

## **Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikos Dendias' remarks at the Online Conference of the Hellenic Society of the London School of Economics (6 March 2021)**

Dear Professor Economides, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Hellenic Society of the LSE for inviting me to this virtual conference. I sincerely hope that, in the near future, I will be able to participate, not just virtually, at an upcoming event to be organized at my Alma mater.

Today, I would like to briefly outline the foreign policy priorities of my country in, what we all hope will be, a post-pandemic world. Sooner rather than later.

However, as many of you know, especially students of International Relations, a country's, foreign policy, any country's, big or small, is shaped within a specific international environment that creates constraints, but also opportunities. Foreign policy priorities aim at adjusting to this environment and to the extent possible influence it towards a specific direction. Greece is no exception to this rule.

As things stand at present, I can think of three main variable factors that affect Greek foreign policy priorities, as well as two stable ones that guide its orientation and objectives.

Allow me to briefly outline the three variable factors:

Firstly, the changing dynamics when it comes to established and emerging powers in Europe and the world. I am referring to the US under a new leadership that is seeking to establish its global footprint, emerging powers such as China, or India, the largest democracy, Russia, and of course post-Brexit, global Britain.

Secondly, the rising instability in the Eastern Mediterranean region, caused in large part by Turkish actions. In this regard I would like to highlight that despite an apparent and relative calm in the Aegean over the past couple of months, on the one hand we see the continuation of an inflammatory rhetoric emanating from Turkish officials, as well as actions that undermine efforts to build a climate of confidence. On the other we witness the continuation of Turkey's aggressive actions in the broader region. Including in Cyprus, Iraq, Libya and Syria, sovereign countries on whose soil Turkish military forces are illegally deployed.

Thirdly, the slow, but still important changes in Greece's immediate neighbourhood, the Western Balkans to the North and the Middle East and the Gulf to the South. In this context, I would like to highlight the aspirations of the Western Balkans' countries to join the EU. A process that moves forward with many hurdles. Also, the realignment in the Middle East, notably through the conclusion of the Abraham accords and the efforts undertaken by countries of the region to put an end to enduring conflicts.

Despite the moving tectonic plates in the international environment, it is important to remind us of the two pillars of Greek Foreign Policy. These are: a rock-solid commitment to international Law, conventional and customary, and in particular the purposes and the principles of the UN Charter. And a commitment to multilateralism,

as exemplified by Greece's whole-hearted engagement to the European Integration project. As well as its participation in numerous international and regional Organizations, including NATO, the OSCE, the Council of Europe etc.

On the basis of these fundamental parameters, our priorities can be summarized in the three "p" s: Peace, Prosperity and Partnerships. Let me elaborate briefly on them.

First of all, Peace. Greece seeks to promote peace in its broader region and to resolve any pending differences on the basis of international norms. These include the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which reflects customary international law. In this context, Greece has concluded agreements on the delimitation of the exclusive economic zones with Italy and Egypt last year and has agreed with Albania to refer this issue to the Hague. We hope that we can resolve this difference, that is the delimitation of the EEZ and the Continental Shelf, the sole bilateral issue with Turkey, on the same basis, that is international law. In this vein, Greece has welcomed the restart of exploratory talks with Turkey. We sincerely hope that these talks can continue in a positive environment devoid of provocations and statements that could undermine them.

Second, Prosperity. Greece joined the then EEC four decades ago. This was a fundamental step in the country's stability and prosperity. We are sparing no effort in supporting the accession process of the Western Balkans' countries in the EU, on the basis of conditionality and on each one's own merit. Furthermore, our objective is to strengthen relations between the countries of our broader vicinity in order to create an environment that will allow multilateral cooperation on a wide range of issues. From trade, energy, including renewable sources, and tourism, to education, inter-faith dialogue and civil protection. Greece aims to become a bridge between on the one hand the Middle East and the Gulf and the Balkans, as well as the remainder of Europe on the other. This was the key objective we set ourselves when convening the Philia Forum, a gathering of, so far, seven countries from Europe, the Middle East and the Gulf, which met in Athens a couple of weeks ago.

Last, but not least, Partnerships. Beyond reaching out to our immediate neighbours, Greece is seeking to further promote and enhance ties with traditional Allies, starting with the UK and the US. But we also want to build a pragmatic partnership with Russia, a country, which, along with France and Britain, played a crucial role in Greek independence 200 years ago. It is my ambition to also build relations with other emerging powers, starting with India, with which relations have been neglected for far too long. We also want to expand our contacts with other regions of the world. Including of course Asia, where we seek to advance relations with countries such as China and Japan, sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.

Today, more than ever, global challenges require global solutions. Greece has the ambition to actively contribute in this endeavour.

It is always difficult to summarize everything that we are doing in a few minutes. But I wanted to give you a full picture of our multi-layered diplomacy.