

Greece's role in Southeast Europe

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It's a great pleasure for me to be here at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), one of the largest and most important think-tanks.

I would like to thank the Director of the New European Democracies Project, Mr Bugajski, for his warm hospitality.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Greece's location is of special geo-strategic significance. Geographical location has always been and will continue to be an inevitable factor in the formulation of the foreign policy of all countries.

For Greece, which is a point of convergence for three continents and different cultures at the crossroads between East and West, defense readiness and seeking alliances in order to ensure our national integrity have always been essential.

The vision of promoting cooperation among states in South-Eastern Europe dates back to the 19th century. At that time, however, it did not succeed in leading to a viable scheme of an interstate cooperation.

The 20th century did not offer great opportunities for reconciliation among Balkan states, neither at the level of bilateral relations nor in the context of multilateral cooperation.

Territorial claims, alliances with Great Powers and, during the Cold War, adherence to different broader ideological and political establishments, were factors that – with a few exceptions – did not allow a “Balkan rapprochement”.

It was during this time that the strong alliance between the U.S. and Greece was really founded. Those traditionally good bilateral relations are steady and stable, based on a long history of shared principles and values, on joint struggles, on our participation in NATO.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Until the re-establishment of democratic rule in July 1974, following a dictatorial regime which lasted 7 years, Greece had not developed substantial ties of friendship and co-operation with its neighboring states on the Balkan Peninsula, at neither the bilateral nor multilateral levels.

This situation changed dramatically in the following years as a consequence of the efforts put forth by the government of the late Constantinos Karamanlis during 1974 – 1980.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Things have changed in our days. The Balkans are no longer considered the “powder-keg of Europe”.

Yet, South-Eastern Europe should receive special attention and consideration. Though the situation today might not be comparable to the volatile mixture of the past, it still remains fluid and therefore fragile.

Greece, the most developed country in the region and a member of UN, EU and NATO for many decades, has undertaken a particularly important role, one might say a leading and difficult role.

Greece devotes great effort in making sure that it does not simply react to developments and challenges after they occur; we expend great effort in being one step ahead of such developments.

Through a long-term strategy, we follow the developments on the ground closely and shape our policies accordingly. Our constant goals are Peace, Security, Stability and Prosperity.

We believe that maximizing the bonds between countries of the region will yield practical solutions to various horizontal issues that face the region; this also helps engaged countries focus on the numerous and important issues that unite them rather than those that separate them.

Greece strongly believes that in today's inter-dependent world a threat towards one state constitutes a threat to all. Security is not divisible.

As a result of a Greek – Bulgarian initiative and with a view to promoting dialogue, peace and stability in the Balkans, the South East Europe Cooperation Process (SEEC) was established in 1996.

Cooperation among Defense Ministries of South East Europe countries, a series of activities and initiatives in the military-technological sector, among others, aim at creating a regional security system to which Greece aspires to contribute substantially.

As an example of this enhanced cooperation, the EU Battle Group Helbrook has been established, with the participation of Bulgaria, Rumania and Cyprus, with Greece as the “framework nation”.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Greece is committed to the promotion of peace and security. Greece is present in international operations and missions, because it is committed to fulfilling its obligations stemming from its participation in international organizations, including the Alliance.

By providing human resources, means and capabilities, in numerous crisis management and anti-terrorist operations undertaken in cooperation with partners and allies, Greece actively participates, among other places, in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Chad and Lebanon.

Moreover, Greece contributes to capabilities and capacity-building of countries in need, such as Afghanistan and Iraq.

It also provides NATO facilities of critical importance, without which operations could be jeopardized.

Apart from the major importance of the Souda Bay Complex facilities, it would be an omission not to mention capabilities offered such as the recently inaugurated NATO Maritime Interdiction Operation Training Center in the Souda Facility and

the Multinational Peace Support Operations Training Center in Kilkis.

Currently, Greece participates in peace-keeping operations with more than 3.000 staff. To this, we should add heavy contributions in terms of equipment and other services provided (vehicles, vessels, air transportation, etc) amounting almost to 400 million USD in the years 2003-2007.

Being the most stable and reliable partner in our broader region, and situated at the crossroads of **Europe, Africa** and the **Middle East**, are elements that strengthen our international position and role.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We actively participate in both NATO's and the European Union's activities, and would like to see the establishment of a closer cooperation between these two institutions.

Greece believes that the enlargement of NATO and the European Union is a "golden opportunity" for the countries of the broader region.

On the other and the accession of the Southeastern Europe to the NATO and European family will lead to the cultural, political and financial enrichment of both of them.

A country's accessions to the European Union, for example, does not only mean strengthening of economy; it is mainly a political decision, as Constantinos Karamanlis used to say.

Greece's strategic goal in South Eastern Europe is to create the preconditions for stability, functioning democratic processes and institutions, cooperation, development and prosperity.

The objective is the accession of all the countries in the region to the European Union and NATO. As the oldest member of both institutions in the region, Greece supports the accession efforts of the new candidate countries.

It also supports the economies and societies of these neighboring states through public funding and extensive investment activity of pioneering Greek enterprises in the region.

Of course, each country's adaptation to European and Euro-Atlantic standards is a long and difficult process. We haven't signed a "white check" for anyone.

The common future towards which we endeavor can only be achieved if those who aspire to participate are truly prepared to adopt and implement the reforms required to respect the accession criteria, the principles and values of the European and Euro-Atlantic institutions. And this should be the message to all countries aspiring to join these institutions.

It is not a message of exclusion but a message of inclusion. It's a message that acknowledges the principles and values of the modern civilized world. These are the shared principles and values that constitute the foundation of our powerful European and Euro-Atlantic family.

In this context, good neighborly relations are an essential criterion for accession.

Greece wants to build the best possible relations with its northern neighbour, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). Towards this goal, the Greek Government stands ready for a compromise on the name issue.

The Greek Government has demonstrated leadership and has the political will for a solution: a negotiated, mutually acceptable solution to be valid internationally. The solution should

comprise of a composite name for all purposes (*erga omnes*) with a geographic qualifier, to be reflected in FYROM's Constitution and passports, and cemented through a UN Security Council Resolution.

I regret to say this is not the case with Skopje. The recently re-elected Government has chosen anachronistic policies, by promoting irredentism, hostile propaganda and cultivating tension and hatred in the hearts and minds of FYROM's citizens against Greece.

Greece does not want winners or losers. We need a win-win solution that will pave the way for FYROM's further European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Committed to maintaining peace, security and stability in the broader region, Greece continues to work intensely for the improvement of Greek-Turkish relations and the elimination of tension. Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis paid a historic visit to Turkey in January this year.

Greece supports Turkey's European perspective with a view to full accession, provided that full implementation of the relevant criteria is ensured. Full compliance to our view should lead to full accession.

Turkey has to be after not only the target, but also the means.

The fulfillment of the relevant criteria will prove that Turkey respects and shares the common European standards, including good neighborly relations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The region of Southeastern Europe must remain the focus of our attention. Peace and security are not tasks or obligations for one country only. A crisis in the Balkans would affect the broader geo-strategic environment.

We look forward to the consolidation of peace, fraternity and mutual understanding in South Eastern Europe.

Greece plays a significant role towards that direction. A role that can be further developed.

The continued strengthening of the excellent and longstanding cooperation between the US and Greece can provide a further impetus in this respect.

I would like to thank you for your attention.