

Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikos Dendias' intervention in a webinar hosted by the Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA)
(30 March 2021)

I am honoured to reach out to you today.

The Jewish Institute for National Security of America has been instrumental in promoting a closer relationship among Greece, Israel and the United States.

Let me first give you a general overview of the Greek foreign policy and then I will be happy to answer any questions.

Greek foreign policy is shaped on the basis of two constants and three major variables.

The two constants are:

- a) the respect to International Law and to the principles of the UN Charter, and
- b) a dedication to multilateralism and bilateral cooperation, as an effective vehicle to create synergies and overcome tensions.

As to the variables, the first one refers to the changing dynamics of world politics that involve global Powers US, Russia, China, as well as the EU.

This pertains to:

- the willingness of the US to re-engage in our region, namely Eastern Mediterranean,
- the re-appearance of Russian influence in the region,
- China's novel interest in this particular part of the world, mostly through the economy up to now
- and the EU's positions on relevant Foreign Policy issues, through efforts for consensus building.

The second variable is the growing instability in our wider region and NATO's southern flank;

This is fueled mainly by Turkey's neo-Ottoman aspirations to dominate the region, including the openly illegal actions against Greece and Cyprus.

It should be stressed that, Turkey maintains illegal military presence in Cyprus, Iraq, Syria and Libya;

Moreover, its close involvement in the recent conflict over Nagorno Karabakh is also not at all a secret.

Ankara has also well-known affiliations with Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood.

Actually, Turkey has become a problem to everyone in the region and beyond.

This includes its recent steps backwards in the field of human rights.

The third variable refers to the positive developments in the Middle East, where the Abraham Accords signal a new paradigm for relations among countries of the region.

Many existing schemes of cooperation are bound to further expand.

On the basis of our constants, Greece's main foreign policy goals can be briefly summarized as promoting peace, stability, prosperity & partnerships.

In fact, we are committed to resolving any outstanding issue on the basis of International Law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

On this exact basis, in 2020 we reached agreements regarding the delimitation of our Exclusive Economic Zones and Continental Shelves with our neighbors Italy and Egypt;

We also agreed with Albania to bring the issue of delimitation of our maritime zones before the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

We have been trying to do the same with Turkey, to settle the sole dispute between our countries, that of delimiting the Exclusive Economic Zone and Continental Shelf.

But Turkey refuses to delimit on the basis of UNCLOS.

This January we resumed the exploratory talks after a 5-year break imposed by Turkey and we will spare no effort to reach that goal.

If not, we are ready to refer the matter to ICJ, a perspective which Turkey doesn't accept either.

The consolidation of peace has been our primary aim also in the Western Balkans, where Greece has been long championing the Euroatlantic integration.

Greece promotes prosperity and stability through our trilateral and multilateral partnerships together with Cyprus.

Prominent among them is the trilateral cooperation between Greece, Cyprus and Israel, which also exists in a 3+1 format with the US.

There is also the East Mediterranean Gas Forum, an Egyptian initiative with Greece being a founding member;

And the Philia Forum whose inaugural session took place in Athens this past February, bringing together partners from the Mediterranean and the Gulf.

Let me now expand a bit on a couple of the above subjects, starting from our strategic relations with the US.

These are at an all-time high. As a longstanding ally and partner of the US, we constantly aim higher.

Our Strategic Dialogue is also pivotal for various forms of cooperation.

The defense cooperation with the United States constitutes for us a top priority;

The recent amendment of the Mutual Defence Cooperation Agreement instilled a new vigor in our defense cooperation.

Discussions are currently under way for a further upgrading of the MDCA.

This is a strategic agreement, as it pertains to promoting security and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkan region by bolstering the US footprint therein.

At the same time, a clearer and more unequivocal message of political support, as well as the improvement of the assets and capabilities of a solid and reliable Ally such as Greece would be beneficial for the peace and stability of the entire region.

Energy cooperation is another strategic aspect of our relation.

We are also moving ahead with projects that aim at turning Northern Greece into an energy hub.

All these projects serve our shared objectives of developing energy resources and help in diversifying-energy providers and routes;

Most of them are actually facilitating the entry of US LNG in the markets of Southeast Europe.

There is also a strong US interest, and rightfully so, on the EastMed Pipeline project, it being a “game changer” for the whole region that will develop local energy sources.

This project should not be evaluated on its strictly financial merits but also on its geopolitical value and importance.

Speaking of geopolitical importance, our relationship with Israel has been developing spectacularly during recent years.

Beyond tourism and trade, our two countries witnessed a tremendous growth of their cooperation in the fields of energy and defense.

Most recently, we signed a major agreement regarding the establishment of an International Flight Training Center in Kalamata in the south west of the Peloponnese.

This entails an Israeli investment of about 1,4 bn EURO.

Israeli companies acquired a majority share in the Hellenic Vehicle Industry, which produces mainly military and special use vehicles.

But what really makes this partnership even more important is that the peoples of both countries have heartily embraced it.

On our tripartite cooperation with Cyprus and Israel, I will limit myself to the latest very important development:

The signing in early March of an MOU on the Euro-Asia Interconnector, the project that will link the electricity power grids of our three countries.

The normalization of relations between Israel and a number of Arab countries, in particular, could also help to advance the Peace Process.

While Syria is still struggling to make political progress, the situation in Libya seems to be on the right track, finally.

The interim Government must now lead the country to credible elections in December.

At the same time, continuing to implement the ceasefire and the UN imposed arms embargo remain key.

Greece will be re-opening our Embassy soon, as well as a Consulate General in Benghazi and I will be accompanying Prime Minister Mitsotakis in his upcoming visit to Libya in April.

Our message will be that we can turn a new page in our bilateral relations;

This, in the hope that Tripoli will find the courage to rid itself of alien interests and agendas and their byproducts, as were the illegal MoUs signed between Turkey and the GNA, in December 2019. We understand this will not be easy.

Allow me a final word on Cyprus:

Given its geostrategic importance, it must come as no surprise that, in order to truly achieve security, stability and cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Cyprus Issue must be resolved.

And this can only happen on the basis of a Bizonal, Bicomunal Federation in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions and in line with the EU acquis.

Greece will participate -as always has done- at the latest initiative undertaken by UN Secretary General of an informal five-plus-one meeting in Geneva in late April.

We hope that this meeting will pave the way for the resumption of full-scale negotiations for a lasting and viable Cyprus settlement.

Greece will consistently be in favor of any initiative promoting peace and stability in our volatile region and beyond that.

Whenever this was the case, we have always been there. Advocating for peace, stability and prosperity, through a rules-based order.