

**Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikos Dendias' intervention in the Parliamentary Conference of the MED7 group of countries (3 March 2021)**

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to thank the Portuguese EU Chair for organizing this meeting.

Given the current developments in this region, the momentum of the MED 7 Summit this year is particularly appropriate.

As reflected in EU's Global Strategy, stability and security can be achieved by addressing the root causes of the ongoing crises and the enhancement of resilience of our partners.

The EU should assume its well-deserved role as a reliable security provider.

This, by utilizing the wide variety of tools and instruments in its disposal, and by enhancing its global footprint.

The aim should be to defend EU's interests and safeguard our fundamental values and principles.

This is the scope of setting up, hopefully by the beginning of next year, a Strategic Compass.

Greece takes an active part in these efforts, with the aspiration to contributing to the increase of the EU's ability to act autonomously.

Operation EUNAVFOR MED IRINI is a telling example in this respect.

The challenges we are facing may be common, but are not always traditional; To mention a few:

- terrorism and violent extremism,
- transnational organized crime, including human trafficking,
- border management and maritime security,
- protection of cultural heritage and environmental degradation.

Moreover, I wish to highlight hybrid threats, as performed by state and non-state actors.

We have been frequently witnessing such challenges in our Mediterranean neighborhood; They take the form of:

- disruptive technologies and malicious cyber activities,
- disinformation,
- instrumentalisation of migratory pressure for political reasons.

During the greatest part of 2020, we were confronted with destabilizing tensions in the EastMed region.

They were provoked by Turkey's dangerous escalation of its illegal and provocative behavior against Greece and Cyprus.

At long last, in light of no tangible results attained on the field by this show of force and under the pressure of US sanctions and EU Council Decisions, a partial de-escalation finally took place.

Much discussion is being made today about the efficiency of measures and of a positive agenda with EU's so-called "strategic partners".

A positive agenda is only feasible, if Turkey manifests, in a consistent manner, constructive engagement in the region, in compliance with International Law and EU standards.

This has not been the case yet.

Consequently, it is crucial that a specific batch of sectoral targeted measures remains on the table, ready to be imposed, as an instrument to permanently deter illegal and provocative behavior.

Let me reiterate that, in order to achieve security, stability and cooperation in the Mediterranean region and beyond, the Cyprus issue should be resolved as soon as possible.

We hope that the initiative undertaken by UN Secretary General to organize a 5+1 meeting will contribute to resuming result oriented negotiations.

In spite of the challenges, Cyprus, together with Greece, is an active part of the trilateral cooperation mechanisms in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

These mechanisms promote a positive agenda, constantly evolving and expanding thematically and structurally.

**These mechanisms are not directed against any other country. They are open to all countries in the region.**

The only prerequisite is the self-evident: the respect of International Law.

In this vein, in the midst of the pandemic, the “Philia Forum” was held in Athens<sup>1</sup>, with the participation of seven countries.

Its aim is to act as a bridge between the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and the Gulf.

Regarding the situation in Libya, we firmly believe that a basic prerequisite for a sustainable solution to the Libyan crisis is the withdrawal of all Foreign Forces and the end of any foreign interference.

We announced our decision to reopen our Embassy in Tripoli, as well as to establish a Consulate General in Benghazi.

The situation in Syria is an issue of grave concern.

The perpetuation of the presence of foreign troops, as well as of terrorist groups, impede any possibility for real progress.

The EU should remain firm on its stance for a political solution that will preserve the unity and sovereignty of Syria and guarantee the withdrawal of the foreign troops.

The situation in the Middle East is undoubtedly of high importance for our neighborhood.

The Abraham Accords have changed the geostrategic outlook on the region;

They have laid the ground for a significant opportunity to revive the long frozen Middle East Peace Process.

Migration remains an international strategic challenge for all countries, be it of origin, transit or destination;

Mass migration should not be used as a hybrid threat, or as a blackmailing practice for political leverage.

The protection of EU external borders against the general volatile situation of the main migratory routes is a necessary condition to preserve security and stability.

Regarding the **European Green -Deal**, Greece aims to phase out all lignite power plants by 2028, increasing the use of renewables and is putting great effort in circular economy.

Particularly, in fields related to innovative technologies and infrastructure interconnection, with cooperation also in civil protection and digitalization.

The pandemic offered an opportunity to re-assess and update our ties with our Southern Neighbors.

**The new agenda for the Mediterranean confirms the importance we attach to our Southern Neighborhood.**

The renewed Strategy draws on the full EU toolbox and proposes to join forces in fighting climate change and speeding up the twin green and digital transition.

Greece attaches particular importance to this endeavour and is committed to the implementation of the new Agenda for the Mediterranean and its Economic and Investment Plan.

In light of the above, we see value in organizing the 2021 MED7 Summit in Crete, around two axes:

***Firstly***, Security and ***Secondly***, Development/Sustainability, with the aim to build on our expectations for a dynamic EU role in the Mediterranean.

Greece is in a unique position to combine a 40-years participation in the EU with an in-depth knowledge of needs and aspirations of the peoples of the region.

We share a responsibility in the European Mediterranean Policy, as we are the first to suffer the consequences of the region's destabilization. **Thank you.**