

**Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikos Dendias' address at the online event "Albania and Greece Relations: what do citizens think", organized by ELIAMEP (Athens, 29.06.2021)**

«It is with great pleasure that I am addressing this event.

An event of particular interest on the public perception about the bilateral relations between Greece and Albania and I thank you for your invitation.

Greece and Albania share a lot more than a common border;

They are bound by historical ties that are lost in time, bringing our two peoples ever closer together;

This is most vividly illustrated in the shape of the indigenous Greek National Minority in Albania, the largest in the country, which enriches the Albanian society.

At the same time, in the hundreds of thousands of Albanian citizens, who live and prosper in Greece and are well integrated into the multicultural Greek society.

These two factors constitute a solid bridge of friendship which has greatly contributed to the strengthening of our cooperation on multiple levels.

In this context, let me stress that, during our latest high-level political contacts, a strong willingness was demonstrated by both sides to open a new chapter in our bilateral relations.

The aim is to reach the full potential of our relations.

A truly great step in this direction was our mutual decision to refer the delimitation of our maritime zones to the International Court of Justice.

This decision is exemplary of how important issues can be resolved when both parties involved are focused on upholding International Law and good neighborly relations.

And I am particularly satisfied that Prime Ministers Mitsotakis and Rama have recently agreed to speed up consultations at legal experts level.

I also wish to reiterate that Greece is constantly focused on supporting Albania in its path towards accession to the European Union.

I am aware that the failure to hold an Intergovernmental Conference with the EU during the first semester of this year has created some disillusionment among the Albanian people.

But it remains our strong conviction that the future of Albania belongs to the EU;

In this spirit we will continue to provide assistance, among other things by way of our know-how accumulated through our EU membership.

Of course, we are aware that our bilateral cooperation has a direct impact on so many lives on both sides of the borders.

As our societies and economies are recovering from the pandemic's repercussions, Greece has endeavored to improve access to vaccines for Albania.

Not only through its participation in the RescEU mechanism and the COVAX Facility, but also by directly delivering, a first installment of 20.000 doses of vaccines to Tirana.

More deliveries will follow in the next weeks.

Dear friends,

I share your interest in today's presentation of the report's findings on public attitudes.

Our peoples have so much in common and people-to-people contacts are all the more meaningful in our fragile neighborhood.

In this respect, I wish to emphasize the critical role of education and mass media in shaping public perceptions at each side of the border.

Therefore, it is of paramount importance to eradicate negative stereotypes, particularly within the younger generation, and focus on issues that bring our peoples together.

With these few words, I would like to commend our hosts, as well as all those who have worked for this public opinion survey.

I wish that its findings contribute to building more understanding and more cooperation between the Greek and the Albanian societies.

Thank you for your attention».