

**«MODERATOR (A. ELLIS):** Welcome to this 1<sup>st</sup> Session of the Digital Conference on Southeast Europe and East Med, in which we will have a discussion with the Foreign Minister of Greece, Nikos Dendias, and former Ambassador to Greece and to NATO, Nick Burns.

It is only fitting that we will start with the top Greek diplomat, since he has been travelling a lot lately all over the world, but mainly in our region, and has completed a couple of agreements with our neighbors, which shows that Greece wants to have agreements, with Italy and with Egypt and we are also moving ahead with Albania on the exclusive economic zones. The issue with Turkey is probably not our fault, but it seems it is Turkey's fault, but we will see that during the discussion.

We will ask the Greek Foreign Minister what he thinks about the latest developments and the latest developments of course is the US deciding on sanctions against Turkey, which is not something we are used to see and hear about. So, what is the reaction from Athens?

**N. DENDIAS:** Well, I have to say that the Greek reaction is the reaction of a member of NATO, the reaction of a country that looks to NATO as a stabilizing factor in Southeast Mediterranean, in Europe, in the world, and also, as a force for peace, as a force that contributes to peace in the world.

In that context, I think those sanctions were necessary. They were necessary not to punish Turkey; this is not something that we wish to happen. But as a way to underline that Turkey has moved beyond limits, not just in purchasing and acquiring the S400 anti-aircraft system, which by the way will have the potential to endanger the life of the NATO member-countries' personnel in the future, but with its overall behavior in the area we live in: in the Eastern Mediterranean, in the Caucasus, in Libya, in Syria, in Iraq, in our overall region.

**MODERATOR:** Do you feel a little bit upset about the fact that the European Union -and Greece is a member of the European Union- did not react as forcefully as the US did?

**N. DENDIAS:** Well, I have to be honest with you. I would have preferred much clearer language from our friends and partners. Yet again, the European Union takes time. We know that the European Union reacts slowly, reacts with unanimity between 27 member-states, so it takes time. But I will underline the fact that even the European Union addresses now Turkey as a European problem, not just as a country having differences with one or two member-states, Greece and Cyprus.

Turkey is being viewed as a destabilizing factor in our region and that says a lot. Now, it may take time for the European Union to arrive at the same level of imposing sanctions as the United States, but unless Turkey changes course, I think that is what is going to happen sooner rather than later.

**MODERATOR:** What do you say as Greece to people in the West, both in Brussels and Washington who say that they don't want to lose Turkey? We want to make Turkey change some of its policies, but we don't want to go all the way as some ask, let's say in their view Athens or Nicosia, because we might lose Turkey, the West might lose Turkey, so it is a huge gamble. What is your response to that?

**N. DENDIAS:** This is a very interesting question, because this is really a line followed by those who speak and act against imposing sanctions.

I am telling you that it is exactly the opposite. If we want to save Turkey for the Western world, we have to make clear to Turkey where the red lines are. Because

Turkey is not a monolithic society. There is an internal political dialogue within the Turkish society and by imposing sanctions, that is by declaring unacceptable and failed the policies followed by the present Turkish government, the policies of invasion in Iraq and Syria, the policies of moving around Jihadists in Libya and in Caucasus, we are helping the modernizing elements of the Turkish society.

If on the other hand we allow this kind of policies to be seen within the Turkish political dialogue as being seemingly successful, then we undermine that dialogue and the modernizing Western-looking parts of Turkish society. So, it is exactly the opposite. This is how we read Turkey today. That by imposing sanctions, by explaining clearly to Turkey where the limits are, by obliging Turkey to fall in line with the Alliance, we help to keep Turkey within the Western Alliance.

**MODERATOR:** I know that you have, had, you tell me, a personal relationship with your Turkish counterpart, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, from your years at the Council of Europe. I am just wondering if this relationship has helped at all in this very tense and difficult period we are going through between the two countries.

**N. DENDIAS:** Well, I was always honest. I consider Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu my friend. He was my friend, he is my friend and I hope he will remain my friend. And I hope this personal relationship between us two will help the Greece-Turkey relationship go through these difficult times to calmer waters. And some time in the future, I hope sooner rather than later, we may arrive to an understanding. But up to now, things have not fared that well. That is obvious.

**MODERATOR:** Any thinking right now of a meeting with the Turkish Foreign Minister? I doubt it, but you never know. Sometimes, meetings break the ice. Where are we on that front?

**N. DENDIAS:** I have recently met Mevlüt in Bratislava. At that time, I was promised by the Turkish government that they would give us a date for starting again the exploratory talks. As you very well know, instead of sending a date, Turkey sent a research vessel with a flotilla of corvettes and frigates, etc., close to Kastellorizo. So that didn't go well.

Now, for us, our position is crystal clear. What we are saying to the Turkish side, and I heard it from the lips of our Prime Minister in Parliament yesterday, is that Turkey should stop the provocations. We have to allow for a period of time for things to calm down. Then Greece is ready to participate in a meaningful dialogue.

But what do we mean by 'meaningful dialogue'? We mean a dialogue within the context of International Law and the International Law of the Sea, and a dialogue about the one difference we have with Turkey: The delimitation of the continental shelf and the exclusive economic zone in the Aegean, in the Southeastern Mediterranean. That is it.

**MODERATOR:** Are you hopeful that we might have some period of calm that might allow the start of the exploratory talks? What is your feeling right now, after the EU meeting, the European Council meeting, the US?

**N. DENDIAS:** I have to say that following the decision of the United States' government and following the conclusions of the European Council, there is some optimism. So, if you would ask me to say what I am expecting to happen, my answer would be "Well, I'm sorry, I am not a magician."

But first of all, I do hope that Turkey takes home the right message out of these decisions and that the Turkish government decides that it is in favor of Turkey, of the Turkish people, of the Turkish society to abide by International Law and, within a reasonable period of time, to restart the exploratory talks with Greece.

I have to say we are waiting for this date since March 2016. It goes back to 2016. It was Turkey that stopped the dialogue with Greece, not vice versa.

**MODERATOR:** So your message is that right now we are not in as tense a situation, a period, as we were a few months ago? Because there was a moment, when the Prime Minister noted recently that not that we were close to war, but it was quite tense. Are we in a less tense situation right now?

**N. DENDIAS:** You are absolutely right. The times were not easy at all and the situation was extremely tense. And that is something we have said openly to our friends and partners in the European Union, to the United States government, to Secretary Pompeo, to everybody that was willing and wishing to hear from us at the time.

Now that the Oruc Reis is back in port and the Turkish vessels flotilla are not cruising around Southeastern Mediterranean, yes, it is obvious the situation is better, but we have to allow for a period of time. Why? Because we would like it to become clear that this is a choice made by Turkey, not just a flag of convenience, not just a limited-period choice, just to avoid sanctions from the European Union or heavier sanctions from the United States.

If that becomes apparent, then Greece is always willing to talk. Greece, regardless of government, always believes in dialogue.

**MODERATOR:** And while you travel and you talk to the Americans and to the Europeans, you also talk to your domestic political opponents. We have so many issues we disagree. Do you get the broad political support, Foreign Minister, once in a situation like this, from the opposition parties in Parliament in Greece?

**N. DENDIAS:** Well, as I am sure you know, I am meeting all the representatives of the parties represented in Parliament monthly and sometimes even in shorter periods of time. And I am trying to keep them all very well informed on what we are facing, what the situation is, what are the choices available on the table. And that is the instruction I have received from the Prime Minister. So that is a policy of the Mitsotakis government.

I have to say, on the broader picture, the vast majority of the political system has supported the government in these difficult times. Well, we have differences, of course. We have differences of opinion, we have differences on how we describe things and as you very rightly say, there is also an internal political audience, but yet again, in the broader picture I think most of the Greek political parties see things in the right way and support the current government.

**MODERATOR:** Lastly, I have two questions that have to do with the US. First, what do you expect from the Biden administration after January 20<sup>th</sup>?

**N. DENDIAS:** Well, first of all, President Biden and also his team in the State Department and in the Ministry of Defense and in the Security Council are people that are very experienced and that Greece considers friends. Most of them know our area very well, know the Balkans very well, they know Greece very well, they know the content of the Greece-Turkey relations very well.

So we are expecting them to be from day one into the picture and help us address what is a very difficult situation with Turkey. We are very much looking forward to working with the new Biden Administration.

**MODERATOR:** And finally, I was wondering, we recently lost, we meaning Hellenism, a Greek-American who was maybe the most important one in the US political system, Paul Sarbanes, former Senator, former member of the Foreign Relations Committee, and I was wondering, I am left with the impression you have met him, some thoughts on his role in this relationship between the two countries, given the difficult ... all those years.

**N. DENDIAS:** It is a huge loss. It is a huge loss for Greece; it is a huge loss for the United States, for the American society, for the American people. Paul Sarbanes was a statesman and that says it all. I was lucky to have met him. I was lucky to have received his advice when I was a young Member of Parliament and I remember very clearly his words on how we should conduct ourselves towards the Greek-American relations and the friendship between the two peoples and the two societies. So, he will be missed, but he will not be forgotten.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you very much. It was a very interesting discussion. And the next discussion we will have is with somebody who knows Greece very well and you know him too. He is the former Ambassador to Greece, Nick Burns. Mister Foreign Minister, thank you very much.

**N. DENDIAS:** Thank you so much. Thank you for the opportunity.