instrumentalising migrants for political and economic gains,
- manipulating minorities,
- attempting to terrorize those who speak against its illegal practices & continued military presence in Libya,
- by not complying with UNSC Resolutions and the EU CFSP positions,

Turkey has been playing a *very dangerous* game in the Eastern Mediterranean.

To those who think this is a Greek problem, it is not.

It is a serious regional problem.

As such, it is an EU problem.

One that, I am sorry to say, the EU as a whole has been hesitant in calling out for what it is: an irresponsible, destabilizing, revisionist, illegal behavior against member-states and its very own EU interests.

And it's not that the EU cannot see that; it is that national interests prevail over EU interests.

Which is regrettable.

This Turkish attempt to replace legality with illegality across the Eastern Mediterranean poses the main challenge for the Greek foreign policy.

So, how does Greece respond to that? We respond:

- By protecting our sovereignty and sovereign rights.
- By calling on Turkey to de-escalate, abide by the international law and abandon its illegal behavior in an attempt to create *faits accomplis* against Greece and other countries in the region.
- By disrupting Turkey's plans to instrumentalize the serious, of humanitarian nature first and foremost, migration issue.
- By accepting to reinitiate dialogue with Ankara on the basis of the international law, in order to settle our sole difference which is the delimitation of our respective EEZs and, if not, by referring this issue to the International Court of Justice.

- By supporting Turkey's EU bid in accordance with the very same standards we hold other candidate countries accountable.
- By making every effort to help Turkey in this regard.
- By creating a strong network of relationships based on international law.

We are not doing this to isolate Turkey; it is not Greece that wants to isolate Turkey, it is Turkey that has isolated itself with its behavior.

Our aim, *Greece's* aim, is to consolidate a mentality of dialogue, friendship, trust and cooperation throughout the region based on international law.

A mentality that, in turn, would promote much needed peace, stability and development in the Eastern Mediterranean, to the benefit of all the countries and the peoples therein.

Including Turkey.

Because I want to be clear: Greece would be very happy to one day –one day soon, preferably– see Turkey transform in the strategic partner and credible EU candidate country that we want it to be.

This transformation has yet to happen, although we believe that it would be in the interest of Turkey and of the Turkish people.

In this regard, we appreciate Austria's stance all this time, regarding the challenges Greece and the whole of Europe are faced with, on Turkey's responsibility.

Therefore, I want to thank Austria and its Government publicly, today, as I have also done in the past, for this show of solidarity and support.

A final point: we believe that Greece following a principled foreign policy and actively pursuing the UN Charter principles and values, makes our country a perfect candidate for a non-permanent seat to the UN Security Council.

We are pursuing this noble cause, for the period 2025-2026, with commitment and determination and we are honored to be able to say that we have the support of countries like Austria.

Which we will support ourselves for its own bid to the same UN Body for the period 2027-2028.

Thank you.”